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**"WE ARE FIGHTING THE WORLD":
A HISTORY OF THE MARASHEA GANES IN SOUTH AFRICIA, 1947-1999**

By

Gary Kynoch

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

at

**Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
July 2000**

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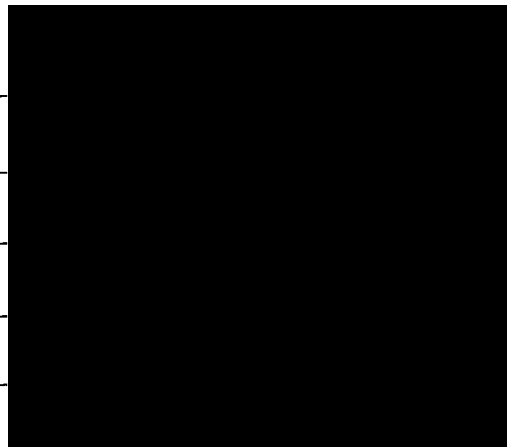
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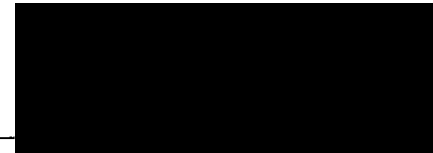
AUTHOR: Gary Kynoch

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the history of the predominantly Basotho migrant criminal society known as the Marashea or Russians, which has been active in South Africa since the 1940s. The testimony of current and former gang members collected in Lesotho and in South African townships and shack settlements provides the basis for the thesis. The central organising principal of this study is to account for the Marashea's ability to survive, and even flourish, throughout the apartheid era. To accomplish this task, I explore how identity formation, gender relations, economic opportunism, collective violence, and political manoeuvring contributed to the long-term integrity of the different factions of the Marashea. There were three pillars to the Marashea's success: its economic relationship with mineworkers, its control of migrant women, and its non-adversarial stance towards the apartheid state.

The survival strategies of the Marashea raise questions concerning scholars' insistence on labelling the coping mechanisms of the colonised as 'resistance' or 'collaboration.' The range of strategies and tactics employed by the different gangs demonstrates that the categories of resistor and collaborator do not accurately describe the Marashea. The gangs were not guided by political loyalties or antagonisms. Their interactions with South African government forces and supporters of the liberation movements were overwhelmingly motivated by self-interest and self-preservation. So, although their actions encompassed both 'resistance' and 'collaboration,' the Marashea gangs' core survival philosophy would be better classified as negotiation. The gangs negotiated the terrain of apartheid South Africa and developed strategies that best served their needs.

The history of the Marashea illustrates the autonomy of African organisations during an era in which the bureaucratic and coercive arm of the apartheid state supposedly extended into all areas of African life. Despite the best efforts of the National Party to extend its control over urban Africans, the Marashea constructed a vibrant and powerful subculture that existed outside of white control and played an important role in the lives of thousands of Basotho and South Africans. Russian activities had significant repercussions for migrant women, mineworkers and residents in squatter camps and locations. They also influenced the political developments of the 1980s and 1990s as many of the gangs co-operated with the police and mining authorities to resist the initiatives of the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). This examination of how the various Marashea gangs ordered life in the townships and informal settlements, and engaged with the state, ANC and NUM supporters, and competing organisations, provides a better understanding of the social and political relationships that emerged in apartheid South Africa.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANC – African National Congress

BCP – Basotho Congress Party

BOSS – Bureau of State Security

BNP – Basotho National Party

COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions

EPTC – Evaton People’s Transport Council

IFP – Inkatha Freedom Party

LLA – Lesotho Liberation Army

NP – National Party

NUM – National Union of Mineworkers

SACP – South African Communist Party

SAP – South African Police

SAPS – South African Police Service

SDU – Self Defence Units (formed by ANC supporters)

TEBA – The Employment Bureau of Africa

UDF – United Democratic Front

GLOSSARY

Marashea Designations

Marashea – the term for the society as a whole, or plural for group members

Lerashea – an individual group member

Borashea – refers to the phenomenon of being Marashea and might best be translated as Russianism

Makaota – another name for the Matsieng faction

Masupha – Marashea faction from northern Lesotho

Matsekha – collective name for the Molapo and Masupha factions

Matsieng – Marashea faction from southern Lesotho

Molapo – main faction from northern Lesotho

National Designations

Lesotho – the country

Sesotho – the language and culture

Basotho – the people of Lesotho

Mosotho – an individual from Lesotho

Sesotho Terms

joala – beer, usually home brewed

koma – secret male society

lekholla – council, can also refer to a particular group

makholla, also *makgolla* – traditional courts that disciplined suspected criminals

malofa – unemployed Marashea

marabele – fighters, term for Marashea rank and file

masole – soldiers, term for Marashea rank and file

'*me*' – term of address for an adult female, literally 'mother'

mekhukhu – shack or shack settlement

molamu, plural *melamu* – fighting stick

morena, plural *marena* – chief, faction leader

moriana – traditional medicine imparting special powers

ngaka, plural *lingaka* – traditional doctor

ntate – term of address for an adult male, literally 'father'

nyatsi, plural *linyatsi* – lover, concubine

Generic South African Terminology

blackjacks – African municipal police

comrades – ANC-affiliated activists, usually youth

comtsotsis – comrades who engaged in blatantly criminal activities

dagga - marijuana

muti – traditional medicine

shebeen – informal drinking establishment

stokvel – party where food and liquor is sold and proceeds go to the group or a specific individual

tsotsi – young urban thug, often a gang member

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This thesis owes much to the efforts of my primary research assistants Tsepang Cekwane and Booi Mohapi. Along with conducting and transcribing interviews, Tsepang proved an able navigator in our travels throughout Lesotho and various townships and shack settlements in South Africa and only laughed at my Sesotho occasionally. His persistence and contacts resulted in many interviews that would otherwise never have taken place. We shared many beers and meals of 'Kentucky,' drove thousands of kilometres and survived a car wreck. Tsepang's enthusiasm for the project and sense of humour made him a pleasure to work with. Booi, assisted by his wife, Mampolokeng, worked independently and conducted a number of superb interviews, especially with women. Teke Tseane provided valuable assistance, an enthusiastic singing voice and good company at the beginning of the project when interviews were very difficult to come by. Litabe Majoro, who studied the Marashea during his tenure as a student at the National University of Lesotho, was kind enough to direct me to one of his informants and conduct an interview. Of course, this study was made possible by the men and women who answered our questions and told stories of their lives as Marashea.

Philip Bonner's article on the formation and activities of the Marashea in the 1940s and 1950s inspired this thesis and Phil encouraged me to explore the post-1950s history of the gangs. Despite an extraordinarily demanding schedule, Phil generously gave of his time and advice and supplied me with copies of his interview transcripts. David Coplan also expressed interest and provided encouragement. I owe a special

thanks to Rosemary Burke, The Employment Bureau of Africa's archivist. Swamped with her own work, Rosemary took the time to contact several people in the mining industry on my behalf, efforts that led to interviews I would never have obtained without her intercession. I appreciate TEBA giving me access to their 1950s files. Kent McNamara graciously passed along numerous materials and discussed the Russians' activities on the mines. I would like to express my appreciation to the staff at Harmony Gold Mine, especially Gideon Jongolo, who arranged for me to speak with hostel managers, Industrial Relations officers and security personnel. Puseletso Salae, Raymond de Boiz, Dan de Kock and Don Mattera shared their experiences with the Marashea and made a valuable contribution to this thesis. Several mineworkers and police officers in Lesotho, who prefer to remain anonymous, also generously related accounts of their interactions with, and knowledge of, the Marashea. Herb and Barbara Anstadt provided a home away from home in Johannesburg, complete with sparkling pool, braai at the ready, cold Windhoek lager and faithful guard dog.

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thesis is immeasurably improved as a result of their suggestions and criticisms. Thank you both. Thanks also to John O'Brien who has been in my corner since I arrived at Dalhousie, Tim Shaw who first encouraged me to publish and David Black who agreed to be a reader for this thesis despite being overburdened. Mary Wyman and Tina Jones have helped me on many occasions and have generally made the Dalhousie History Department a more fun place to work.

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Finally, this thesis had its genesis in the two years I spent working as a high school teacher in Lesotho from 1991-93. This time and all the time since I have shared with Theresa Ulicki. My greatest debt of gratitude goes to her.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to stop the reign of terror caused by Basuto gangs known as the "Russians" in Johannesburg Native Townships and locations during recent years, a conference will be held in the city tomorrow between officials of the Police Department, Johannesburg City Council and the Native Commissioner's staff. (*Sunday Times*, February 11, 1951)

The leader of a gang known as "The Russians" was killed during a fierce faction fight on the platform of President Station, Germiston on Sunday morning. (*World*, January 18, 1977)

The Russians, with the assistance of Sotho workers, infiltrated No. 4 shaft hostel on the night of 24 November 1991 and ruthlessly attacked sleeping Xhosa workers, killing and injuring many. (Goldstone Commission. Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Violence During November 1991 at the President Steyn Gold Mine, Welkom)

Readers familiar with South African urban and gang literature will have come across the 'Russians' or Marashea¹ in the work of Philip Bonner, and Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane.² Despite the gangs' widespread reputation for violence and the fact that the association has been active for more than fifty years in South Africa, these two

¹ Marashea is the term for the collective; Lerashea is a single member and Borashea refers to the phenomenon of Marashea and might best be interpreted as Russianism.

² Philip Bonner, 'The Russians on the Reef, 1947-57: Urbanisation, Gang Warfare and Ethnic Mobilisation' in Bonner, et al (eds.), *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962*, (1993); Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea: A Participant's Perspective' in Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict*, (1987). Guy and Thabane's article is a mini-biography and is thus limited to one member's experiences and perspective.

articles are the sole academic works whose primary focus is the Marashea.³ The authors present the Marashea as a fighting association of Basotho migrants who banded together on the Rand in the 1940s and 1950s for protection from urban gangsters and ethnic rivals, to obtain control over migrant Basotho women, and to celebrate their identity as Basotho by engaging in exhilarating internecine battles. Both articles deal with the Russian gangs in their formative years on the Rand and pay special attention to the violence that seems to have defined the gangs. Indeed, Bonner states that 'The Russians on the Reef were, above all, a fighting machine.'⁴ Neither study extends its focus beyond the 1950s Witwatersrand, although Bonner claims that increasingly heavier prison sentences imposed on regular offenders, combined with more stringent influx controls, significantly weakened the Russians by the mid-1960s.⁵

This thesis, based largely on oral accounts supplied by 79 current and former members, is the first attempt to write a comprehensive history of the Marashea from its

³ The Russians appear in English and Sesotho novels including: A.S. Mopeli-Paulus and Peter Lanham, *Blanket Boy's Moon*, (1953); Simon Majara, *Liakhela*, (1972); and Chobokoane Chobokoane, *Ke lesheleshele leo a iphehletseng lona*, (1995). They are also referred to in Father Trevor Huddleston's accounts of his experiences in Sophiatown, *Naught for Your Comfort*, (1956). A few academic works mention the Russian gangs in their treatment of related subjects: Leslie Bank, 'The Making of the QwaQwa "Mafia"? Patronage and Protection in the Migrant Taxi Business', *African Studies*, 49, 1, (1990); David Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Migrants*, (1994); David Goodhew, 'The People's Police Force: Communal Policing Initiatives in the Western Areas of Johannesburg, circa 1930-1962', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 3, (1993); Deon van Tonder, 'Gangs, Councillors and the Apartheid State: The Newclare Squatters' Movement of 1952', *South African Historical Journal*, 22, (1990) and Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, (1983).

⁴ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 175.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

inception in the 1940s to the present day. As the citations quoted above indicate, the Marashea gangs came to public notice almost exclusively as a result of their involvement in violence. While acknowledging that violence of various kinds played an important role in the existence of the Marashea, this study strives for a more holistic understanding of Borashea. It covers the association's expansion from the Rand into the mining areas of the Free State and illustrates how the gangs became more commercially oriented, although they retained their martial identity and continued to use violence to advance their interests. The central organising principle of this study is to account for the Marashea's ability to survive, and even flourish, throughout the apartheid era. To accomplish this task, I explore the ways in which identity formation, gender relations, economic opportunism, collective violence, and political manoeuvring contributed to the long-term integrity of the gangs.

There were three pillars to the Marashea's success: its economic relationship with mineworkers, the control of migrant women, and its non-adversarial stance towards the apartheid state. The development of the compound system that effectively confined male mineworkers to single sex hostels provided a market for the primary business of the Marashea – supplying miners with alcohol, women, and recreation in the form of dances and feasts. The Marashea was able to attract, coerce and establish control over female members partially because of the hardships migrant women faced in apartheid South Africa. And finally, because the association posed no political challenge to the state and

occasionally fought with supporters of organisations antagonistic to the government, the Marashea was not persecuted as a political opponent.⁶

The Marashea capitalised on a combination of state action and inaction to carve out a niche for itself in apartheid South Africa. In order to be successful, the gangs adapted to conditions imposed by the government and the opportunities created by the migrant labour system. Strict influx and employment controls ensured that a residuum of migrant women was barred from formal employment. In order to operate in the informal sector as brewers these women needed protection, both from criminals and the police. The Marashea exploited these circumstances to gain control over the women who provided the society's economic foundation. The state-supported migrant labour system, which caused hundreds of thousands of men to be housed in single sex compounds, provided the primary market for the liquor and commercial sex sold by the gangs. The government's abdication of a protective policing role benefited the gangs in two basic ways. First, the Marashea was able to operate with a minimum of interference in the poorly policed townships and informal settlements. Second, the lack of a police presence in these areas enabled the gangs to establish protection rackets. In addition to these adaptations, the Marashea gangs negotiated their existence with other African groups operating in the same environments.

The Russians' struggle to establish and maintain their presence in South Africa engages several historiographical debates in the South African and larger colonial

⁶ The police cracked down on the gangs periodically, but as common criminals, not

context. The apartheid state's inability to administer urban townships and informal settlements, along with its dependence on criminal elements to undermine political opposition, indicates the National Party's tenuous control over the African majority. The Marashea's use of violence focuses attention on relations within urban populations and the systematic violence employed by segments of the black majority to establish and consolidate spheres of influence. Emerging identities based on ethnicity and concepts of masculinity are also highlighted. Studying gender relations within the Marashea furthers our understanding of female migrancy, specifically the strategies female migrants developed to deal with the various challenges with which they were confronted. In particular, the survival strategies of the Marashea raise questions concerning scholars' insistence on labelling the coping mechanisms of the colonised as 'resistance' or 'collaboration'.

Reinterpreting 'Resistance'

Resistance is a slippery concept open to a wide range of interpretation. The simple binary relationship of domination versus resistance has been expanded in recent years. Michel Foucault drew attention to more diffuse, everyday forms of power, while James Scott argued for less organised, more everyday forms of resistance.⁷ In these

political dissidents.

⁷ Sherry Ortner, 'Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37, 1, (1995), p. 175. I am paraphrasing Ortner here. She is referring to Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, (1978) and James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (1985).

interpretations a wide range of prosaic activities assume subversive dimensions. Frederick Cooper explains the allure of this approach.

Scholars have their reasons for taking an expansive view. Little actions can add up to something big: desertion from labour contracts, petty acts of defiance of white officials or their African subalterns, illegal enterprises in colonial cities, alternative religious communities – all these may subvert a regime that proclaimed both its power and its righteousness, raise the confidence of people in the idea that colonial power can be countered, and forge a general spirit conducive to mobilisation across a variety of social differences.⁸

However, as Cooper points out, such a sweeping interpretation of resistance undermines an appreciation of the complexities of colonial societies and reduces the lives of the colonised to participants in the struggle against colonial oppression.

[M]uch of the resistance literature is written as if the “R” were capitalised. What is being resisted is not necessarily clear, and “colonialism” sometimes appears as a force whose nature and implications do not have to be unpacked. The concept of resistance can be expanded so broadly that it denies any other kind of life to people doing the resistance.⁹

Furthermore, the tendency to view the colonial experience exclusively through the lens of resistance obscures or ignores relations and struggles within the colonised population. As a result, ‘the texture of people’s lives is lost; and complex strategies of coping, of seizing niches within changing economies, of multi-sided engagement with forces inside and outside the community, are narrowed into a single framework.’¹⁰

⁸ Frederick Cooper, ‘Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History’, *American Historical Review*, 99, 5, (1994), p. 1532.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1533.

Following Cooper's lead, some scholars advocate abandoning the basic oppressor-resistor axis in favour of a more complex multi-layered understanding of the tangled web of relationships that comprised the colonial process. Nancy Rose Hunt contends that:

Social action in colonial and postcolonial Africa cannot be reduced to such polarities as metropole/colony or colonizer/colonized or to balanced narrative plots of imposition and response or hegemony and resistance.¹¹

Teresa Barnes takes issue with this approach, arguing that while local struggles and misunderstandings existed in colonial Zimbabwe, a larger struggle was operative. Most settlers acted like racist overlords and most Africans resisted colonial rule. She warns that 'Lilting along in deconstructionist mode... can lead scholars to miss the forest for the trees.'¹²

In the South African context, the forest is in no danger of being overlooked. A characteristic feature of the social history school in South African historiography is to portray 'Africans as enterprising and independent social agents whose lives and activities cannot be reduced to their responses to the initiatives taken by others.'¹³ In spite of this mandate, South African social history continues to focus almost exclusively on the struggle against colonial and apartheid rule and thus retains at its centre the binary relationship of oppressor and oppressed. There are numerous reasons for this

¹¹ Nancy Rose Hunt, 'Introduction' to special issue, 'Gendered Colonialisms in African History', *Gender & History* vol. 8 no. 3 (1996), p. 326. See also, Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper (eds.), *Tensions of Empire*, (1997), especially the introduction by Stoler and Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda.'

¹² Teresa Barnes, *"We Women Worked so Hard": Gender, Urbanization and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930-1956*, (1999), pp. xx-xxi.

development. Apartheid persisted for some thirty years after colonialism ended in most of the rest of Africa and has been singled out as a gross human rights violation. The South African government became an international pariah because of apartheid and the violence used to enforce it. The world media increasingly focussed on South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. Internal opposition to the South African government gained an international audience, especially during periods of conflict. Finally, many leading South Africanists came of age in apartheid South Africa and identified both personally and professionally with the struggle against apartheid.

Attempts to provide more subtle and nuanced interpretations of the struggle still tend to view resistance as the definitive South African story. For example, in their call to expand the category of resistance, Bonner et al. argue that

the resistance and opposition which confronted the governing authorities was far more wide ranging and amorphous than has been revealed by the conventional focus on national political organisations. Countless individual or small-scale acts of non-compliance proved more pervasive, elusive, persistent and difficult to control, than more formal or organised political struggle.¹³

Charles van Onselen's masterful biography of Kas Maine, a black South African sharecropper, is an illuminating evocation of one man's lifelong struggle to overcome the obstacles confronting independent black agriculturalists in a country whose government was committed to their destruction. He seems to fit neatly into the category of the

¹³ Ran Greenstein, 'The Future of the South African Past', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22, 2, (1996), p. 327.

¹⁴ Bonner et al., 'The Shaping of Apartheid' in *Apartheid's Genesis*, p. 2.

'informal resistor' described above. Van Onselen refers to Maine's history as 'a black man's manual of *survival*¹⁵ in what was apartheid South Africa.'¹⁶ The pitfall that claims many social historians is the tendency to conflate 'survival' with 'resistance'. I suggest that Maine's story provides an excellent example of how the resistance framework misrepresents the lives of the colonised. Maine did not confront the state. He struggled to survive within an arena largely determined by state policies but he did not openly resist or oppose the government of the day.

It seems more fruitful to adopt different terminology to define the actions of the colonised rather than label such a wide range of disparate activities as resistance. One of the central arguments of this thesis is that the use of the term resistance (and therefore collaboration) needs to be employed with greater rigor and more narrowly than is currently the norm. It would clarify the situation if we retained Cooper's capital 'R' notion of 'Resistance' for activities that constituted an overt and public challenge to colonial regimes. Groups defined by such programs and ideologies – liberation movements, some trade unions, and elements of civil society – could then be categorised as resisters. However, the vast majority of colonial subjects did not openly confront the state, either as individuals or collectively. If they had, the history of colonialism would have been even more bloody than it was. In her study of the African working class in colonial Lourenco Marques, Penvenne's informants 'regarded any open or direct individual challenge to the colonial structure as a foolish invitation "to bring trouble upon

¹⁵ My emphasis.

oneself and one's family."¹⁷ In their discussion of migrant networks in apartheid cities, Bonner et al. concluded that 'Many of these men rallied to the appropriate subsistence struggles ... but few were prepared to engage in an overt head-on political challenge to the structures of urban political control.'¹⁸ So, for a more representative history of colonialism, we need to categorise and conceptualise the life strategies of colonial subjects under different headings.

'Resistance' needs to be distinguished from the strategies of avoidance, manipulation, circumvention and adaptation regularly employed by colonial subjects. Negotiation and navigation are more useful labels for these coping strategies. The majority of people living under colonial rule navigated the spaces available to them and created new spaces in which to realise their aspirations. The colonised were forced to acknowledge and deal with constraints imposed by the colonial regimes and usually chose to negotiate rather than openly challenge these conditions. Specifically because colonial states suppressed groups and individuals that posed a direct threat, navigation and negotiation were generally more prudent and popular options. They allowed colonial subjects more latitude to achieve their immediate objectives and the daily business of survival required most people to prioritise these immediate needs rather than focusing on 'Resistance'. Adopting these concepts as the dominant reactions to colonial rule does not imply passive acceptance of colonial oppression, but only acknowledges that people

¹⁶ Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*, (1996), jacket cover.

¹⁷ Jeanne Penvenne, *African Workers and Colonial Racism*, (1995), p. 7.

organised their lives to take advantage of existing conditions. Furthermore, specific episodes of resistance that attracted significant popular support – boycotts, general strikes, protest marches etc. – undoubtedly involved large numbers of people who did not make a habit of confronting colonial power structures. The argument advanced here is that this sort of activity was not representative of the day-to-day lives of the majority. In most instances, 'Resistance' was viewed as a dangerous option with little prospect of success.

Colonial regimes were not all-powerful. Colonial subjects had room to manoeuvre, but often in competition with other elements within the colonised population. Thus, a focus on navigation and negotiation opens up avenues for studying the ways in which colonial subjects interacted with each other as well as with colonial structures. In many circumstances, the most immediate and important relationships for day-to-day survival and success were those between groups and individuals comprising the colonised.¹⁹ This approach facilitates an appreciation of social fragmentation among colonised populations and brings the issue of identity to the forefront. In this manner gender, generation, ethnic, and class differences and solidarities can be explored to offer a more expansive, less Manichean view of the colonial process and to gain a better understanding of historical junctures and continuities before, during and after white rule.

¹⁸ Bonner et al, 'The Shaping of Apartheid: Contradiction, Continuity and Popular Struggle' in *Apartheid's Genesis*, p. 12.

¹⁹ See Chapter 6 on the Marashea presence in Newclare for evidence that supports this argument.

Group Mobilisation in Colonial Settings

To explore the concepts of negotiation and navigation, this thesis is concerned with how people organised collectively to better cope with the challenges posed by apartheid. While some Africans, like Kas Maine, managed with little support outside of immediate family networks, many turned to informal groups as a survival resource. Some of these associations comprised semi-autonomous communities that operated within (and despite) the strictures of urban apartheid. An exploration of these groups corresponds with Ran Greenstein's call to incorporate 'indigenous capacities' as a theoretical variable. He employs the concept of indigenous capacities:

to direct attention to the attributes of indigenous structures that shape the capacity of people to organise at the economic, political and identity levels, and employ their modes of organisation to sustain and open up new avenues of independent existence and development outside the control of colonial forces.²⁰

Indigenous cultures maintained much of their vitality in twentieth-century South Africa despite the ravages of capitalism and state interference.²¹ At the same time, migrants and succeeding generations of urbanites developed and adapted new cultures and communities to answer their needs.

²⁰ Ran Greenstein, 'The Study of South African Society: Towards a New Agenda for Comparative Historical Inquiry', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 4, (1994), p.654.

²¹ See, for example, Morrell, 'Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 4, (1998), p. 615.

This phenomenon has been best explored in relation to African mineworkers housed in the compounds of Kimberley, the Rand and the Free State mining areas.²² Moodie, for example, speaks of 'myriad brotherhoods, formed around ... entrepreneurial services, religious concerns, burial societies, musical tastes, rural politics, homosexual dalliances, or other shared interests.'²³ While some groups were characterised by the retention of rural customs and structures,²⁴ distinct social and sexual practices emerged in the compounds and surrounding areas as men created new cultural behaviours to serve their purposes.

There is little doubt that a plethora of such groups, assuming many different guises, existed throughout the cities and mining centres of colonial Africa. Village and kinship-based networks assisting newly arrived migrants with employment, shelter and other means of support were a common feature of colonial cities. In some instances, workers with regional or ethnic ties were able to dominate specific sectors of

²² See especially, Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910*, (1994) and Dunbar Moodie, *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration*, (1994).

²³ Moodie, *Going for Gold*, p. 20.

²⁴ Pedi migrant workers formed associations prior to the Second World War to preserve their rural identity and stave off the contaminating influences of urban life. See Peter Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, (1996), especially chapter one. Bank provides another example in his discussion of *iseti* drinking groups amongst Xhosa speaking migrants in East London: 'It was here that Red migrants [those who rejected urban lifestyles, Christian values and westernisation] were constantly reminded of their responsibilities to their rural kin, of the virtues of saving in the city, of the dangers of sexual liaisons with town women, and of the corrosive influences of westernisation and Christianity on the Xhosa way of life.' Leslie Bank, 'Men with Cookers: Transformations in Migrant Culture, Domesticity and Identity in Duncan Village, East London', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25, 3, (1999), p. 398.

employment.²⁵ In Lourenco Marques, for example, the sanitation brigades became the exclusive preserve of the Chopi people of the Zavala area by the early years of the twentieth century.²⁶ Zulu washermen, most of whom came from a few specific clans, established a guild and cornered the laundry market on the Witwatersrand around the turn of the century.²⁷ Bhaca migrants from the Mount Frere area of the Transkei were prominent in unskilled municipality jobs in East London in the 1960s to 1980s. Bank reports that these men 'were able to completely dominate' jobs in the sewerage department.²⁸ All of these networks facilitated the entry of new migrants, sharing similar backgrounds with established employees, into a specific niche in the job market. In Dar es Salaam, migrants grouped together in dance societies that also functioned as mutual aid associations.²⁹ Ibo migrants moving into Nigerian towns and cities, 'formed

²⁵ Bonner has identified several such ethnic/regional occupational groupings for the mid-century Witwatersrand: 'Flat cleaning and hotel work, for example, became largely the preserve of migrants from the Zululand and Natal Reserves. Building workers were drawn disproportionately from the Transkei. Municipal workers hailed mostly from East Griqualand and Tembuland, commercial workers from the Orange Free State farms and heavy industrial workers from Basutoland (now Lesotho) and particular areas of Zululand.' Philip Bonner, 'African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930s and 1960s: Its Social Character and Political Consequences', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 1, p. 126. Little made similar observations for colonial Accra: 'The manufacturing industries comprised, for the most part, workers recruited from the tribes of southern Ghana and Ashanti. In the building trades tribes from southern Ghana predominated, followed by tribes from Ashanti.... The northern tribes figure much more prominently in commerce, public service, and in occupations not specifically defined.' Kenneth Little, *West African Urbanization: A Study of Voluntary Associations in Social Change*, (1965), p. 47.

²⁶ Penvenne, *African Workers*, pp. 51-54.

²⁷ Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914*, Vol. 2, *New Nineveh*, (1982), Chapter 2.

²⁸ Bank, 'Men with Cookers', p. 401.

²⁹ Terence Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa*, (1975), p. 100.

associations to protect themselves from the hostile way in which they were received by local inhabitants when they took jobs as clerks, policemen, traders and labourers.³⁰

Occupational groupings sometimes co-operated. Luise White describes prostitutes in colonial Nairobi who 'often paid each other's bail and helped each other through lean times.'³¹ 'Stylishly and richly dressed young women' in Brazzaville organised groups to perform as singers and dancers in night-clubs. Members paid dues into a fund that they could draw on in times of financial crisis. There were additional benefits for women who worked as prostitutes or wished to attract wealthy male patrons: 'Grouping together in this manner was excellent strategy for young women who wanted to go to the top bars and draw the attention of the male clientele through their dress and dancing.'³² Female brewers in Salisbury (now Harare) formed networks that provided structures for members to advance to the status of shebeen queens operating independent brewing and prostitution businesses. Some of these women became so powerful they 'proved almost untouchable by the authorities.'³³ Religious groups and sporting and social clubs also eased the lot of newcomers in the cities.

As ubiquitous as these groupings were, this thesis concentrates on less amorphous, more readily identifiable groups bound together by a common name, a set of rules and

³⁰ Little, *West African Urbanization*, p. 26.

³¹ Luise White, *The Comforts of Home*, (1990), p.15.

³² Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville*, (1995), p. 138.

³³ Richard Parry, ' "The Durban System" and the Limits of Colonial Power in Salisbury, 1890-1935' in Crush and Ambler (eds.), *Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa*, (1992), p. 133.

structures and a specific identity as group members. More particularly, I focus on criminally inclined communities in the urban and industrialising centres of South Africa.

A survey of the literature on colonial cities raises the spectre of South African exceptionalism. The urban centres of South Africa seem to have been plagued by a greater degree of lawlessness and violence than colonial cities elsewhere in Africa. Also, the criminal gangs so prominent in the South African setting do not appear to have played a significant role in other colonial African cities.³⁴ Archival evidence, newspapers, popular publications like *Drum* magazine, biographical accounts and academic works all portray South African townships as dangerous places where criminals terrorised law-abiding folk. For a period in the 1930s, the Monday edition of the *Bantu World* listed the weekend casualties of criminal assault in Johannesburg townships. The victims were typically stabbed and usually numbered in the dozens, sometimes much more. Whether these differences are attributable to deficiencies in the literature or accurately reflect social realities is impossible to establish without further research. It is apparent, however, that South African cities have bred criminal societies that have helped sustain and perpetuate urban violence.

³⁴ The 40 Age Group that operated in Nairobi in the 1940s and 1950s engaged in criminal activities, especially armed robbery, but was overtly political in character. The 40 Group advocated armed insurrection against the colonial authorities and provided an urban support network for Mau Mau fighters during their struggle. By contrast, South African gangs typically avoided politics until the 1980s and 1990s when many townships became battlegrounds between competing political movements and the state. Frank Furedi, 'The African Crowd in Nairobi: Popular Movements and Elite Politics', *Journal of African History*, 14, 2, (1973). I am grateful to Sarah Lozowski for this reference.

Urbanisation and the South African State

Before the National Party (NP) assumed power in 1948, the successive colonial regimes in twentieth century South Africa practised what is widely referred to as a policy of segregation in their dealings with the colonised population. Once the NP took office, official apartheid was instituted and racial separation and white supremacy were increasingly codified in law. Although the state's capacity to enforce apartheid was considerably enhanced, recent scholarship has effectively refuted the popular notion that the NP government ruled South Africa as a monolith whose guiding purpose of promoting and preserving Afrikaner (and white) supremacy minimised divisions and disputes between the party faithful. The defining vision of a country run by whites, largely for whites, did not prevent political rifts and interdepartmental jealousies that undermined efficient administration. Both Dan O'Meara and Deborah Posel have revealed aspects of internecine disputes, corruption and bureaucratic bungling that plagued the NP.³⁵ Such developments, combined with limited resources, influenced the state's ability to intrude into the lives of the disenfranchised black majority. The state devoted enormous time and expense to suppressing opposition to white rule and devoted far fewer resources to monitoring black organisations not explicitly antagonistic to the government.

The industrialisation of South Africa resulted in millions of rural-based Africans migrating to the cities and mining centres. This thesis argues that urbanisation in the

South African colonial context, and specifically the apartheid dispensation, facilitated the development of black organisations (especially those with criminal leanings) that wielded significant local influence. The state's inability to impose anything approaching total control over life in the townships, combined with the restrictions it did implement, created an environment in which certain types of black organisations exercised considerable power. In many cases, these groups had an enormous impact on the lives of urban Africans.

The state maintained a minimal presence within the townships and exercised even less control over informal settlements. Its presence was felt most acutely as a result of liquor and pass raids and forced removals, but the government lacked a constant presence on the ground in the townships. This vacuum allowed a variety of groups to make their presence felt. Squatter movements organised their own communities, and civil guards, traditional courts, migrant associations, vigilante groups and gangs were all, at one time or another, significant players within the townships. The government's inability to control the townships without resorting to military occupation became glaringly apparent during the 1976 Soweto uprising and the insurrections of the mid-1980s when the African National Congress (ANC) sought to make the townships ungovernable. Street committees and people's courts enforced stay-aways and boycotts and assumed responsibility for judging and punishing political sell-outs and common criminals. Many townships became 'no go' areas for government officials and police. This state of affairs

³⁵ Dan O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The apartheid state and the politics of the National Party, 1948-*

reflects the government's weak administration of the townships as much as residents' determination to defy state authority.

Gangs and Gangsters in Twentieth-Century South Africa³⁶

Despite the unprecedented level of public concern with violent crime in the new South Africa, surprisingly little effort has been made to explore the historical roots of gangsterism. Since their establishment the segregated black residential areas, informal

1994, (1996); Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961*, (1991).

³⁶ For a more comprehensive review of South African gangs see, Gary Kynoch, 'From the Ninevites to the Hard Livings Gang: Township Gangsters and Urban Violence in Twentieth-century South Africa', *African Studies*, 58, 1, (1999). I extended my readings on gangs and gangsters to look at the Sicilian mafia and related organisations in the United States, as well as Chinese triads and American street gangs. The differences between these groups and the Marashea greatly outweigh the commonalities and there seems little point in attempting a comparative analysis. The Mafia began as a criminal organisation in Sicily and then branched out, as the triads did from China. Both became extremely sophisticated criminal networks with international connections, political influence and control over massive financial resources. The Marashea originated in South Africa, not Lesotho. It remained isolated in certain areas of South Africa, resided in impoverished townships and squatter camps, practised criminal activities on a very limited, local scale and wielded virtually no political influence with the white-ruled state. American street gangs are dominated by youth, are usually short lived, and have much more in common with the tsotsi gangs than with the Marashea. Furthermore, the Marashea's close ties with, and dependence on, the mining industry, distinguish it from other criminal organisations. Gus Tyler (ed.), *Organised Crime in America*, (1962); Joseph Albini, *The American Mafia: Genesis of a Legend*, (1971); Raimondo Catanzaro, *Men of Respect: A Social History of the Sicilian Mafia*, (1992); Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860-1960*, (1974); Rufus Schatzberg and Robert Kelly, *African-American Organized Crime: A Social History*, (1997); Frank Robertson, *Triangle of Death: The Inside Story of the Triads - the Chinese Mafia*, (1977); Martin Booth, *The Triads: The Chinese Criminal Fraternity*, (1990); Dian Murray with Qin Baoqi, *The Origins of the Triads: The Chinese Triads in Legend and History*, (1994); Malcolm Klein, *The American Street Gang*, (1995); Scott Cummings and Daniel Monti (eds.), *Gangs: The Origin and Impact of Contemporary Youth Gangs in the United States*, (1993).

settlements and mining compounds have proved a fertile breeding ground for criminal gangs. By examining the history of urban gangs, this thesis seeks to move beyond the standard explanations that attribute gang activity to poverty and the breakdown of family and social controls. Three main suggestions are advanced:

1) Gang/community relations were fluid and ambiguous and to understand why gangs have been so prevalent in the townships we need to appreciate the fragmented nature of township society and the ways in which gangs reflected, exploited and exacerbated urban fault lines.

2) As a result of various social, economic and political factors, criminal groups were often able to obtain significant support from segments of their communities.

3) State forces have a long history of sponsoring and abetting gangs and this support has been critical to the survival and prosperity of many criminal elements in South Africa.

These conditions support the overarching argument that the history of South African gangs in general, and the Marashea in particular, demonstrate that 'Colonial dichotomies of ruler and ruled, white and black, colonizer and colonized only reflected part of the reality in which people lived.'³⁷

A History of Urban Gangs

Beinart tentatively suggests that there is an historical trajectory of violence within and between African communities in South Africa:

³⁷ Stoler and Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony', p. 34.

Any attempt to plot the incidence of violence within a conquered or colonised population would certainly entail examination of the critical pressure points created in social transformation. In twentieth-century South Africa, it might be hazarded that there was a shift from rural fights over land, to compound violence at the height of mining expansion and subsequently to location and township gang fights in the post-Second World War era: in the 1970s and 1980s cleavages in the townships have become more deeply politicised and violence far more directly political in character.³⁸

This is a crude trajectory at best, as Beinart acknowledges. Rural fights over land and resources occurred throughout the twentieth-century; much of the worst compound violence took place in the 1990s and some of the more recent township conflicts were not directly political. That said, there are some trends in the histories of certain types of criminal movements and in collective urban violence.

The Zulu-based Ninevites on the turn-of-the-century Witwatersrand terrorised the inhabitants of urban black locations.³⁹ In early twentieth-century Durban, attacks on unsuspecting individuals by gangs of 'kitchen boys' known as Amalaita 'remained a ubiquitous feature of suburban labouring life.'⁴⁰ The Rand mining compounds of the 1920s and 1930s were plagued by the Mpondo Isitshozi gangs that 'established a reign of terror on the paths leading to and from the mines.'⁴¹ A resident of Johannesburg's

³⁸ William Beinart, 'Political and Collective Violence in Southern African Historiography' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 3, (1992), p. 468.

³⁹ Van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, p. 195.

⁴⁰ Paul La Hausse, '“The Cows of Nongoloza”: Youth, Crime and Amalaita Gangs in Durban, 1900-1936', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, 1, (1990), p. 108.

⁴¹ Keith Breckenridge, 'Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting: The Role of the Isitshozi in the Development of Ethnic Organisations in the Compounds', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, 1, (1990), p. 63.

Western Native Townships, reflecting back on the early 1930s, recalled that ‘The most dreaded gang in those days were the [Pedi-dominated] Amalaitas.... They used to beat up people mercilessly.’⁴² The 1940s witnessed the birth of the tsotsi phenomenon as large sections of the rapidly growing population of urbanised youth formed gangs and turned to violent crime. Indeed, Glaser claims that by the 1950s ‘the majority of permanently urbanised black youths in South Africa’s key urban conglomerate, the Witwatersrand, was involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in tsotsi gangs.’⁴³ The same period witnessed the birth and expansion of the Marashea. In Cape Town’s District Six, prior to the population removals of the 1960s and 1970s, extended family gangs ‘ordered the ghetto through their connections, intermarriages, agreements, “respect” and ultimately, their force and access to violence.’⁴⁴

Because of the depredations by tsotsis and other gangs the police were unable or unwilling to control, numerous groups formed defensive associations that clashed with the gangsters and further fuelled the spiral of violence. As these defensive associations grew more powerful, they often engaged in predatory behaviour that rendered them indistinguishable from the gangs they originally mobilised against.⁴⁵

⁴² *Bantu World*, 22 June, 1953.

⁴³ Clive Glaser, ‘The Mark of Zorro: Sexuality and Gender Relations in the Tsotsi Subculture on the Witwatersrand’ *African Studies*, 51, 1, (1992), p. 47.

⁴⁴ Don Pinnock, ‘Stone’s Boys and the Making of a Cape Flats Mafia’ in Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict*, (1987), p. 427.

⁴⁵ The movement from defensive association to anti-social predators is typical of organisations as diverse as the Globe Gang, the Marashea, and the ZX5 youth gang of 1970s Soweto. Formed in the late 1940s to combat the crime of skollies (tsotsis), Globe members comprised the sons of the Coloured middle class – shopkeepers, artisans and the

Youth gangs such as the Black Swines and the Pirates established a strong presence in Soweto in the 1960s, while the Hazels reigned supreme in the 1970s.⁴⁶ And although it seems these youth gangs were thrown on the defensive by politicised students following the 1976 uprising, they re-emerged in the form of the 'jackroller' gangs of the 1980s and 1990s. Relocation to the Cape Flats spawned several different types of criminal syndicates that have survived to the present day. Indeed, many gangsters and their gangs, like Rashied Staggie of the Cape Flats Hard Livings Gang, have become household names. All the while the Marashea gangs have maintained a presence on the Rand and in Free State mining areas.

Political conflict between the supporters of the ANC and the state, and the ANC and Inkatha, engulfed many of the townships surrounding Johannesburg and Cape Town⁴⁷ from the mid-1980s to the 1994 elections. At the same time, much of KwaZulu-Natal was involved in what amounted to a civil war. These struggles often blurred the line between politics and crime and provided an environment in which many criminal

more successful hawkers. However, by 1950, the Globe controlled criminal activities in District Six. The Marashea began as a defensive association but soon extended into the criminal sphere including robbery and murder. The ZX5 'started out as a small defensive gang, but became increasingly territorial and aggressive.' The most recent example of such an occurrence is provided by People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (Pagad), a Western Cape-based vigilante group that openly defies the government and has engaged in violence both against gangsters and the police. See Don Pinnock, *The Brotherhoods: Street Gangs and State Control in Cape Town*, (1984), pp. 25-29; Clive Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics in Soweto, 1958-1976' Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, (1994), pp. 255-6.

⁴⁶ See Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics' for a discussion of the different tsotsi gangs.

gangs justified murder and robbery as political action. Thus was born the label *comtsotsis*, a term used to describe both comrades who engaged in crime and *tsotsis* who characterised their crimes as politically motivated. To further complicate the picture, the competing political movements and the government all utilised gangsters to do their dirty work. Criminal gangs have clearly played a crucial role in shaping the urban environment of twentieth-century South Africa.

Gang Historiography

There has been a tendency to depict black South African gangsters as social bandits battling the repressive state on behalf of the oppressed masses,⁴⁸ or conversely, as destructive predators victimising fellow blacks.⁴⁹ To privilege a gang's relationship to the

⁴⁷ While the ANC-Inkatha dispute received the most publicity, state sponsored groups, such as Cape Flats 'wit doeke' were involved in the struggle against ANC-aligned forces throughout the country.

⁴⁸ Lodge, for example, in his discussion of Sophiatown gangsters, writes, 'The gangs were popularly characterised as marauders in the white city, as heroes ... it was popularly believed that "gangs seldom harm ordinary folk."' Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 102. In an autobiographical account, a former *tsotsi* leader insists that some of the gangsters in Sophiatown functioned as 'Young Robin Hoods, fighting the strong in defence of the weak.' Don Mattera, *Gone with the Twilight: A Story of Sophiatown*, (1987), p. 102. A study of gangsters in 1980s Cape Town concluded that the gangs 'are constantly on the threshold of resistance. They share with all Cape workers a long and terrible history of poverty and relocation.... It is this that has underpinned an understanding ... of gang behaviour among ordinary people.' Pinnock, *The Brotherhoods*, p. 433. Austen argues that criminal gangs in South Africa 'are one of the models for wider forms of youth gangs which ... offer a degree of non-political resistance to the repressive state.' Ralph Austen, 'Social Bandits and other Heroic Criminals: Western Models of Resistance and their Relevance for Africa' in Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, (1986), p. 96.

⁴⁹ Other analysts, keen to refute the social bandit ideal, have drawn attention to the destructive aspects of gang activity. Goodhew warns that 'historians have tended to

government and its agents as the defining characteristic of that gang (whether the gang be classified as anti-state, apolitical or allied with the government) overlooks the complex manner in which gangs fit into their communities and the variety of roles they played in the townships.⁵⁰ This approach also obscures the issue of identity. Gang identities were forged as a result of numerous factors – relations with rivals gangs, the methods by which gang members supported themselves, political affiliation, specific rituals and cultural idioms, gender relations, ethnicity, age, territorialism and so on – designed to contextualise the world of the townships, an environment in which the white-ruled state was an important, but by no means the only – or even the dominant – influence. Group identities, which shaped activities and community relations, developed to meet the needs and correspond with the worldviews of gang members struggling to survive in hostile surroundings. Establishing a presence often meant that a gang's primary preoccupation was with its own constituents and rival groups within the townships, not with the larger political questions of the day. This is not to argue that gangs defined themselves

romanticise the gruesome impact of township crime', while Bonner emphasises 'the role of ethnic gangs in providing the nucleus and thrust for the growth of destructive ethnic chauvinism' in the townships. Goodhew, 'The People's Police-Force', p. 469; Bonner, 'The Russians on the Reef', p. 186.

⁵⁰ In any case it would be difficult, if not impossible, to establish such a placement as many gangs both acted in concert with state forces and joined anti-government campaigns as it suited their needs. For example, in the 1950s, tsotsi groups on the Rand frequently fought with ANC supporters, but on some occasions rallied to ANC-led initiatives. In the 1980s and 1990s, comtsotsis were generally classified as comrades-gone-bad, or as gangsters who appropriated the 'comrades' label in an attempt to legitimise their activities, but the distinction between comrades and comtsotsis was not always readily discernible, a state of affairs that further complicated the already murky definition of 'political' violence.

exclusively through relationships with competitors or did not consciously resist the agents of the state, only that a host of influences contributed to gang identity and determined gang activities. In other words, it is unlikely that gangs defined themselves, or were regarded by different groups in the community, primarily according to their place on the resistance continuum.

Analysts who focus on the destructive impact of gangs also obscure the multi-faceted roles these groups performed within the townships. Although the vast majority of gangs were predatory in some respect, they often engaged in activities or represented ideals that were appreciated and applauded by significant numbers of township residents.

Virtually every study dealing with gangs and township life emphasises poverty and anomie as the central causes of gang activity. In summary, the materially and socially impoverished locations and squatter camps caused individuals to come together to secure territory and control over income-generating schemes. These activities led to clashes with other groups pursuing similar agendas. In this explanation, gangs originated and persisted because so many people in the townships were poor and lacked the structure and guidance of 'traditional' family life. Add to this the humiliation, frustration and emasculation of living under racial domination, and gangs and violent crime become all but inevitable. It is essential to keep in mind that government policies, which enriched and empowered whites at the expense of Africans, provide the larger framework within which gangs must be situated. However, to understand how and why gangs have become an indelible element of urban society requires an historical examination of the formation

and resilience of criminal organisations. Such an approach casts light on the extent of colonial power and control, collusion between state agents and criminal elements, identity formation, the strategies adopted by Africans to negotiate colonial constraints in urban settings, the role of violence in this process of negotiation, the impact of this violence on colonial subjects, and gender and power relations within urban African communities. The remainder of this chapter outlines how our knowledge of gangs can be utilised to gain insight into these various issues.

The very fact that lawlessness and gangs have predominated in the townships is a testament to the lack of state penetration on the ground in these areas, as well as to police priorities. Until 1994, the foremost priority of the police was to uphold white supremacy through the enforcement of racist legislation. Instead of policing black communities with the aim of reducing crime, the police staged pass and liquor raids and crushed political dissent. As a result, criminal gangs operated with a significant degree of impunity. This brand of policing can be traced to the early days of the Rand. The Ninevites were said to have dispensed their own rough brand of justice in Johannesburg because for Africans it was 'a town without law.'⁵¹ John Brewer summarised this situation for the 1950s: 'Passes and documents were checked, raids for illicit liquor conducted and illegal squatters evicted, all while murder, rape and gangsterism flourished in the townships.'⁵² Indeed, a 1955 report on youth crime on the Rand recorded that gang members boasted openly that police were so intent on liquor and pass offences that tsotsis had little to fear from

⁵¹ van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, p. 55.

them.⁵³ Policing did not improve in later decades as evidenced by a memorandum the Diepkloof Parents' Association submitted to the Divisional Commissioner of Police in Soweto in 1989: 'There is a growing feeling in the community that the SAP are quick to act against anti-apartheid activists and their organisations but they do nothing to stop the criminals presently terrorising us.'⁵⁴ Residents were effectively left to fend for themselves as the state abdicated its civil policing role and this state of affairs led to the proliferation of criminal gangs, communal policing initiatives and vigilante movements.⁵⁵

Because of their weakness on the ground in the townships, the police needed to strike alliances and sponsor proxies to root out the political enemies of the state who tended to be based in the urban areas. Criminal gangs were instrumental in this process. In Newclare, a freehold township on the Rand, the police gave the Marashea gangs tacit support in their campaign to defeat the ANC-aligned Civilian Guard groups in the early 1950s. During the political violence of the 1980s and 1990s, the police frequently recruited gangster elements to harass and kill the government's political opponents. The state sponsored various gangs that informed on and eliminated ANC activists during the civil war in KwaZulu-Natal and the current epidemic of gang violence on the Cape Flats has been traced to the 1980s and early 1990s when gangsters flourished under police

⁵² John Brewer, *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa*, (1994), p. 200.

⁵³ Glaser, 'The Mark of Zorro', p. 59.

⁵⁴ Philip Bonner and Lauren Segal, *Soweto: A History*, (1998), p. 138.

⁵⁵ For community policing efforts in the 1930s to 1960 see Goodhew, 'The People's Police Force.' Recent news reports claim that Mapogo a Matamaga is now South Africa's largest vigilante group with some 50,000 members. *Email & Guardian*, January 25, 2000.

protection in return for acting as political informants.⁵⁶ The government's political agenda created space for criminal elements eager to reap the benefits of state collusion.

The history of South African gangs lays bare the fault lines of urban African societies and demonstrates how criminal groups both reflected and exacerbated these fissures. To understand how gangs fit into the urban social milieu one must recognise that urban African communities were intensely heterogeneous and riven by divisions and tensions. The ways in which different gangs related with and were perceived by various groups within the larger community were heavily influenced by gender, ethnicity, class and age. To a large degree, gangs mirrored the divisions in urban communities – youth versus elders, 'townsmen' versus 'tribesmen', male versus female, ethnic groups versus outsiders and the desperately poor versus the relatively well off – but gang activity also moulded these antagonisms and solidified discrete identities. Tsotsis were widely understood to be predatory male youths, the Marashea was perceived as a Basotho organisation, migrant gangs were seen as distinct from their fully urbanised counterparts, and virtually all the gangs adopted a masculine identity that glorified fighting prowess and promoted the violent domination of girls and women.

As a primarily Basotho association involved in countless episodes of violence with other ethnically defined gangs, the Marashea's role in heightening ethnic chauvinism illustrates the power and resonance of ethnic identities, especially in socially fragmented

⁵⁶ *Sunday Independent*, 22 February 1998; *Mail & Guardian*, 6-12 March 1998; I. Kinnes, 'Reclaiming the Cape Flats: A Community Challenge to Crime and Gangsterism', *Crime*

and dangerous urban settings. The gangs typically set aside internecine rivalries and invoked a national identity as Basotho when involved in such conflicts. As both migrants and foreign nationals, these mostly unschooled and illiterate men drew on a common identity not so much constructed and informed by elite 'culture brokers'⁵⁷ as instilled by a linguistically and culturally homogenous society that had successfully (and heroically) staved off incorporation into South Africa. This heroic history was emphasised during the initiation process that a large majority of Marashea men underwent as youths. The Marashea reinforced this sense of ethnic exclusivity through its role as protectors of the Basotho, its cultural practices and the violence it directed against non-Basotho. The political violence of the 1980s and 1990s focussed attention on the Inkatha Freedom Party's (IFP) attempts to appeal to, and manipulate, Zulu ethnic consciousness. However, ethnic mobilisation has a long history in South Africa and an historical examination of ethnic identity and migrant associations would improve our understanding of urbanisation and collective violence.

That said, none of the divisions discussed above were definitive – township populations were not neatly segregated into compartments defined by ethnicity, generation, class, gender or any other classification, nor were the interests of different groups always in conflict – imbricating identities and agendas were as much a feature of

and Conflict, 2, (1995), p.6; Mark Shaw, 'Organised Crime in Post-Apartheid South Africa', Institute for Security Studies, Paper No. 17, (March 1998), p. 2.

⁵⁷ This is in contrast to Vail who attributes the invention of ethnicity in Southern Africa to African intellectuals, European anthropologists and missionaries. See Leroy Vail,

township life as were confrontations. Instead, a focus on gangs illustrates the fluid and contingent nature of urban identities. Tsotsi youths battled with students, civilian guards were composed of multi-ethnic alliances, girls and women sometimes played important roles within the gangs, and migrants fought with fellow migrants as opposed to forging any sense of class identification. The Marashea saw themselves as Basotho, as warriors, as workers, as migrants, and as community protectors, depending on the context.

The strategies employed by gangs to protect their interests underscore the limitations of state power and the ability of African groups to identify and exploit the 'weak joints and soft spots of the structures of urban control.'⁵⁸ Different gangs struck alliances with and bribed the police, manipulated township officials, aligned themselves with political movements, retained legal practitioners, appealed to language and regional groups on an ethnic basis, controlled and exploited female associates, and established profitable economic niches. In other words, the gangs negotiated their existences, sometimes by challenging, but more often by adapting to, the urban conditions imposed by the South African state. The lack of a government presence on the ground in many urban communities permitted enterprising gangs to exercise considerable power. Many groups were relatively unorganised and short lived but the Marashea, some squatter movements, and later, ANC-aligned Street Committees and Self Defence Units (SDU), as

'Ethnicity in Southern African History' in Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, (1989).

⁵⁸ Bonner et al., 'The Shaping of Apartheid', p. 15. The authors utilise this phrase in the context of spaces African women hollowed out for themselves, but the description is applicable for all Africans negotiating the constraints of urban South Africa.

well as Cape Flats gangs, took advantage of this power vacuum to assume control of day-to-day activities in entire neighbourhoods. In the 1950s, the Marashea controlled informal business activities and access to housing and required residents to pay protection fees in Newclare. In the mining areas of the Free State and West Rand the Marashea set up autonomous settlements that they rule to this day. James Mpanza and other squatter leaders (some of whom were linked to criminal gangs) not only established large communities in mid-1900s Johannesburg, but policed and taxed them in return for supplying essential services such as water, latrines and schools.⁵⁹

An important issue addressed in this thesis is the role of violence in shaping urban communities. Many scholars have observed that colonialism was inherently violent. Frantz Fanon argued that the colonised were brutalised by colonialism and responded by directing displaced aggression against their fellows.

While the settler or the policeman has the right the livelong day to strike the native, to insult him and make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native; for the last resort of the native is to defend his personality vis-à-vis his brother. Tribal feuds only serve to perpetuate old grudges buried deep in the memory. By throwing himself with all his force into the vendetta, the native tries to persuade himself that colonialism does not exist, that everything is going on as before, that history continues. Here on the level of communal organizations we clearly discern the well-known behavioural patterns of avoidance. It is as if plunging into a fraternal bloodbath allowed them to ignore the obstacle, and to put off till later the choice, nevertheless inevitable, which opens up the question of armed resistance to colonialism.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Philip Bonner, 'The Politics of Black Squatter Movements on the Rand, 1944-52', *Radical History Review*, 47, 7 (1990).

This is a classic case of overstating the reach and impact of colonialism. Violence among the colonised cannot be unquestionably attributed to the effects of colonial rule. More attention needs to be paid to the ways in which, and for what purposes, the colonised utilised violence. Violence was sometimes, but not exclusively, a function of colonialism. As Beinart points out, 'While it is wrong to see pre-colonial African society as intrinsically violent, it is no less misleading to see it as without violence.'⁶¹ Many elements within colonial African society continued to employ violence to meet their needs. The possibilities were, to some extent, restricted by the colonial state, but violence was still used in a variety of contexts to achieve gender domination, prestige, control over territory, security and material wealth.

For some groups, violence served as an essential marker of masculinity and public identities revolved around courage and fighting prowess.⁶² This is certainly true for the Marashea, whose rank and file members referred to themselves as *marabele* (fighters) or *masole* (soldiers). Beinart observed that

Collective violence is clearly related to social dislocation and the breakdown of family authority consequent on rapid urbanisation as many

⁶⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (1963), p.54.

⁶¹ Beinart, 'Political and Collective Violence', p. 469.

⁶² This is a recurrent theme in South African gang literature, but was also characteristic of male associations that were not as criminally inclined, including rural groups like the *indlavini* as well as the primarily urban comrades, or 'young lions' of the 1980s and early 1990s. See for example: Glaser, 'The Mark of Zorro'; Ari Sitas, 'The Making of the "Comrades" Movement in Natal, 1985-1991', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 3, (1992); William Beinart, 'The Origins of the *Indlavini*: Male Associations and Migrant labour in the Transkei', *African Studies*, 50, 1-2, (1991); Catherine Campbell, 'Learning to Kill? Masculinity, the Family and Violence in Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 3, (1992).

earlier sociological works stressed. But forms of violence express cultural continuities, and changing collective solidarities. Where alternative social expressions of masculinity are less immediately available, violence can become a powerful means of self-definition for younger men in particular. Violence can in this context be used to carve out social space.⁶³

What he neglects to mention is that in the under-policed townships, violence could also be a practical strategy to secure control over territory and resources. Thus, for gang members living on the peripheries of urban African society, violence provided identity and a means of achieving power. The townships and squatter camps comprised the arenas in which different African groups sought to appropriate spheres of influence and violence played an integral part in these campaigns.

Examining Marashea activities allows us to focus on how and why groups capitalised on structural conditions that encouraged violent action. First and foremost, members engaged in collective violence because it met their material and social needs. The townships and squatter camps were poorly policed and powerful groups competed for territorial control. Control of urban space was synonymous with material wealth and competition was fierce. In this environment the judicious use of violence paid dividends. There is strong evidence that some Marashea groups fought with National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) supporters because union practices and ideologies threatened their economic interests. Marashea groups relied on a combination of strategies and tactics to entrench their power, and violence often played a decisive role.

⁶³ Beinart, 'Political and Collective Violence', p. 481.

Secondly, an element that emerges time and again in Marashea testimony is the exhilaration of urban combat. Many veterans report that they enjoyed fighting and the prestige associated with martial prowess. The early Russian battles on the Rand, albeit bloody, had a definite recreational aspect that should not be discounted. Prearranged fights with rival Marashea factions were a staple of Russian life in the 1940s and 1950s with little other than bragging rights at stake. Accomplished fighters gained the respect of comrades and foes and the veneration of Marashea women. The excitement, camaraderie and group pride associated with these street battles were attractive aspects of Borashea for many members.

The Marashea's use of violence supports the argument that the binary framework of coloniser and colonised is too restrictive. The gangs sometimes fought with the police, most often to avoid arrest, but the vast majority of their violence was directed against rival Marashea factions or other elements within the townships and compounds. The armed might of the state was unassailable and it was fruitless for the gangs to pit themselves against the police except in desperate circumstances. Instead, the Marashea concentrated its efforts where it could expect some degree of success. Russian gangs battled each other for recreation and to achieve prestige. They attacked criminal youth to increase the security of their home areas and to win popular support. They fought with other ethnic gangs over territory and to consolidate support among Basotho. They engaged in hostilities with political movements and unions that threatened to undermine their

authority and economic base. Finally, different gangs worked with the police when it suited their purposes.

Without discounting the mayhem gangs inflicted upon urban residents, it is important to recognise that the communities that harboured criminal groups did not view them solely as a destructive force. It is unlikely that gangs could have flourished in South Africa without a significant degree of support from segments of urban communities. This support shifted in emphasis, from mere tolerance to outright alliances, and different gangs drew support from different sections of the community at different times, contingent upon a variety of social, economic and political factors.

Resentment towards authorities that governed township dwellers' movements, rights of residence and access to jobs, and subjected townspeople to constant harassment as a result of liquor and pass raids, meant that violence directed at the police was likely to be celebrated by many members of the community. A former tsotsi highlights the ambivalent relationship between gangs and their neighbours. 'The gangs were a great paradox. People couldn't understand why they would rob them, stab them and then fight the police. So there was this love-hate relationship.'⁶⁴ Other than battling the police, gangs engaged in activities that met with varying degrees of popular approval including the victimisation of white, Indian and Chinese owned businesses, brawls with white gangs, and participation in political initiatives. Moreover, many gangs conducted their

⁶⁴ Mike Nicol, *A Good Looking Corpse*, (1991), p. 59.

criminal activities away from their home areas and thus probably did not earn the enmity of the people among whom they lived.

Some township residents shared in the spoils of the gangs' criminal exploits, especially through the distribution of heavily discounted stolen goods.⁶⁵ Poverty and the brutally high rates of unemployment in the townships ensured that many families appreciated any source of income, including proceeds from criminal activity. Gangs provided crucial economic inputs for many neighbourhoods. A recent newspaper article contends that Cape Flats gangs are especially powerful in this regard: 'They are popular figures providing income for an estimated 100,000 people through the illicit economy they control, sometimes paying the water and electricity bills of entire neighbourhoods.'⁶⁶ Such developments fostered an economic interdependence between gangs and local residents and entrenched an acceptance of criminal culture within large sections of the affected communities.

It is hardly surprising that a culture of violence has developed in South Africa. The current climate of lawlessness is often attributed to the township revolts that began in the 1980s and the political violence that preceded the end of NP rule. More specifically, it is commonly traced to the 'lost generation' of 'young lions' who put liberation before education. These former youth, lacking any marketable skills, are said to resort to violent crime out of frustration and a lack of alternatives. However, the political violence of the

⁶⁵ Anthony Sampson, *Drum: A Venture into the New Africa*, (1956), p. 107; S. Mokwena, 'The Era of the Jackrollers: Contextualising the Rise of Youth Gangs in Soweto', Seminar No. 7, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, (1991), p.14.

1980s and 1990s was merely the culmination of decades of lawlessness in the townships. The culture of violence that afflicts South Africa has historical roots that predate the death throes of apartheid. Violence was by no means limited to urban centres. White farmers and black labourers have a long history of hostility.⁶⁷ Rural 'faction fights' over land and other resources have plagued many areas for decades, particularly in the former reserves and homelands.⁶⁸ Violence on the mines was endemic. White supervisors routinely used physical force against their black subordinates who sometimes responded in kind, and faction fights have occurred on the mines since their inception.⁶⁹ Urban locations, racked by poverty, unemployment and social dislocation, lacked effective policing. Instead, the police assumed an oppressive role and in the course of liquor and pass raids and the suppression of political dissent, countless Africans were arrested, assaulted, jailed and 'endorsed' back to rural areas. Meanwhile, gangs operated with a minimum of interference and routinely employed violence to establish and maintain their

⁶⁶ *Business Day*, 11 February, 1999.

⁶⁷ The murders of white farmers over the past several years are at least partially attributable to this history of poor labour relations.

⁶⁸ For KwaZulu-Natal see Jonathan Clegg, *'Ukubuyisa Isidumbu – "Bringing back the Body" An Examination into the Ideology of Vengeance in the Msinga and Mpofana Rural Locations, 1882-1944'* in Bonner (ed.), *Working Papers in Southern African Studies*, vol. 2 (1981). For a discussion of the Msinga violence in the more recent past see Rian Malan, *My Traitor's Heart*, (1991). For the former Transkei see William Beinart, 'Conflict in Qumbu: Rural Consciousness, Ethnicity and Violence in the Colonial Transkei' in Beinart and Bundy (eds.), *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa*, (1987). Ongoing conflict in this region is dealt with in the *Kroon Commission – Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Tsolo Violence and Related Matters*, (1995).

⁶⁹ See Keith Breckenridge, 'The Allure of Violence: Men, Race and Masculinity on the South African Goldmines, 1900-1950', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 4, (1998); Moodie, *Going for Gold*; and Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*.

presence. Gang activities precipitated different civil guard and vigilante movements that also depended on violence. The various liberation movements endorsed armed struggles in response to state repression of peaceful protest and activism. In a society characterised by the rule of force, different actors relied on violence to achieve their various aims. South Africa continues to grapple with this legacy and the deeply ingrained consciousness that violence often provides the surest method of obtaining status, material wealth and power.

The study of male associations also reveals the gendered nature of violence in South Africa. Some female gangs existed and female members of male-dominated gangs sometimes participated in violence, but gang violence in South Africa has been an overwhelmingly male phenomenon. Rape, abduction and other forms of assault and harassment were common activities for many gangs.⁷⁰ Marashea gangs often fought pitched battles over women and kidnapping women from rival gangs was an integral part of internecine relations. Virtually all township residents were vulnerable to gang violence but females were specifically targeted for sexual assault. Given the nature of the gangs it is not surprising that a masculine identity predicated on fighting ability and the domination of women achieved hegemonic status,⁷¹ however; there were alternate understandings of masculinities⁷² and room for women to negotiate their circumstances through personal

⁷⁰ There is no shortage of literature documenting the victimisation of women by gangs. See for example, Glaser, 'The Mark of Zorro' and Mokwena, 'The Era of the Jackrollers'.

⁷¹ The concept of hegemonic masculinity in a South African setting is explored in Morrell, 'Of Boys and Men'.

⁷² For example, employed Marashea often disparaged the 'loafers' who were too lazy and soft to work. For Basotho miners' work-related masculine identities see Jeff Guy and

relationships. How women dealt with male violence was an important element in their survival. Unable to turn to the police for protection, some unattached women saw association with a criminal gang as their best survival option. A gendered history of urbanisation in South Africa needs to incorporate the ways in which gang activities affected female residents differentiated by age, class and ethnicity.

With a few notable exceptions, the literature on migrancy in Southern Africa focuses on the experiences and perceptions of male migrants.⁷³ An examination of the Marashea and other migrant associations provides a window through which female migrancy can be studied. Female migrants, at least in South Africa, typically had restricted access to formal waged work outside of the domestic sector. This led to a greater reliance on the informal economy. Brewing and liquor sales in particular often brought migrant women into association with criminal groups. An understanding of the ways in which women joined, participated in, and shaped these organisations would greatly enhance our knowledge of female migrancy.

Motlatsi Thabane, 'Technology, Ethnicity and Ideology: Basotho Miners and Shaft-Sinking on the South African Gold Mines', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14,2, (1988).

⁷³ These exceptions include: Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng*, Ravan Press, (1991); Philip Bonner, 'Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women: Liquor, Prostitution and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945' in Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (1990); Tshidiso Maloka, 'Khoma Lia Oela: Canteens, Brothels and Labour Migrancy in Colonial Lesotho, 1900-1940', *Journal of African History*, 38, 1, (1997); and Jane Parpart, 'Sexuality and Power on the Zambian Copperbelt: 1926-1964' in Parpart and Stichter, (eds.), *Patriarchy and Class*, (1988).

Overview of the Thesis

This introduction is followed by a discussion of methodology that explores the nature and difficulties of my fieldwork and the importance of oral testimony to the thesis. Chapter 3 serves as the basis for the dissertation by laying out the formation, composition, structures, and social practices of the Marashea. It discusses how members ordered their environments and forged identities that drew strongly on a common past and culture, yet incorporated new elements suitable to the challenges they faced as Marashea. The structure and organisation of the gangs illustrates the autonomy of African organisations. During an era in which the bureaucratic and coercive arm of the apartheid state supposedly extended into all areas of African life, the Marashea constructed a vibrant and powerful subculture that existed outside of white control. An examination of gender relations in Chapter 4 highlights the experiences of female migrants and explores the gendered nature of power in a criminal association dominated by men. South African gang literature firmly establishes women as excluded from, or in some cases operating on the peripheries of, male gangs.⁷⁴ Female Marashea, while subordinate in power relations, were fully integrated members with many of the rights and privileges of men. However, gender violence was a core feature of Borashea and the basis of male domination. Chapter 5 concentrates on the various ways that members of the Marashea made a living and sustained themselves in South Africa. These practices and strategies further depict

⁷⁴ Females are conspicuous by their absence in the accounts of migrant gangs like the Ninevites and the Isitshozi, and feature primarily as hangers-on in the tsotsi gangs. van

African initiatives to capitalise on the limitations of the apartheid state. In particular, the Marashea's interactions with the police demonstrate how the gangs attempted to neutralise the superior force of the state through a combination of co-operation and conflict. These relationships were constantly renegotiated as were Russian relations with their African neighbours. The Marashea presence in Newclare, featured in Chapter 6, provides a specific case study of the government's inability to control African residential areas and the practical application of various Russian survival strategies. Chapter 7 examines the organisation's colonisation of the mining areas of the Free State and demonstrates how the Marashea exploited structural changes in the South African economy and labour legislation to consolidate its presence. The final chapter looks at the political orientation of the Marashea. The gangs' relations with the South African state, mining authorities and the ANC supports the underlying argument of this thesis that the dominant coping strategy of the colonised was negotiation, not resistance.

Onselen, *New Nineveh*; Breckenridge, 'Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting'; and Glaser, 'The Mark of Zorro'.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

As I conceived of this project, I knew it would be almost completely dependent on primary materials, particularly oral testimony, for the Marashea is anything but well studied. Only two articles have been written on the Basotho gangs and both confine their focus to the area of the Rand during the 1940s and 1950s. Newspapers and archival documents proved to be important source materials but are limited in the range of issues they address. Police, mining and township officials tended to focus on the disruption to order that Russian activities caused, although it was generally concluded that this was a nuisance factor that posed no significant threat to the state or mining operations. The Marashea came to public notice almost exclusively as a result of their involvement in violence. Newspapers intended for white readership rarely mentioned Marashea because, except for the most spectacular instances of violence, their activities rarely impinged on the white world. African newspapers reported on 'faction fights', robberies and court appearances, and typically portrayed the gangs as primitive tribal thugs. This was the public face of the Marashea.

Gathering oral testimony was the only way to learn more about the gangs, to probe into issues of culture and gender relations, to better understand how they fit into their environment and how they perceived of and represented themselves. There were a number of possible ways to approach this project, but I decided early on that I wanted it to be a history of the Marashea as told by members and ex-members. The major

limitation to this approach is that one does not get an outsider's view of the society. I interviewed a handful of mineworkers, police and mining officials, but, for the most part, outsiders' perceptions are only examined through the claims of Marashea themselves, although newspaper and archival sources provided additional insights.

To provide a solid foundation for my fieldwork, I spent the first six months in South Africa doing archival research in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Bloemfontein. The two main barriers were my inability to read Afrikaans and the twenty-year moratorium on archival material (thus holdings were only accessible to 1977). I used an Afrikaans dictionary to identify relevant files and documents for translation. The moratorium presented less of a challenge as archival material and newspaper reports on the gangs become noticeably scarcer after the 1960s when the Johannesburg gangs maintained a lower profile and the society expanded into the less public spaces of the rural Free State. Accordingly, there is an even greater reliance on oral testimony for the 'modern' Marashea than for those who operated in the earlier periods.

In his study of the Russians on the Rand in the 1950s, Bonner relied heavily on retired veterans living in Lesotho, although he did locate a few who had remained in South Africa. My search also began in Lesotho because I am familiar with the country after having lived and worked there as a high school teacher from 1991-93. Fortunately, I was able to call on a network of friends, former colleagues and students when I began fieldwork. As it turned out two of my former students became the primary research assistants. Tsepang Cekwane spent more than a year driving all over Lesotho, Gauteng and the Free State with me in search of informants while Booi Mohapi interviewed

independently in Lesotho. Tsepang and Booi each had their particular strengths with regard to this study. Tsepang had sold insurance throughout Lesotho and seems to know every nook and cranny of the country. Furthermore, he has relatives in Soweto and is at home in the townships. This familiarity proved invaluable once we had exhausted our contacts in Lesotho and sought new ones in South Africa. As a former mineworker, Booi had firsthand experience of the Marashea and knew the different mines and areas that informants described. Booi's wife, Mampolokeng, assisted him with many of the interviews, and they were able to obtain rich and sensitive material from women who had been kidnapped by Marashea.

At the beginning of the fieldwork my goal was to interview fifty current and former members of Marashea. After six weeks of searching in Lesotho I had done two interviews and fifty seemed impossible. In the end, however, between April 1998 and June 1999, 79 Marashea were interviewed in Lesotho, in the townships and informal settlements of Gauteng province, and in Marashea settlements in mining areas surrounding Klerksdorp, Virginia, Carletonville and Welkom.¹

Oral History

The production of history has traditionally been an elitist project in which the lives of the poor and marginalised (including women) have gone unnoticed. Social history is an attempt to rectify these biases and has relied heavily on oral traditions and

¹ 83 Marashea were interviewed but one tape malfunctioned and three tapes were lost, so there are transcripts for interviews with 79 informants.

testimonies to record the 'experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been hidden from history.'² Historians and social scientists have long debated the merits, limitations and potential drawbacks of oral history. Gathering and utilising oral testimonies is a process fraught with difficulties, but one that promises unique rewards. I do not believe that oral history has to be defended, simply that the inherent difficulties and limitations need to be acknowledged and dealt with. Detractors list concerns such as the reliability of memory, the agendas and biases of informants, and the nature of the interview relationship. However, all of these issues arise with documentary sources. Many documentary sources, such as memoirs, are recorded long after the events being written about took place and are subject to the same questions of reliability as oral testimony. Moreover, eyewitnesses to an event often give conflicting information and impressions immediately after the fact. Their versions are recorded and valued as evidence. Of course, further distortion is apt to appear over time as informants contextualise and interpret their experiences in light of later events, but this does not discredit their testimony. Rather, it provides an opportunity to observe how informants have reconstructed their pasts. This can be an important aid to understanding more about these informants and how they understand their lives. As Alessandro Portelli states:

What is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. The changes reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give

² Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, (1998), p. ix.

form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context.³

History has always been manipulated to lend legitimacy to political institutions and ideologies, to demonise enemies, to justify actions and events, and to expiate guilt. This manipulation has occurred on a grand scale – for example the 'discovery' of the Americas by Columbus, and the myth of a depopulated South African interior by apartheid apologists to legitimate white occupation.⁴ At a lesser level, certain discourses surface repeatedly. For example, police reports of clashes with Marashea often note that the officers were attacked for no discernible reason by a screaming mob of 'crazed natives'.

Critics argue that the relationship between the informant and the interviewer influences oral testimony and may lead to distortion, elision and even fabrication. However, official reports are produced with an audience in mind, be it posterity or simply a superior's scrutiny. It is ludicrous to suggest that oral informants, who present a story in a favourable light or provide information they believe the interviewer is seeking, have a monopoly on the manipulation of historical accounts.

All history is produced by people and thus subject to human bias and inaccuracy, whether recorded in written form or transmitted orally. Oral history allows historians to

³ Allesandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different' in Perks and Thomson (eds.). *The Oral History Reader*, p. 69.

⁴ In 1975, Foreign Minister Pik Botha's defence of apartheid to the United Nations was partially based on the argument that Afrikaners moving into the interior in the 1830s settled in areas that were 'for the most part completely uninhabited.' John Williams (ed.), *From the South African Past: Narratives, Documents and Debates*, (1997), p. 332.

extend the discipline to explore the histories of people traditionally ignored or overlooked in the written sources. It is an especially important methodology when dealing with the history of a society like South Africa where one dominant racial group has had a monopoly on both power and the production of (written) history. The apartheid state in particular took a very interventionist approach and consciously manipulated history to justify its policies. The NP version of South African history infiltrated the entire society as the government controlled curriculum materials and censored the production and importation of conflicting accounts.⁵

It would be impossible to write much of the history of South Africa without making use of oral testimony and that fact alone validates the process. A classic example of the value of oral history is provided by van Onselen's biography of Kas Maine, a black sharecropper whose incredible life went unnoticed in public records with the exception of a fine levied for failure to produce a license for his dog. In his introduction, van Onselen states that 'This is a biography of a man who, if one went by the official record alone, never was.'⁶ Dunbar Moodie's collection of oral testimonies has contributed greatly to our understanding of the lives of black mineworkers and Belinda Bozzoli's detailed account of the lives of migrant women on the Rand is based on oral testimony. These books, and others like them, could not have been written without an extensive reliance on

⁵ See Melanie Walker, 'History and History Teaching in Apartheid South Africa' in Brown et al. (eds.), *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices*, (1991).

⁶ van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*, p. 3.

oral history and South African historiography is immeasurably richer as a result of these contributions.⁷

That is not to say that oral history is without limitations and pitfalls. Because oral history involves interaction and negotiation between people rather than simply interpreting documents, more variables come into play. The document is the same today as it will be tomorrow, so while different historians may well interpret the information differently and even the same historian may evaluate the material differently over time, the document itself does not change. By contrast, the terrain of the interview shifts constantly. An identical set of questions posed by the same interviewer working with the same informant may well produce significantly different results from one encounter to the next. When one throws in different interviewers, methods of asking questions etc., the differences may be even more exaggerated.

The interview is a volatile, precarious environment. Informants, for the most part, choose what they want to reveal. The information elicited is, to a large degree, shaped by the questions asked and thus much material is never uncovered. The interviewer asks the questions but the informant decides how to respond and the relationship influences the response, as does the venue of the interview, the presence of others, the explanation of why the information is wanted and to what uses it will be put, and any combination of an almost infinite number of other variables. The final product of the interview is in turn shaped by the transcription and possible translation of the

⁷ For a discussion of the development of oral history in South Africa see, Paul la Hausse, 'Oral History and South African Historians' in *History from South Africa*.

taped material. Furthermore, the historian decides what to include and the context in which the oral testimony is situated. All of these factors need to be acknowledged, explained, debated and challenged, but none of them undermines the validity of oral history as a methodology.

Fieldwork

Securing Interviews

After constructing a questionnaire, I faced the initial and daunting task of finding Marashea, both former and current, who would agree to be interviewed. I began in Lesotho and tapped into a network of friends and acquaintances. First I explained the project – I wanted to write a history of the Marashea and in order to do so I needed to interview as many members as possible. The most common reaction was incredulity. People were surprised that an outsider was aware of the existence of the Marashea, and even more shocked that anyone would aspire to write the history of such a group. Many people expressed reservations about the project from a safety standpoint. Booi and Tsepang encountered similar reactions. The Marashea, as an organisation, is almost as well known in Lesotho as the Mafia is in Italy. Virtually everyone has heard of the Marashea and many people are acquainted with former members who have retired in Lesotho. Despite this familiarity, it was not uncommon for people to deny knowledge of the existence of the Marashea. Some Basotho regard the Marashea in a romantic light – as warriors who have survived in South Africa by virtue of their bravery and cunning – but others regard them as a menace, and perhaps as an embarrassment, and are reluctant

to discuss the gangs. Thus, the initial research period, which depended on word of mouth to identify possible Marashea, was largely unproductive.

Logistical difficulties contributed to these failures and dogged the entire research experience. Because telephones are still a rarity in private homes in Lesotho, we had to travel to the villages of potential informants and hope for the best. In April 1998 in Qacha's Nek district, I took a long bus ride, rowed across a river and then hiked through the mountains for three hours only to discover that the man I was looking for was not at home. On another occasion, I drove from Maseru to a village past Thaba Tseka and back – a roundtrip of thirteen hours, part of it in a snowstorm – and once again had no luck as the man denied he was ever Lerashea. Long hours on the road and occasional hikes were a constant of research in Lesotho and patience was an essential component of this element of the fieldwork.

The first significant break came from a lead supplied by David Coplan, a social anthropologist from the University of the Witwatersrand. During his research several years before, David had interviewed a Russian commander named Molefi Thabane in the Mafeteng area. Tsepang and I set out to track down Thabane only to find out he was dead. We were, however, directed to his home village where some men told us they knew of a former associate of Thabane's. This man was away on business so we returned a few days later and introduced ourselves to PL. He was amenable to being interviewed and produced a photograph of himself and several other Marashea that had been taken in Soweto in the 1960s. This was the beginning of a long and productive relationship. PL had been a faction leader on the Rand for several years in the 1960s and had remained in

contact with active Marashea. Furthermore, he knew a number of retired Marashea in Lesotho. PL acted as a guide and intermediary on several occasions over the next fourteen months and was interviewed three times. Through PL, Tsepang and I made other contacts who in turn acted as intermediaries and the interviewing began to snowball.

The importance of our intermediaries cannot be overstated. PL took us to potential informants, assured them that he had been interviewed, reassured them that we had no sinister motives and that the project was only concerned with collecting stories about the Marashea for a book. Even with PL's participation, some men refused to be interviewed. One issue that was raised time and again was the activities of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC was conducting hearings into crimes and human rights abuses during the apartheid era and there was a great deal of suspicion about this process. Even in remote villages in Lesotho, people had heard of the TRC and worried that we were secretly gathering information for the hearings. People were sometimes suspicious that I was a police officer, which I found surprising in Lesotho where there are no white police (this became more of an issue when we began working in South Africa). Because I had opted to interview as many people as possible, there was no opportunity to build a relationship with informants. In most cases, PL, Tsepang and I would visit the informant, explain the project and, if agreed, do the interview on the spot. Thus, PL's role was extremely important.

Tsepang and I discussed at length the advantages and disadvantages of my presence in securing and conducting interviews. Without my participation, we would not

have done nearly as many interviews because Tsepang did not have a vehicle, so in a sense the decision was made for us. It is possible that the presence of a white stranger inhibited a more open discussion of sensitive topics. On the positive side, Tsepang thought that my presence often added credibility to the project. That a scholar from Canada had come all the way to Lesotho to learn about the Marashea made the whole enterprise seem more important. My ability to make rudimentary conversation in Sesotho and the fact that I had been Tsepang's teacher for two years helped allay suspicion. Lesotho is a small country and it was also helpful when informants and I shared mutual acquaintances. I soon learned to carry my passport with me and to produce it upon request to certify my status as a Canadian (as opposed to a South African).

All potential informants were told that their information would contribute to a book on the history of the Marashea. They were guaranteed anonymity and those who participated are identified by initials that have no relation to their actual names. All interviews were taped after permission was secured and contrary to my expectations the tape recorder did not seem to cause any anxiety. No one refused permission to be taped or expressed reservations about the presence of the recorder. Indeed, the taping process might have enhanced the perceived importance of the study.

With very few exceptions,⁸ participants were paid an honorarium for their time and I have no doubt that this influenced many people to give an interview. The payment

⁸ For example, it seemed inappropriate to offer BM, the leader of the Matsieng faction in the Free State, who owns several homes, cars and farm properties, the equivalent of \$5.

was seen both as a courtesy and an indication that their contributions were valued. For some of the poorer informants the usual fee of R20 (approximately \$5 Canadian) represented a significant amount. For example, the monthly rent of one woman we interviewed in a shack settlement in South Africa was R15, so she was delighted with the payment. Only one informant – a relatively wealthy man – refused to do an interview because the payment was insufficient. Initially, I was reluctant to offer payment fearing that impostors would come forward simply to get the money. This did not prove to be a problem of any magnitude. I cancelled three interviews in the beginning of the research when it became evident that the informants were not Marashea. As the research team acquired an extensive knowledge of the Marashea, including specific groups, leaders and events, it became very unlikely that an impostor would pass muster. Once we began working with intermediaries, who were paid for each interview, this problem never surfaced. There were four main intermediaries, PL and TS, who were former Marashea, and two mineworkers who had extensive contacts with Marashea. All of them introduced us to numerous informants and it was not in their best interests to try to pass off a charlatan, for this would have ended the relationship.

Once contacts were established and we began to do a significant number of interviews, we still faced problems getting access to active members and women. We conducted interviews with four current Marashea visiting Lesotho and these contacts led to trips to two Marashea settlements in South Africa where two interviews were conducted, including one with BM, the leader of the Matsieng faction in the Free State. Even though BM readily agreed to an interview and gave us permission to be in the

settlements, his members were reluctant to follow suit. Another visit to one of these settlements yielded two more interviews and visits to other settlements, outside of Welkom and near Carletonville, yielded two additional interviews. In Carletonville, an elderly man gave a lengthy interview after which several younger men gathered around to discuss the Marashea's history. Unfortunately, they all declined interviews. In the end, we interviewed ten active Marashea, but one tape malfunctioned so there are nine transcripts. Despite the widespread reluctance of active members to grant interviews, visits to Marashea settlements were quite instructive. Informal conversations over beers yielded information about protection arrangements, rental agreements between white farmers and the Marashea, the demographics of the camps, business ventures, living conditions, social practices and relations with mineworkers. These visits also provided a feel for the poverty and isolation of the settlements. Breeze-block buildings are the exception and most people live in corrugated iron shacks. In some camps there is no running water and none of the settlements I visited have electricity or waste disposal of any kind, other than pigs and dogs. Infants and toddlers are numerous, but school age children are noticeably absent. Drinking is pervasive and cards and dice are popular pastimes. The camps are typically located on white-owned farmland far from shopping and other amenities. Goods obtained from onsite 'spaza' shops are accordingly expensive. The camps exist as satellites of the mines and are dependent on the patronage of mineworkers for their survival.

The 79 individuals interviewed span six decades of experience as Marashea.⁹ One man, OB, joined in 1950 at the age of seventeen and did not retire until 1995 when he returned to Lesotho. Other informants were only members for a year or two. Of the 63 men interviewed, eleven had experience in the 1940s, 34 in the 1950s, 28 in the 1960s, 28 in the 1970s, 27 in the 1980s and eighteen in the 1990s. Of the sixteen women, only one had been active in the 1940s, two in the 1950s and 1960s, nine in the 1970s, eleven in the 1980s and seven in the 1990s. The ages of those informants who knew their birth dates ranged from 28 to 84. The vast majority were over the age of forty.

BM refused our request to interview women saying that women did not know history and they would say silly things. The same experience was repeated in the other Marashea settlements. As a result, only one active woman, a relation of an intermediary, was interviewed. Marashea women in general were difficult to identify, especially in Lesotho. Former Marashea women who have returned to Lesotho do not advertise their status as do some men and despite a concerted effort we only managed to interview sixteen women. One of the problems was that our intermediaries were men and, with the exception of TS, our primary guide in Soweto, were either unwilling or unable to find and convince female informants to participate.

The initial stage of interviewing concentrated on Lesotho. Booi worked independently, and without a car his mobility was limited. Booi and Mampolokeng conducted seventeen interviews, including four interviews with women. Except for two interviews that Booi did during visits we made to Free State settlements, he and

⁹ See the Appendix for interview dates and locations as well as some biographical data.

Mampolokeng worked exclusively in Lesotho. Teke Tseane did two interviews in Lesotho and Majoro Litabe did one. Tsepang did the remainder in Lesotho, on the Rand and in the Free State. All of the interviews were conducted in Sesotho with the exception of two that I did in English. In the end 47 interviews took place in Lesotho, 27 in Gauteng and five in the Free State (six if you include PL who was interviewed in Lesotho and Welkom).

Interviewing people who had experience with Marashea was often problematic. It would have been valuable to interview police officers, but I decided against this because of the extensive connections Marashea groups have with police. If it was discovered that I was asking the police about the Marashea it is possible that avenues would have been closed off. Consequently, I did not pursue any police contacts until near the end of my fieldwork when I interviewed Inspector de Kock who worked closely with a Marashea faction for many years in the Free State. I also discussed Marashea informally with a few police officers in Lesotho.

I interviewed several mineworkers during the initial stages of fieldwork in Lesotho but once we located Marashea we concentrated our efforts in that direction. A number of mining officials refused to meet with me to discuss the Marashea. One security officer at Buffelsfontein agreed to an interview, but later cancelled. I got the distinct impression he had been told to do so. Other officials refused on the grounds that Marashea violence on the mines was a thing of the past and they had no desire to revisit those days. However, the Industrial Relations staff at Harmony Mine, which had experienced extensive fighting between NUM supporters and Marashea in the early 1990s, were very helpful. They gave

interviews and arranged for me to meet with hostel managers and security staff. A NUM representative enthusiastically participated in an interview as did a former liaison division employee of The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA). Virtually all the lawyers and township officials mentioned in the archives and newspapers (predominantly in the 1950s) were dead. The one lawyer I interviewed was clearly embarrassed that he had represented members of the Marashea and offered little detail.

The Interview Process

Conducting the interviews posed a separate set of problems. It constituted a teething process for myself and Tsepang and Booi for none of us had any prior experience. The quality of the first set of interviews reflected this inexperience. Both Booi and Tsepang had to learn to listen and wait for answers, to prompt for details, to pursue information and to transcribe the complete conversation, not simply the general meaning of the answer. Both became accomplished interviewers during the duration of the study and some of the learning process had to come through on site experience. That said, hindsight makes it clear that all three of us would have benefited from a series of mock interviews and transcriptions.

Although the questionnaire constantly changed and evolved, the basic format remained the same.¹⁰ Informants were asked to provide biographical information, to

¹⁰ I now feel that the earlier questionnaires concentrated too much on issues of fighting, violence and crime and that this overemphasis detracted from exploring other areas such as family life, community relations and economic activities. I was influenced by both Bonner and Guy/Thabane who concentrated on the martial aspect of Borashea and the

answer general questions about the Marashea and to comment on their personal experiences as members. In all cases, informants were encouraged to give detailed examples to support their answers and were asked open-ended questions. Depending on the informant, the interview lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours, with an average interview taking a little over an hour. I was present for all of Tsepang's interviews. This enabled me to take an active role. The questionnaire could not possibly address all avenues of inquiry and when new information surfaced I could direct Tsepang to pursue areas of particular interest. The questionnaire acted as a guideline but interviews frequently assumed a life of their own and diverged from the set format. Some informants spoke at great length on subjects that captivated them and these topics comprised the bulk of the interview. Sometimes informants became tired, especially the elderly, so we were selective about the questions. With certain informants, I was interested in pursuing a particular theme which dominated the interview and precluded asking all the questions. For example, veterans who had been active in the 1950s were prompted to extensively discuss events that took place in Newclare.

Of course, some informants were evasive or refused to discuss certain topics. Questions concerning relationships with the police, criminal activities, conflicts with ANC supporters and Marashea links with political parties in Lesotho were the most likely to spark such responses. The political turmoil stemming from the May 1998 elections, which eventually led to military intervention and occupation by a South African led force in

newspaper and archival sources that reinforced these perceptions of the Marashea as little more than a fighting society.

September 1998, made discussions of political affairs extremely sensitive. Some male informants treated questions about the role of women in Marashea with disinterest and dismissal, claiming that women merely performed domestic chores just as they did at home in Lesotho. Another difficulty was presented by informants who were willing to discuss the Marashea in general but reluctant to relate personal stories. Such reluctance could only be overcome to a certain degree, but both Booi and Tsepang became skilled at urging informants to personalise their experiences.

Because of the decision to interview as wide a range of informants as possible, only four informants were interviewed more than once. Consequently, there was no opportunity to establish a relationship with informants or to re-interview to check the consistency of answers. Questions of accuracy were addressed by triangulating between a given account, other oral testimony and written sources. In most cases, informants had no idea we were coming, although some had been informed by intermediaries prior to the interview. Without prior knowledge of the interview, informants could not prepare information and were, I think, more likely to answer spontaneously. On the other hand, with no opportunity to reflect on their experiences as Marashea, they probably left out information they might otherwise have included.

The interview venue was often a concern, primarily because of noise. Ideally, interviews were done in private dwellings with no distractions, but this was often not possible. Many of the interviews in villages in Lesotho took place outside, weather permitting, and some of these sound like they were conducted at petting zoos. Various livestock provided background music that made some tapes difficult to transcribe. On

occasion interviews were done in the car. Because of the distances and travelling time involved, not to mention the informants' comfort level, we always interviewed in the informant's home environment.

Regrettably, I was not able to find a female research assistant, although Mampolokeng worked with Booï on a number of occasions and conducted some interviews. It was difficult to find research assistants at all and the women I approached had no interest in interviewing Marashea. This was especially problematic when female informants were asked to comment on sensitive personal matters, but it was a situation I was unable to rectify.

The single greatest obstacle I encountered was my inability to speak fluent Sesotho. I was present for 64 of the 79 interviews and my limited Sesotho allowed me to grasp the meaning of some of the dialogue, so I was able to interject to pursue lines of questioning. However, I missed some important clues and lost the opportunity to further exploit valuable information. Tsepang did not have the background knowledge I possessed from archival research and could not possibly anticipate all the areas in which I was interested. The research team communicated constantly about new developments; nevertheless, possible areas of inquiry went unexplored. I have no doubt that my linguistic shortcomings were an impediment to the research.

Interpreting Testimony

Interpretation of the interviews was also rendered more problematic by the translation process. The probability that the original meaning would be distorted or

misconstrued was increased during the translation from Sesotho to English. While Booi and Tsepang were able to translate meanings they sometimes lacked the English vocabulary to capture the subtle essences. Raphael Samuel notes that even when working in the same language, transcriptions from oral to written texts often lose some of their richness. He examines two examples transcribed from the testimony of Suffolk labourers. The first is written in standard English and the second remains faithful to the speaker's vernacular. 'In the one passage we are given mere information: in the other meanings ebb and flow.'¹¹ I consulted Tsepang and Booi whenever the meaning of a passage was ambiguous or unclear and am confident that errors in accuracy have been kept to a bare minimum. However, given the translation process and the translators' limitations in English, some of the 'ebb and flow' was lost.

Other problems of interpretation included chronologies, collective versus individual memories, constructed memories and informants' agendas. Getting accurate dates was very difficult as the vast majority of informants were illiterate and many did not know the date of their birth, the year they joined Marashea, or the dates of specific events they described. It was sometimes possible to determine dates by cross-referencing. If, for example, a man did not know the year he joined but his leader was Hlalele in Newclare, then it could be established that he joined in the early 1950s. When informants spoke about a huge battle with Zulu hostel dwellers at Dube Hostel, archival and other sources pinpoint the date to 1957. On some occasions informants would refer to the year by a specific event that could be established. For example, WL remembered that he joined

¹¹ Raphael Samuel, 'Perils of the Transcript', in *The Oral History Reader*, p. 391.

Matsieng just before Lesotho's first elections. HL joined during the year of the inauguration of King Moshoeshoe II and BK joined 'long ago when Queen Elizabeth visited South Africa.' I was able to approximate some dates by information provided during the interview, but it was often impossible to establish the exact year with any degree of certainty.

The issue of collective memory in oral testimony has been commented on by many practitioners. Discussing the testimony of Holocaust survivors Deborah Lipstadt observed:

Lots of survivors who arrived at Auschwitz will tell you they were examined by [Dr. Josef] Mengele. Then you ask them the date of their arrival and you say, "Well, Mengele wasn't in Auschwitz yet at that point." There were lots of doctors ... [somehow] they all became Mengele.¹²

In this instance it seems that larger societal perceptions influenced how people remembered and related their stories. Mengele became the embodiment of evil, representing the horror of the concentration camps in popular perceptions, so some survivors appropriated his presence to make sense of their own horror and to perhaps better express it to others, including the interviewer. This raises the issue of the construction of memory, or as Alistair Thomson suggests, the composure of memory.

In one sense we "compose" or construct memories using the public language and meanings of our culture. In another sense we "compose" memories which help us feel relatively comfortable with our lives, which gives us a feeling of composure. We remake or repress memories of experiences which are still painful and "unsafe" because their inherent

¹² D.D. Guttenplan, 'Holocaust on Trial', *Atlantic Monthly*, February 2000, p. 62.

traumas or tensions have not been resolved.... Our memories are risky and painful if they do not conform to the public norms or versions of the past.¹³

There was evidence of constructed memories amongst Marashea informants. One of the defining events for Marashea active on the Rand in the 1950s and 1960s was a series of battles between combined Marashea forces and Zulu hostel dwellers that took place in 1957. The fighting raged for days between hundreds, if not thousands, of combatants and the Dube Hostel Riots, as the conflict came to be known in official parlance, were the subject of a government inquiry and extensive media attention. Virtually all the men interviewed who were members during this era claim to have taken part in these battles and recite details that have obviously become imbedded in popular lore. It is extremely doubtful that all these informants actually participated in the fighting. For example some men date their arrival on the Rand after 1957. Given the confusion with dates this is not absolute proof they were not present, but the likelihood that they all were is quite remote. The ideal that the Marashea functioned as defenders of the Basotho resonates very strongly among these men and the Dube Hostel conflict is perhaps the foremost example of the Marashea rallying to the defence of fellow Basotho. It was also a great victory for the Marashea. Not surprisingly, informants wish to be associated with an event that reinforces their self-image as both champions of the Basotho and successful warriors. Bonner noted a similar development in discussions of a 1940s

¹³ Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia', in *The Oral History Reader*, pp. 300-301.

clash between Basotho and Zulu in Benoni. 'A host of other informants claim to have witnessed this latter episode. I am almost certain that for a number it was hearsay.'¹⁴

The collective memory phenomenon is also evident in the strikingly similar stories that surround the Dube Hostel conflict. Informants' recitations of the beginning of the conflict in which a Russian named Malefane was castrated by Zulu men in the hostel shebeen has the feel of a story that has been many times in the telling. The same sort of mythologising was evident in testimony surrounding the famous leader Tseule Tsilo.¹⁵ Again, it is unlikely that all the men who claimed to have witnessed Tsilo's feats and interacted with him could actually have done so. Rather than invalidating such testimony, these responses speak to the power of the myth of Tsilo. Once such developments are recognised, they can be utilised as a window to interpret the ideals and worldviews of the informants instead of simply dismissing suspect statements and stories as falsehoods. As Portelli argues, 'Oral sources tell us not just what people did but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.'¹⁶

Kathleen Blee's work gathering testimonies from former members of the Ku Klux Klan led her to consider how people from groups that have been publicly maligned consciously attempt to rehabilitate the group's (and their individual) reputation during the interview process.

¹⁴ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 188.

¹⁵ See Chapter 5 for more on Tsilo.

¹⁶ Portelli, 'What makes Oral History Different' in *The Oral History Reader*, p. 67.

Meanings are created in social and political contexts; memory is not a solitary act. Thus it is not simply that narratives constructed by former Klan members to explain their role in one of history's most vicious campaigns of intolerance and hatred are biased by their own political agendas and their desire to appear acceptable to an oral historian but also that informants' memories have been shaped by subsequent public censure of this and later Klans.¹⁷

Marashea informants are well aware of their public reputation as thugs and assassins, and some of the men went to great lengths to portray the Marashea, or at least their particular group, as a benign force that fought crime, dispensed justice and served as protectors to both fellow Basotho and neighbours in the townships and squatter camps. This was especially evident amongst active informants who distanced themselves from the Marashea of the past who they often characterised as violent criminals. These men were at pains to portray the current Marashea as a business and mutual aid association for migrant Basotho, denying that they, or their fellow members, engaged in collective violence, robberies, murder for hire, extortion or other anti-social activities. For example, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Russian leader BM denied that his group participated in the violent conflicts between Marashea and union supporters that took place in and around Harmony Gold Mine in 1990. When questioned, BM insisted that his followers had no stake in the conflict and that any Marashea who joined the fighting did so in their capacity as miners, not as Marashea.¹⁸ The testimony of active informants,

¹⁷ Kathleen Blee, 'Evidence, empathy and ethics: lessons from oral histories of the Klan' in *The Oral History Reader*, p. 335.

¹⁸ Mineworkers, mining officials and numerous retired Marashea reported that BM's group was involved in a battle to preserve its sphere of influence from encroachment by union supporters.

who were unlikely to incriminate themselves and who have a more direct interest in the well-being and reputation of the Marashea, has to be considered in this light. Sensitive information about the modern Marashea came from recently retired veterans who were active in the 1980s and 1990s. These men and women were more candid and discussed aspects of their experiences that active Marashea were reluctant to divulge.

Retired informants' reflections on their time as Marashea differed greatly. A few women emphasised the excitement of being associated with Marashea. Most do not view their experiences so favourably. Some men expressed regret for the crimes they committed while others were boastful and unrepentant. For some informants membership in the Marashea was a short term contingency, while others embraced it as a lifestyle. A number seemed to believe that Marashea was a natural outgrowth of Basotho migration to South Africa. The diversity of responses on many issues leads me to believe that the informants comprise a fairly representative cross section of the Marashea. The obvious exceptions are the under-representation of women and young, active male members.

A final issue of interpretation that needs to be addressed is the question – whose story is this? Is this a case of 'Africans speaking for themselves'? Or have I, as the author of the final product, intruded on these narratives to impose my own interpretations? Luise White notes that many oral historians, herself included, are guilty of such practices.

Some recent African history, some of it by me, has argued for the greater reliability of oral evidence for twentieth-century Africa.... But few historians, and I include myself again, actually relied exclusively on oral sources. Time and time again, we used documentary materials to flesh

out, contextualize, and even explain the words of our informants to provide a more reliable, representative, accurate history.¹⁹

This study relies extensively, but not exclusively, on oral testimony. Documentary sources provide crucial information that did not often emerge in oral accounts. For example, when discussing the series of conflicts that erupted at President Steyn Mine in 1991, the Goldstone Commission's inquiry was an invaluable resource providing a backdrop for the sparse oral evidence. The inquiry gave a full account of the events that led to the strike and subsequent fighting as well as relevant dates and a list of casualties. This information complemented oral accounts of the conflict. Rather than undermining or devaluing oral evidence this contribution enhanced the reconstructive process. White contends that

... by simply including the "African voice" – a term still used without irony – historians could claim their work represented an African vision of African experiences, even when, as often was the case, those voices were placed in a narrative derived from colonial documents and shaped by the author's mediation.²⁰

The task of the historian is not simply to offer up voices (African or otherwise) unless that is the stated objective of a given project. The objective of this study was to reconstruct a history of the Marashea. Thus, I have made use of all available evidence. This does not mean privileging written sources, or using them to explain oral testimony, only that the greater diversity of sources employed, the richer and more comprehensive the history is

¹⁹ Luise White, "They Could Make Their Victims Dull": Genders and Genres, Fantasies and Cures in Colonial Southern Uganda, *American Historical Review*, 100, 5, (1995), p. 1381.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1382.

likely to be. When utilising oral testimony alongside other source materials, the historian's responsibility is to present informants' voices in a context that, as accurately as can be determined, best reflects the speaker's intended meaning. But in the end, it is the author's job to decide which testimony to include and to interpret and analyse these testimonies. The oral evidence is presented alongside documentary evidence that fills in some of the gaps. In this sense, the author provides the context within which the story is told. Despite these intrusions, this is essentially a history of the Marashea as related by Marashea. The 79 people who told their stories and explained the workings of the Marashea made this thesis possible.

Conclusion

Gathering oral testimonies from gang members who were regularly involved in criminal activities presented particular difficulties; the foremost being identifying informants and persuading them to participate in an interview. Secondly, because of the nature of their activities and the climate of repression that characterised their lives in South Africa, some informants were evasive or refused to discuss certain topics. I labour under no illusion that I have uncovered the definitive history of the Marashea. Many aspects of people's lives as Marashea remain obscured for a host of reasons. The archival record is extremely limited in the scope and range of issues commented on. The collected testimony cannot possibly relate the entire story of the many thousands of people who have comprised the Marashea over the years. And lastly, there were limits as to what these informants were prepared to reveal. That said, I believe this thesis provides an

insight into the lives led by the women and men of the Marashea, the coping strategies they employed, the impact the association had in the townships, informal settlements and mining hostels and the autonomy that groups like the Marashea exercised within the structural constraints established by the apartheid state.

CHAPTER 3

THE ANATOMY OF THE MARASHEA

This chapter explores the internal structures of Marashea and sets the foundation for the rest of the thesis. An examination of the formation and composition of the society, along with leadership, organisational hierarchies, regulations and discipline, social practices, identity and family life provide an idea of the consistencies and changes that have affected Marashea over the past fifty years. It also supplies the necessary background to make sense of the following chapters that explore different facets of the Russian experience in South Africa. Finally, an understanding of the internal workings of the Marashea demonstrates the autonomy of the gangs during a period in which the government made a concerted effort to increase its control over the urban African population.

Composition and Formation

The Marashea is a society of loosely affiliated migrant/immigrant gangs, primarily composed of Basotho, which has existed in South Africa since the 1940s. Borashea had its genesis in the migrant Basotho gangs established in the mining compounds and locations on the Rand in the early decades of the century. Both Bonner's and Guy and Thabane's works on the Marashea trace Basotho gangs and protective organisations back to at least the 1930s. Guy and Thabane's Lerashea informant Rantoa explained that 'before he arrived on the mines in 1937, Basotho were already organised

in gangs for collective defence.¹ Archival evidence illustrates that Basotho banded together during periods of conflict on the mines as early as 1910.² Prior to the Second World War these migrant groups who fought with *melamu* (traditional fighting sticks) were commonly known as *liakhela*, a label that distinguished them from 'respectable,' law-abiding Basotho.³ It is clear that the name Marashea surfaced in the late 1940s, taken from the Russians who were understood to have been fierce and successful fighters in the recent World War. Initially, one faction referred to themselves as Marashea, while their rivals took the name Majapane after the Japanese.

It is like naming a football team. The new team might be named after one that is already famous. Marashea were those from Matsieng [southern Lesotho] and Majapane were from Leribe [northern Lesotho]. Those from Matsieng named themselves after Russia while Molapo named themselves after Japan. These two countries were known to be strong in war. That is why those two groups chose those names. But within no time the name of Majapane died away and even those of Molapo were called Marashea.⁴

The two main factions have since identified themselves as Matsieng (sometimes referred to as Makaota) and Molapo/Masupha (collectively known as Matsekha).

¹ Guy and Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea', p. 442; Bonner, 'The Russians on the Reef', p. 162.

² Free State Archives (hereafter FSA), Bloemfontein, CO 620 file 2385/1, Native Disturbances, InterTribal Mxosas and Basutos on Koffiefontein Mine, 1910.

³ Multiple interviews; Guy and Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea', p. 437.

⁴ Interview, MK, Lesotho, 8 August, 1998. Bonner suggests that 'As news of Hiroshima and Nagasaki began to filter through, the name *Japanese* was quietly dropped in favour of the common title of *Russians*.' Bonner, 'African Urbanisation on the Rand', p. 127. For more on the Russian-Japanese split see Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (hereafter CAD), NTS 6490 file 125/313 S vol. 2, Deputy Commissioner, SAP to the Office of the District Commandant, 26 September 1949.

Membership was open to all Basotho men (most men came from Lesotho, but Basotho from the Eastern Free State and QwaQwa were also readily accepted), however people from other ethnic groups were generally allowed to join as long as they spoke Sesotho. For example, Hlubi from the Matatiele area on Lesotho's southern border (who speak both Xhosa and Sesotho) made up a portion of many Marashea groups. The typical trajectory for men was to herd their families' animals, attend initiation school and then migrate to South Africa to work on the mines. Once in the Republic, these men joined the Marashea for a variety of reasons. Female members commonly left Lesotho, the homelands (particularly QwaQwa, Transkei and Ciskei) or Mozambique to escape desperate economic and social circumstances. The overwhelming majority of Marashea, both male and female, came from backgrounds of rural poverty and few had any significant schooling. Men employed in the formal sector laboured in the mines and secondary industry while women most often took positions as domestic servants, brewed beer and worked as prostitutes. As Bonner has noted, 'Unlike other urban gangs on the Rand, the Russians were overwhelmingly adult in composition. No age cohort dominated, certainly not the youth.'⁵ Men usually joined in their youth but senior positions were generally reserved for long-serving veterans and *marena* (chiefs or leaders, singular is *morena*) were required to be men of experience. Many Marashea were actively involved for decades and naturally came to rely on men who had proven themselves in

⁵ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 175. Arrest reports support this statement. For example, the ages of 16 Marashea men arrested for public violence following a fight at George Goch station outside Johannesburg, ranged from 21-59. *World*, 22 May, 1970.

difficult situations. Matsekha commander Maliehe Khoeli explained that when a killing was planned he depended on veterans who had undergone many difficulties and problems. Even if they were arrested these men would not divulge information to the police, whereas a youth would probably inform on his comrades if tortured.⁶ Occupational divisions among male Marashea will be discussed in detail later; it is enough to note here that groups were composed of employed members and those known as *malofa* (loafers) who relied on various, often illegal, means to support themselves. Like their fellow migrants, Marashea have struggled to survive. 'Performing the roughest, most menial and worse paid tasks in the mines and domestic and municipal services, the migrants were at the bottom, but to some extent outside, of the status system of urban African society.'⁷ None of the retired members interviewed in Lesotho could be considered well off and many live in poverty. Marashea still active in South Africa typically live in shack settlements, and although a select few men in the upper echelons of the organisation display such trappings of wealth as private vehicles and cell phones, this is the exception to the rule. Women tend to be more impoverished than their male counterparts.

Any study of the Marashea must begin by acknowledging Bonner's pioneering work on the origin and first decade of Russian existence on the Reef in the 1950s. His efforts provide a foundation upon which other scholars can build. Bonner argues that

⁶ James Majoro Litabe, 'Marashea: A Participant's Experiences as a Leader of Molapo-Masupha Faction Versus the Matsieng Faction, Zulu, Tsotsis and Police', B.A., B. Ed. Paper, Department of History, National University of Lesotho (1986), p.18.

what distinguished Basotho from other migrant groups on the Rand in the 1930s to 1950s was their tendency to permanently settle in the urban areas and that 'it was the scale and rapidity of this transition from migrant to immigrant status that was responsible for the Russians' development.'⁷ Basutoland was in deep distress in the 1930s. Population growth, land shortages and soil exhaustion were exacerbated by severe drought. At the same time bridewealth prices in Lesotho were higher than elsewhere in South Africa. As a result of these circumstances increasing numbers of men left Basutoland for longer periods of time. Desertion of wives became more frequent and thousands of impoverished women migrated to the Rand to scrape out a living, primarily in the informal sector, often as beer brewers and prostitutes. Many of these migrant men and women formed enduring liaisons that eroded family commitments at home and mitigated against their return to Lesotho. At the same time, burgeoning employment opportunities and the higher wages available in secondary industries meant that Basotho men were leaving their jobs on the mines and moving into the urban areas. As a result, Basotho migrants began dominating many of the squatter movements and established an increasing presence in the townships. This process, Bonner believes, resulted in battles over space, accommodation and women and eventually gave birth to the Russians, the bulk of whom lived and worked in the townships.

I disagree that Marashea were primarily employed in secondary industry and made their homes in the locations. The Russian gangs on the Rand in the 1950s, as I will

⁷ David Coplan, *In Township Tonight*, (1985), p. 62.

argue in detail later, were led by men who lived in the locations, but remained dependent on mineworkers for the bulk of their members. Additionally, a more urbanised Basotho populace did not necessarily signal a migrant to immigrant shift. The circumstances of most Basotho workers during this period were not so sharply defined. Marashea veterans interviewed for this study almost all maintained close ties with friends and family in Lesotho and moved frequently between South Africa and Lesotho. And, while some settled permanently on the Rand and lost contact with families in Lesotho, most regarded Lesotho as home and returned when their working lives were finished. Others migrated between Lesotho and South Africa on a more or less continual basis dependent on work opportunities, family circumstances and the need to escape criminal prosecution in South Africa. Borashea was a survival and coping mechanism for its members but it did not arise from a definite migrant to immigrant transition. As for the timing of the formation of the Marashea, an additional factor might well be of consequence. A number of early Marashea, including several of the men interviewed, were veterans of the Second World War. Some accounts credit these veterans with being the founding members of the society. BH, a prominent Matsekha leader in the 1950s East Rand, arrived in Johannesburg in 1946. He recalls that:

Marashea began at the time of men like *Nate* [term of address for an adult male] Mapiloko, *Nate* Likhella and *Nate* Matsarapane when they arrived from the World War. They divided themselves by the names of Russia and Japan. When they divided the Matsieng group was called Marashea

⁸ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 169.

and Majapane were men from Leribe. There were many men from the World War and they were the ones that began the groups of Marashea.⁹

If this is so it accounts for both the timing and the name of the Basotho organisation.

The Geography of the Marashea

The Marashea have settled in various areas and environments during their fifty years of existence. Since the gangs were formed, members have resided in the mining compounds. On the Rand in the 1950s, Marashea groups tended to congregate in the 'less regulated parts of urban locations,'¹⁰ like Newclare and the Asiatic section of Benoni as well as various squatter camps. As Soweto was divided into different ethnic enclaves, Marashea became concentrated in the 'Sotho' sections – Phiri, Naledi, Tladi, Molapo, and Moletsane. Phiri and Naledi, in particular, became Matsieng strongholds from the 1960s to the late 1980s. GK remembers that 'In Phiri where I was living the whole street was Marashea.'¹¹ On the East Rand, Benoni, Springs and Germiston were Matsekha areas, with Germiston remaining a hotspot into the 1980s. At least one faction of Marashea lived in a white area, sharing the servants' quarters inhabited by their *linyatsi* (lovers or concubines, singular is *nyatsi*). In the 1960s, PL, along with a number of men from his group, operated out of Booyens. 'We were living in the whites' houses. Our *linyatsi* were working in the whites' homes so we were living there. When the owner of the house asks the woman when I go to work, she tells him that I work at night, whereas

⁹ Interview, BH, Kwa Thema (East Rand), 9 February 1999.

¹⁰ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 172.

really I did not work at all.¹² This group of Matsieng drew the majority of its members from nearby Crown Mine and held its meetings either in a forest that separated the town from the mine or travelled to Phiri for larger gatherings.

With the opening of mines in the far West Rand, Marashea groups established themselves in squatter camps adjacent to the mines and in townships such as Khutsong. The same process occurred in the Free State where Marashea groups rented land from white farmers and set up independent squatter settlements.¹³ Although some of these camps were occasionally raided by the police, there was less police pressure than in urban areas and thus fewer pass problems for illegal migrants. Some Marashea groups simply lease the land, some pay per dwelling and others work out liquor kickback and protection agreements with the farmers. In 1998 and 1999 I visited three such camps in the Free State and one near Carletonville and there is no doubt that the Marashea constitute the ultimate authority in these settlements.

As foreign migrants, Marashea who lacked the proper documents were vulnerable to deportation. The adoption of harsher pass control measures, particularly the imposition of a single standard reference book, the 'dompass,' in 1952, caused considerable hardship for some Marashea groups on the Rand. Rantoa reported that

At the time of Jan Smuts we had no problems but when the dompass was introduced we had a difficult time. We had to fix the whole thing in Lesotho, as such we had our number reduced. Some of us were arrested

¹¹ Interview, GK, Lesotho, June 1998.

¹² Interview, PL, Lesotho, 24 May 1998.

¹³ Marashea groups also operated on the platinum mines around Rustenberg and in the Eastern Transvaal gold mining areas near Evander.

and others could not return to South Africa ... this was one of the reasons the group disintegrated.¹⁴

However, for Marashea determined to stay in South Africa, pass and border controls became simply one more obstacle to contend with and did not significantly weaken the organisation. 'Me' TF, who was active in the 1970s and 1980s, was deported several times but always returned. 'We were arrested at Christmas because the South African government wanted everyone to go back to their home, so they would deport us to the border posts. But we would not stay in Lesotho, we would just go back again by trespassing.'¹⁵ Active Marashea illegally residing in South Africa experience no real difficulties because of their status. A Free State squatter camp resident explains: 'Sometimes the police come here and deport us to Lesotho. At Christmas in 1997 they came and I was one of those who was deported. They dropped us at Ficksburg bridge and we crossed and then came back. A taxi took us here the same day.'¹⁶ CN takes advantage of lax border controls to avoid the inconvenience of deportation: 'I renew my temporary permit every month because I go home almost every month. If I do not go home, I give my passport to a taxi driver I know to renew it.'¹⁷

Lesotho is seen as neutral territory by Marashea, and while instances of conflict between rival groups have occurred there they are rare. 'We don't fight in Lesotho. It

¹⁴ Interview, Johannes Rantoa, 21 May 1987 (Bonner transcript).

¹⁵ Interview, 'Me' TF, Lesotho, 20 September 1998. Female informants are identified by the designation for adult women - 'Me'.

¹⁶ Interview, TC, Vaal Reefs, 30 January 1999.

¹⁷ Interview, CN, Vaal Reefs, 23 October 1998.

only happens here where Marashea belongs. If I went to Thabong now they would kill me, but if we meet in Lesotho, nothing will happen.’¹⁸ There are no mines in Lesotho and little if any money to be made, so the Marashea operates exclusively in South Africa. Groups return to Lesotho for funerals, feasts and meetings. The Malunga Hotel on the outskirts of Maseru is widely known as a popular place for Marashea to hold meetings.

Marashea are active in Lesotho only in the sense that they can be hired to intimidate people and resolve disputes. Interested parties travel to South Africa and contract men to do this type of work for them. ‘The Marashea are doing nothing [in Lesotho] but if I want to attack someone in Lesotho I can go to South Africa and hire Marashea who will come back and kill him. There is no Marashea in Lesotho but you can invite them if there is a problem.’¹⁹ A detective in the Royal Lesotho Mounted Police (RLMP) confirmed that Marashea were sometimes hired for the purposes of intimidation and assassination. According to him Marashea are most visible at their funerals, at which they invariably display and discharge illegal firearms. The police do not interfere in these activities as Marashea are present in large numbers and are well armed.²⁰

Although some prominent Marashea who retire to Lesotho maintain contact with their former groups, act as mediators and advisors, and still consider themselves Marashea, the bulk of retired members seem to share KI’s assessment of their status. ‘Those who live in Lesotho after leaving Marashea are no longer regarded as Marashea.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Interview, SM, Lesotho, 29 August 1998.

²⁰ Interview, Detective M, Maseru, 20 April 1998.

Like in my case, I don't regard myself as Lerashea ... my being Lerashea ended when I left South Africa.²¹

Joining Marashea

Like virtually every aspect of Borashea the process of joining the group was profoundly gendered. Men chose to join and, although there were no elaborate induction ceremonies, were usually informed of the responsibilities and expectations that accompanied group membership. SO's account of joining Matsieng in 1972 is typical of the process.

When I joined I was surrounded by all the members and the *morena* told me all the rules. He asked me whether I was ready to fight any rival and I said yes. Will you kill anyone who tries to kill you, he asked. When you are arrested you must not inform on others he told me. You must keep all our information secret from the police. They said this is what we need you to do. And they told me not to tell the other miners our secrets. Even in Lesotho you were not supposed to tell anything concerning Marashea.²²

There were no qualifications for membership other than the ability to speak Sesotho. Men simply presented themselves to the group, expressed their desire to join, agreed to abide by the rules and paid an initial fee. Different groups constantly sought new members as there was strength, both military and financial, in numbers. Most often, potential members were introduced to the group by established Marashea who were 'homeboys', workmates or relatives. BM joined in 1968 after he was invited by fellow mineworkers.

²¹ Interview, KI, Lesotho, 16 December 1998.

When I started working on the mine I found men in my compound room who stayed outside the mine compound on weekends.... There were five Marashea in my room and this influenced me to follow them on weekends. I asked them what was this Marashea. They explained to me and I became interested.²³

An examination of the circumstances and motivations that caused men and women to join reveals much about the lives of migrants and the perceived benefits that group membership offered.

The most common reasons cited by male informants for becoming Marashea were physical security and access to women. Urban locations could be dangerous environments, especially for migrants, and group membership provided a measure of safety. The Mpondo in particular are remembered for preying on Basotho: 'I joined Marashea to protect Basotho who were ill-treated by Mapondo. Some were even killed in the bush when they walked from one mine to another. The Mapondo gathered at the railway stations to rob and kill Basotho.'²⁴ WL echoes these sentiments, 'Mapondo used to beat us. Therefore I joined in order to be safe. I started enjoying life when I became a member.'²⁵ Additionally, Basotho from southern Lesotho were sometimes targeted for intimidation and assault by Matsekha groups, as were northerners by Matsieng. Consequently, men joined their homeboys for protection. Joining a fighting association for safety is not without irony. However, even though collective violence was a staple of

²² Interview, SO, Lesotho, 13 September 1998.

²³ Interview, BM, Virginia, 24 October 1998.

²⁴ Interview, MK.

²⁵ Interview, WL, Lesotho, 8 August 1998.

life in the Marashea, members judged that group security was preferable to the vulnerability of isolation.

One of the foremost benefits for men was the access to women that group membership afforded. Marashea veterans boast proudly of their sexual exploits and the vast numbers of women available to them. Non-members had to pay to enjoy the company of Marashea women while members were frequently given a woman and had free access to unattached women under the group's control. GK reports that his life improved significantly once he joined Marashea. 'What made me join was my love for women. I found that I was spending a lot of money to pay for women and this made me join in order to get them for free and without intimidation. I lived a happy life as Lerashea because I got what I always wanted.'²⁶ Mako Thabane, a Matsieng commander in the 1950s and 1960s, declared that, 'There were many women to be had as Lerashea. There is no other reason why I became Lerashea except it meant entertainment.'²⁷ Others became Marashea because of a particular woman. 'I joined Marashea because the woman I loved lived in a squatter camp next to the mine and I was not free to see that woman unless I paid a fee to Marashea. I joined because as a member it was easy for me to live with her.'²⁸ CN, who worked on a Free State mine in the 1970s,

²⁶ Interview, GK.

²⁷ Interview, Molefi Thabane, 15 June 1987 (transcript supplied by Phil Bonner).

²⁸ Interview, KB, Lesotho, June 1998.

rated access to women as the primary joining incentive, 'because in the mine compound life is difficult and very lonely.'²⁹

Of course, men joined the group for a combination of reasons. WL, as stated above, joined for personal security, but also 'because I was attracted to their life. They lived a bold life in Gauteng. When I saw Basotho putting on their blankets I became attracted and decided to join them in order to be like them.'³⁰ Pride caused TC to become Lerashea.

I was working at Buffel [Buffelsfontein] mine and Marashea from Gauteng were coming here for stokvels. They would sometimes provoke me saying that I was not a man, so I joined to show them that I was also a man like themselves. I had been to initiation school and I had learned *molamu* and I did not want to be mocked by other men.³¹

A long serving Matsieng veteran viewed membership as an effective strategy to thwart personal enemies.

When I worked [at St. Helena] as a miner there was a troublesome supervisor who undermined me. He even demanded bribes from people and there was a Shangaan cook at the kitchen who gave me bones instead of meat and I decided to join Marashea because of those two people so that I could get revenge against them.³²

LT joined because membership at least offered the prospect of survival. 'I was forced to join because I lost my job. I had no money to return home and there was nobody to

²⁹ Interview, CN.

³⁰ Interview, WL.

³¹ Interview, TC.

³² Interview, PK, Lesotho, 12 September 1998.

assist me to get home.³³ The Marashea became more commercially oriented as the numbers of *malofa* increased over the years. Thus, many members joined for primarily economic reasons. KI, on the contrary, viewed membership as the fulfilment of a longstanding dream.

When I came out of initiation school I was interested in the people called Marashea in South Africa. I wanted to go to the mines so that I could join them. When I arrived there I visited Thabong [township adjacent to Welkom] where I met Marashea. Since I was already interested I decided to join immediately.... I told myself when I was growing up that I would undergo initiation and thereafter go to the mines and join Marashea.³⁴

Mineworkers sometimes commented on the social life available as a result of membership. ‘The good things about being Lerashea were to have security and a place where one can enjoy himself because on the mines life is too lonely for those who stay in the compound.’³⁵

An important aspect of Borashea for a number of veterans seems to have been the pride they took in their reputations as fighters.

There were no benefits in Marashea. If you are a soldier you do not expect any return. When you are Lerashea you are not paid but you are proud to say, I defeated someone in the fight, or to say I won the fight, someone is afraid of me – you become proud of that. What I can be proud of is that people of Ha-Molapo were afraid of me. When they saw me coming they would say, “Here comes Terata-Nyana [nickname]” – that is the only benefit I got.³⁶

³³ Interview, LT, Lesotho, July 1998.

³⁴ Interview, KI.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Interview, HG, Soweto, 18 June 1998.

Many male veterans revel in the groups' ferocious reputation, specifically as defenders of Basotho. They also boast about their control over women, their sexual exploits as gang members, and gleefully recount old battlefield and courtroom victories. Some female informants have fond memories of their days as Marashea. 'We went to dances at Benoni, Springs and other places. We rode the trains and I enjoyed it very much. I was a singer and I even recorded a cassette – it was nice to be there.'³⁷ However, for the most part, women's recollections tend to be more negative.

Some women did not choose to become Marashea, rather they were kidnapped and coerced into becoming members.³⁸ Perhaps the majority of women joined voluntarily, but for reasons that often differed from those of male Marashea. Those women who chose to join usually linked up with a man who was Lerashea and automatically became part of the group. 'My cousin was Lerashea and he stayed with us in the house and I became a friend of Marashea. My cousin was from the Matsieng group. They were dancing in the third house from this one and I met Tsotsi – he proposed and I agreed.'³⁹ Others joined out of desperation: 'You are just there [with the Marashea] because you do not have anywhere to stay and you are not even allowed to stay in South Africa. So you just stay there and sell *joala* [home brewed beer].'⁴⁰ Some women accepted proposals without knowing the man was Lerashea. Once they

³⁷ Interview, 'Me' SP, Soweto, 21 December 1998.

³⁸ The accounts of kidnapped women will be dealt with in the following chapter.

³⁹ Interview, 'Me' RW, Soweto, 18 December 1998.

⁴⁰ Interview, 'Me' TF.

discovered his identity it was too late to leave the group.⁴¹ Marashea men frequented the railway stations and taxi ranks to scout for women who had just arrived in the locations. These women often had no place to stay and were susceptible to offers of accommodation.⁴²

Women who joined without being attached to a particular man most often cited the need for protection from criminals and the law as their primary motivation. Independent women were vulnerable to criminal predation, police harassment and deportation. Association with the Marashea afforded a degree of protection and security. For example, the men of Marashea ensured that customers honoured their debts and women were not robbed, a significant benefit in the crime plagued townships and informal settlements. Newspaper reports from the Rand confirm oral evidence that criminals and even African municipal police who interfered with Marashea women were subject to retribution. In Dobsonville (Soweto) a gang of seven tsotsis who allegedly molested a female Lerashea were chased into a house by avenging Marashea. 'When the gang of seven ignored a challenge to fight it out, the raiders removed the iron roofing, poured petrol inside and set the house alight. Overcome by smoke, the gang ran out to be thrashed by the Russians. All of them landed in hospital.'⁴³ On the East Rand in 1967 four African police also ended up in hospital following a fight with the Russians resulting

⁴¹ Interview, 'Me' FD, Vaal Reefs, 30 January 1999. This happened to 'Me' FD personally. Other women reported that her experience was not exceptional.

⁴² Interview, DG, Lesotho, 26 November 1998.

⁴³ *Post*, 20 August 1967.

from their arrest of female Marashea.⁴⁴ The hazards of life as an illegal migrant convinced 'Me' ID to join the Marashea in Carletonville in the 1980s. 'In South Africa we were staying illegally because we did not have work permits or residence permits so I felt afraid. That is why I joined Marashea because Marashea were not deported at all.'⁴⁵ Additionally, the group usually paid the fines of women arrested for brewing and other minor offences.

Although some women were impressed with the reputation of Marashea, admired their fine clothing and enjoyed the dances and concerts, it seems that most joined simply because their male partner was Lerashea or as a measure of last resort. 'Me' ID summarises the plight of the latter group:

Women still leave Lesotho but it is unusual for a woman to leave knowing or intending to join Marashea. I think for most it is like it was for me. They intend to find jobs but it is very difficult and then the easiest thing to do is to join Marashea.⁴⁵

The Marashea as an Organisation

The Marashea has consisted of dozens of separate groups in its fifty or so years of existence. These groups have operated largely independently of each other and have been differentiated by composition, leadership, relations with white authorities, size and power, the environments in which they carved out a niche and changes over time. A 1950s group in the urban township of Newclare would necessarily be quite different from

⁴⁴ *World*, 25 May 1967.

⁴⁵ Interview, 'Me' ID, Lesotho, 29 December 1998.

a 1990s gang presiding over a squatter camp in the rural Free State. The Marashea has never been a monolithic entity, however: it remains a society linked by national origin, a distinct culture and a common history. Borashea continues to be recognised as a Basotho phenomenon. Sesotho culture plays a key role in the identity of the Marashea – language, dress and some social customs emanate from Lesotho, as does the divide that separates the two main factions. Marashea groups dispersed throughout the Free State and Gauteng come together for general meetings, celebrations and funerals and assist each other in times of conflict, both with rival factions and outsiders. And, while each group has its own particular character, oral testimony indicates that there is a common organisational culture governing hierarchies, rules and discipline. This section explores the internal structure of Marashea and examines some of the changes the organisation has undergone.

The different groups of Marashea have varied widely in size. A cohort of at least twenty to thirty men was required for a group to be formed, but groups have been much larger and Marashea battles on the Rand sometimes involved several hundred combatants. The key determinants seem to have been the number of Basotho in a given area and proximity to the mines that sustained the groups. An influential *morena* could attract followers from a large area and establish control over several smaller groups. Hlalele was one such leader. He commanded the allegiance of most, if not all, Matsieng groups on the Rand in the early 1950s before he was jailed and deported to Lesotho.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Other famous *morena* from both Matsieng and Molapo have established powerful networks in the years since. BM estimates that he rules approximately two hundred male Marashea and more than a thousand women. According to KB, the size and strength of each group was largely dependent on the quality of the *morena*. Without proper leadership, groups disintegrated.

The strength of Marashea differs from place to place depending on how they organise themselves, especially the *morena's* ability to organise them. Another factor is their number that is also determined by the number of Basotho in the area. If the *morena* is a good one many Marashea will join but if he is not favoured many will run away or resign.⁴⁷

With a single exception, all informants reported that leaders were elected by the male Marashea. BM is the exception to the electoral rule. He claims he was appointed by his predecessor, who was preparing to retire.

I was called to Klerksdorp by .Nate Mokhemele who was *morena* of the Klerksdorp region that covers the Free State and Orkney and Klerksdorp. He said he looked all over the area but he could not find a leader among his people who could take his position as he was old and intended to retire. He found me to be the only one who could take his position. He called all the *morena* under him and asked them to elect someone to take his position but he rejected all their candidates and chose me as the general *morena*. He called me to Klerksdorp to take his position. He called me together with sixteen men, I was the seventeenth, to take his position as the *morena* of the whole Free State and Klerksdorp. These men became my council and advisors.⁴⁸

In most cases it seems as if the *morena* was elected by all the men in the group. In larger groups, senior members sometimes arrived at a decision amongst themselves, but their

⁴⁷ Interview, KB.

decision needed to be confirmed by popular consensus. When Lenkoane was assassinated in 1963, PL reports that he was chosen as *morena* of the powerful Matsieng group by the senior strata. ‘We had lost our brave leader. We had big men like Mako Thabane, Menchele, and ‘Nape and an old man whose name I forget. We sat down to discuss who was going to be *morena* and they appointed me and all Marashea approved this appointment.’⁴⁹ Women were not elected or appointed to leadership positions but the *nyatsi* or wife of the *morena* was often acknowledged as a senior figure among female members. ‘We only respect the wife of *morena*. She is our leader – but we only respect her if she respects us.’⁵⁰ The *morena* usually appointed a committee of advisors, including a secretary, a treasurer and a second-in-command. Each group also had whistle blowers who functioned as sentries and directed fights through different whistle signals. *Marena* were selected from these senior positions. KI explains:

Morena appoints wise men whom he trusts to work with him as his advisors. When *morena* dies we call them and put them in front and say, “Which one can we put on the seat of *morena*?” If the majority agrees on one man, we install him as our *morena*. We make a big feast, we eat and drink *joala* and dance all sorts of dances.⁵¹

Leaders were elected wholly on the basis of merit; royal connections and noble bloodlines in Lesotho carried no weight in the Marashea. *Marena* were required to be

⁴⁸ Interview, BM.

⁴⁹ Interview, PL.

⁵⁰ Interview, ‘Me’ MG, Soweto, 21 December 1998.

⁵¹ Interview, KI.

brave men and accomplished strategists. HL discusses the qualities that groups looked for and the manner in which *morena* were expected to rule:

You cannot be *morena* if you are careless, you must have the qualities to rule people and you must speak in a way that you can convince people. You must be a good leader because you are not going to fight alone, you are fighting along with the people under your control. We sit at a meeting for every issue. You discuss with the members about how you can trap your rivals. You must investigate how many people they have so that you do not bring your people into trouble.⁵²

The safety of the group depended on the *morena* and his leadership was under scrutiny, especially in the beginning of his term. '*Morena* is elected by the members who consider his qualities and experience. But if he is shit, we remove him and put another as *morena*. We might even kill him.'⁵³ PM concurs. 'We wanted a person who is brave, who can look after people. If he is careless we could kill him. That is why we want a good person, we tell him that he must be very careful.'⁵⁴ Successful *morena* wielded a considerable amount of power but they had to be sensitive to popular opinion. For example, BM was not pleased when he discovered his eldest son had joined one of the groups under his control. 'I advised my son to leave Marashea but I failed because my members asked me where that rule comes from. I did not stand a chance. They said that if a man has joined, he has joined. He cannot all of a sudden leave because he already knows the secrets.'⁵⁵

⁵² Interview, HL, Soweto, 18 December, 1998.

⁵³ Interview, KI.

⁵⁴ Interview, PM, Soweto, 11 December 1998.

⁵⁵ Interview, BM.

Marena performed a variety of functions with the assistance of the committee. They dispensed group funds to pay the bail and legal fees of members who had been arrested and negotiated all sorts of arrangements with the police. Group discipline was the responsibility of the *morena* who decided on punishments and arbitrated disputes. *Marena* decided when, who and how to fight and, in larger groups spread throughout several areas, controlled the actions of their sub-chiefs. For example in October 1999, BM summoned his lieutenants from settlements throughout the Free State to a meeting in Virginia to discuss rumours that some of them were participating in taxi conflicts without his permission.⁵⁶ SAPS Inspector de Kock reports a similar hierarchy among the group he worked with in the 1970s and 1980s, initially headed by Mokhemele. 'It worked like this – MoKimbelele [Mokhemele] was in charge first and he had a lot of lieutenants under him. At that time it was Buffels, Harties, Stil, Jouberton, Canana [mining areas]. He was in charge of them – anything they do they must first discuss it with him.'⁵⁷

Once *marena* were solidly entrenched coups were almost unheard of. One of BM's assistants, when discussing the matters of electing and removing *marena*, stated that '[BM] is *morena* for life. He is more than *morena* now. He is the father of us and he is above these conditions.'⁵⁸ Long serving *marena* usually died on the job, although a few retired, ended up in jail or were deported. BM plans to retire shortly, partly because he feels he is losing control.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Interview, Inspector Dan de Kock, Potchefstroom, 7 June 1999.

⁵⁸ Interview, CN.

I am retiring next year if I am still alive because I am aware that I will end up killed by these youngsters because they do not like to be corrected. I should point out that Kloof, Khutsong and Bekkersdaal were under my governance but because they were not prepared to accept my control, we parted.⁵⁹

Many of the most famous *marena* died violent deaths. Matsarapane was hanged for his part in the killing of a white police officer; Lenkoane was assassinated by a fellow Matsieng; Bifa was killed by Mamalinyane who was in turn slain by Bifa's compatriots; Tseule was stabbed to death under mysterious circumstances; Maseko was killed by the police and Tsotsi Raliemere was killed by a rival faction. The importance of leadership is illustrated by the demise of Tsotsi. Prior to his death, the Matsieng faction based in Phiri was one of the most powerful groups of Marashea. After he was killed in 1985, it dwindled to an inconsequential level. KM left the group following Tsotsi's death. 'I decided to leave because there was no one who could rule Marashea the way he did. He was a good man, everyone in Phiri can tell you about him. After his death everything was stopped and Phiri's Marashea became inactive.'⁶⁰

Rules and Discipline

Although there have been minor variations between groups there seem to be some general rules that have applied to the Marashea as a whole. Regulations were designed to maintain group integrity, specifically to minimise conflict within each group, to maximise

⁵⁹ Interview, BM.

⁶⁰ Interview, KM, Soweto, 27 January 1999.

the financial and human resources of the group and to prevent betrayal. Members were expected to follow instructions issued from the *morena* and the committee. 'You have to take orders from the top.... When you are ordered to go somewhere, maybe to collect money, you have to obey.'⁶¹ Members were required to settle quarrels through arbitration and to accept the judgement of the *lekhotta* (council). To take matters into one's own hands invited severe punishment.

If maybe you beat someone [another member] who has taken your *nyatsi* instead of taking him to the *lekhotta* then you would be convicted and the fine was maybe R600 for such offences. And you had to pay that fine immediately. If you failed to pay immediately you would be beaten. They beat you severely and then they would take you to the hospital. They would break your bones and after the hospital you would come back to the group. You were required to respect the members in the group.⁶²

The *linyatsi* of group members were introduced to the group and it was an offence to covet another man's *nyatsi*. 'You should not propose to the woman of another member in the group. When you have *nyatsi* you have to report it to the group so that she would be known and an investigation would be made to ensure that she is not involved with another man within the group.'⁶³

For serious matters such as infidelity or attempting to escape, women were judged and punished by men. Some groups allowed women to deal with minor offences such as personal quarrels. 'We have a women's council composed of elderly women that looks

⁶¹ Interview, MM, Lesotho, 20 June 1998.

⁶² Interview, SO.

⁶³ Interview, DG.

into the matter of rule-breaking. They can fine her some money or corporal punishment may apply depending on the nature of the case.⁶⁴

All male group members were required to pay a regular contribution to the group treasury. In some groups this levy was collected monthly and in others it was paid on a weekly basis. These funds were used for the benefit of the group – to pay bail and legal fees, to hire traditional doctors and pay for *moriana* (traditional medicine), to bribe police, to pay for transport and to bury the group's dead. When larger sums were needed – for example to cover legal expenses when several members faced serious charges – both men and women Marashea were required to pay extra.

Once a man committed to the Marashea he was not free to leave the group. 'It is not easy to leave because you are like a soldier, so you cannot leave while the fight is on.'⁶⁵ The old, badly injured and sick were typically given a choice between returning home to Lesotho or staying with the group as advisors. For the young and active it was a more sensitive matter. 'If you are healthy and young we cannot let you go – you are like an ox in a yoke ploughing – we cannot let you go especially when you are young.'⁶⁶ This condition applied equally to men and women. As one female informant observed, 'No one in Marashea is allowed to leave the group except for those who are old and useless.'⁶⁷ There was strength in numbers and groups strove to maximise their membership. Another concern was that absconders would reveal secrets to rivals and place the group in

⁶⁴ Interview, BM.

⁶⁵ Interview, DS, Lesotho, 25 November 1998.

⁶⁶ Interview, HL.

jeopardy. 'You are not allowed to leave because you have seen our secrets, you have even seen our doctors and how they give *moriana* to us.'⁶⁸ 'If you leave without our permission, then we consider you a traitor because you can inform on us to our rivals and the police who can kill and arrest us.'⁶⁹ Healthy members could secure their release in select circumstances. Employed men who lost their jobs were often permitted to leave provided they returned to Lesotho – thus posing no danger. KI was forced to retire from the mines after contracting tuberculosis in 1985 and obtained permission to leave the group. He explains:

It is not easy to leave Marashea. But for those who work on the mines, if the job is finished as in my case, one has to go home.... If one leaves the group because he was working and then lost his job that is a valid reason and they let him go. But if he just decides to step aside still living in South Africa, it might be like a decision to die.⁷⁰

It appears that some groups allowed members to purchase their release as reported by MM. 'When you want to leave you must pay money for going out and if you do not have money we do not permit you to leave.'⁷¹

Those who betrayed the group were sentenced to death and great effort was expended in tracking them down. 'The most serious offence that a member can commit is treason and he is killed instantly like a dog when he is discovered.'⁷² Treason could

⁶⁷ Interview, 'Me' ID.

⁶⁸ Interview, BH.

⁶⁹ Interview, HL.

⁷⁰ Interview, KI.

⁷¹ Interview, MM.

⁷² Interview, KI.

encompass informing on colleagues to the police, defecting to a rival group or even leaving the group without permission. After being shot and wounded by the police during a skirmish, ML testifies that he was tired of life as Lerashea. 'After that I wanted to leave the group but it was difficult to leave because after committing yourself there is no way to go back as they will call you a traitor and chase you until they kill you.'⁷³

The most common method of discipline was corporal punishment. 'In most cases the punishment will be *melamu*. We are Marashea here, not a church society – he must pay with his flesh.'⁷⁴ Beatings were usually administered in front of the group and there was a definite element of humiliation. 'You are beaten like a child – but with *melamu*. You are stripped naked and beaten.'⁷⁵ Furthermore, offenders were expected to admit their culpability. 'The one who broke the rules is surrounded by others and beaten with *melamu*. If he is ready to stop breaking the rules it ends with a severe beating but if he is stubborn, he might be killed.'⁷⁶ For lesser offences, transgressors were sometimes fined. If members were unable to pay the fine, their valuables were impounded and released upon payment. On occasion members would be suspended from the group until they paid their dues.

Marashea arrested on group business were entitled to legal counsel paid for from the treasury. However, those who participated in criminal acts that were not sanctioned by the group were not afforded this protection. 'When you were arrested we would pay

⁷³ Interview, MM.

⁷⁴ Interview, CN.

⁷⁵ Interview, GL, Soweto, 24 January 1999.

for your bail or fine if you were arrested for a group fight. If you were arrested for robbery we would not pay any fine for you because that was not for the group's purpose it was for your own needs.⁷⁷ Some *morena* forbade their members to take part in certain criminal activities and not only withheld financial assistance but punished transgressors. BM declares that there should be

No rape, robbery or assassinations. If a member is found guilty of any of these he is severely beaten. If he is arrested by the police we do not bother ourselves about him. We let him go to jail.... I should point out that one of the *morena* under me in Klerksdorp is now on trial because of a taxi conflict. He broke my rule by accepting payment to engage in that conflict and we will not pay for his lawyer because he broke that rule.⁷⁸

National and Martial Identity

Marashea has served two main purposes from its beginnings.⁷⁹ It operated as a defensive association for Basotho in the dangerous urban environs of the Reef. Violent crime was pervasive in many neighbourhoods, policing was completely inadequate, and migrants were easy targets for more urbanised criminals schooled in the ways of the city. Additionally, ethnic conflicts on the mine compounds carried over outside mine premises and miners travelling to and from the locations were often victimised by ethnically organised gangs. Safety came in numbers and the Marashea soon became famous for violently assaulting their enemies.

⁷⁶ Interview, WL.

⁷⁷ Interview, PL.

⁷⁸ Interview, BM.

⁷⁹ Only in more recent years has the Marashea provided a living for a significant portion of its membership.

Secondly, Marashea offered a haven of familiarity, a vehicle for survival, but also of cultural identification in the ‘ethnic and social chaos of the black townships.’⁸⁰ Almost without exception male Marashea grew up in rural areas, herded their families’ livestock as boys and then went to initiation school before proceeding to the mines and factories of South Africa. Initiation reinforced a sense of nationalism and migrants travelled to South Africa instilled with a distinct identity as Basotho. Guy and Thabane reached this same conclusion based on their interviews with Basotho miners:

In the case of the Basotho workers whose evidence we have collected, the dominating feature of the testimonies was the existence of a sense of Basotho ethnicity. This ethnic culture was used to organize and to protect the workers in a largely rightless and dangerous environment.⁸¹

The compounds and locations on the Rand were alien environments for these men. A Molapo veteran active in the 1940s and 1950s explains the sense of belonging and national solidarity that characterised Borashea:

Borashea was like *mohobelo* [dance of male fellowship] – we danced *mohobelo* together, the men from different mines. I did not want a Mosotho to fight with another Mosotho – it was a fight but a kind of game that brought us together as one nation. People criticised us asking what kind of men we are and we told them that we are Marashea because we can fight. We kept our reputation as Basotho and also defended our places. When we said Molapo and Matsieng, we meant Basotho – we respected our country. We just wanted to see who knew *melamu* [in this reference the practice of fighting with sticks] better than others. We were fighting with our brothers.⁸²

⁸⁰ Coplan, *Cannibals*, p. 143.

⁸¹ Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane, 'Basotho Miners, Oral History and Workers' Strategies' in Kaarsholm, (ed.), *Cultural Struggle and Development in Southern Africa*, (1991), p. 239.

⁸² Interview, PM.

Basotho men came together in the Marashea to make sense of their new surroundings, to encapsulate themselves ‘in an ethnically based, culturally grounded subculture of their own, competing strategically and violently with each other but wrapping their blankets and shaking their fighting sticks at settled urbanites, other ethnic groups, and landed Basutoland Basotho alike.’⁸³

From its inception, Marashea has been a male-dominated organisation, founded and run by men. Many veterans refer to Borashea as a *koma*, a secret male society and view it as an extension of the practice of skirmishing between boys from neighbouring villages in Lesotho.⁸⁴ ‘We learned to fight when we were young boys and this grew in our hearts.’⁸⁵ There was an overt martial character to Borashea and male members frequently refer to themselves as fighters or soldiers. Perhaps the best illustration of the militaristic identity of Marashea is provided by a glimpse of their funeral ceremonies. ‘The funerals of Marashea are no different from the soldiers. We take the corpse to the grave where we don’t sing hymns but songs of war.’⁸⁶ Staged fights between group members were common at funerals because ‘blood had to be shed before the man could be buried ... the intention was not to kill anybody but at least a wound must be seen as an honour to that man who was a soldier.’⁸⁷ During a 1965 funeral at Doornkop Cemetery in Johannesburg, 300 Marashea allowed a minister to perform a Christian

⁸³ Coplan, *Cannibals*, p. 191.

⁸⁴ Multiple interviews. Coplan’s informants also referred to Borashea as a *koma*. Coplan, *Cannibals*, p. 190.

⁸⁵ Interview, PL.

⁸⁶ Interview, KB.

service but then conducted their own ritual, smashing the coffin and insulting the dead man. One of the mourners explained that 'There is absolutely no ill-feeling against the dead man. This is just our way of bidding a comrade goodbye.... When you attend a soldier's funeral you see that he is honoured by being given a full military funeral, so it goes with us.'⁸⁸ ML adds that 'When we bury Lerashea, as the coffin descends into the grave we shoot it saying "you were a man" and we put the weapons in the grave so he may fight beyond the grave.'⁸⁹

Robert Morrell's discussion of hegemonic masculine identities is useful to an understanding of Marashea masculinity.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a way of explaining that though a number of masculinities coexist, a particular version of masculinity holds sway, bestowing power and privilege on men who espouse it and claim it as their own.⁹⁰

The Marashea's dominant or 'hegemonic' masculine identity celebrates fighting prowess and the domination of women. Group survival demands this. The Marashea began as a fighting association and has always utilised violence to protect and advance its interests. Demonstrations of bravery and fighting ability earn the respect and admiration of one's colleagues and one cannot hope to assume a leadership position without demonstrating such qualities. The economic foundation of the Marashea is based on the control of women and violence has always been a key element in acquiring and maintaining this

⁸⁷ Interview, BM.

⁸⁸ *World*, 22 June 1964.

⁸⁹ Interview, ML, Lesotho, 19 May 1998.

control. There are secondary masculine ideals within the Marashea – many miners, for example, take pride in the arduous and demanding nature of work underground. Aspects of what Morrell terms 'African masculinity,' stemming from the rural experience and based on the authority of elders and respect for custom, resonate strongly within the Marashea.⁹¹ However, given the nature and activities of the association, the construction of a warrior identity was inevitable.

Internecine Conflict

Remarking on the propensity for Marashea groups to engage in set piece battles on the Rand in the 1950s, Bonner characterised the Russians as 'a fighting machine.'⁹² Russian gangs fought with other ethnically organised migrant groups, urbanised criminal youth known as tsotsis, and the police, but above all, the rival factions battled each other. The rivalries that distinguished the different Marashea groups reflected regional animosities rooted in Lesotho's history of succession disputes.

The factions of Matsieng and Ha-Molapo/Masupha reproduced and reignited the historical antagonism between the royalists of south Lesotho, follower of Moshoeshe's [founding King of Lesotho] heir, Letsie I, with his capital at Matsieng, and the restive collateral nobility of north Lesotho led by Moshoeshe's second and third sons, Molapo and Masupha, whom he installed at Peka and Thaba Bosiu, and who consistently defied or rebelled against the paramountcy.⁹³

⁹⁰ Morrell, 'Of Boys and Men', p. 608.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 619-622.

⁹² Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 175.

⁹³ Coplan, *Cannibals*, p. 187.

The earliest documented flare-up of this rivalry in South Africa took place in Vereeniging, south of Johannesburg, in the early 1940s and continued through to 1947, despite the best efforts of chiefs sent from Basutoland in 1946 to bring an end to the fighting. These early conflicts between Matsieng and Molapo/Masupha involved Basotho from Vereeniging, Evaton and the East Rand.⁹⁴

The Marashea proper seem to have been born in Benoni on the East Rand in 1947 or 1948.⁹⁵ At first, no distinction was made between Matsieng and Matsekha, but by 1950 the Marashea had divided into a bitter rivalry. There are numerous stories as to why the split took place ranging from fights over women to disputes over money, but it is evident that Basotho migrants carried a keen awareness of their homeland's historical divisions. 'We fought with the people of Molapo because they wanted to rule us.... We know that the King of Lesotho is living at Matsieng and we would not allow people from Ha-Molapo to rule us, so our quarrel started there.'⁹⁶ Oral evidence is consistent, however, that in the beginning Marashea were united: 'Marashea began at Benoni.

⁹⁴ CAD, NTS 4179, file 33/313, Native Commissioner Vereeniging to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 6 December 1946; CAD, NTS 7691 file 375/332, Chart of Native Unrest 1946-47; CAD, NTS 7689 file 325/332, Director of Native Labour to the Secretary of Native Affairs, 6 May 1949, Enclosure – Statement of Joel Molapo, clerk in the office of the Agent for the High Commission Territories, 26 April 1949.

⁹⁵ A police report contends that the gangs arose in 1947 as a result of fighting between Basotho who worked on the mines and visited the women in Benoni's location and Basotho residing in the location who mobilised to defend their women against these interlopers. These gangs were originally comprised of both Matsieng and Matsekha and only divided along these lines after a dispute over money in late 1948 or early 1949. CAD, NTS 6490 file 125/313 5 vol. 2, C.J. Lemmer, Chief Inspector SAP Boksburg District to the Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Johannesburg, 26 September 1949.

⁹⁶ Interview, DG.

People from Lesotho were friends – there was brotherhood from Leribe to Matsieng but we ended up separating because of women. The people from Matsieng killed a man named Lehloailane because of a woman and the people of Molapo were furious.⁹⁷ As Bonner observed:

Once this factional polarisation had taken place it quickly spread to other areas where Basotho migrants and immigrants were congregated and where the same latent rivalries were present. By the early 1950s there was scarcely a Reef township untouched by the fighting, which very often reached extraordinary intensity, involving up to a thousand combatants at any one time.⁹⁸

By 1950, the Matsieng faction had relocated its headquarters to Newclare in the Western Areas of Johannesburg. Both Matsekha and Matsieng maintained gangs throughout the Reef, but Matsieng tended to be stronger in the west, while Matsekha remained dominant in the East Rand.

These internecine conflicts were a defining feature of Borashea and the rivalry between Matsieng and Matsekha persists in various forms to this day. The Russian gangs in the Johannesburg area gained much notoriety in both the African and white press because of the battles they waged across the length and breadth of the Rand from the 1950s to the 1970s. Colourful descriptions of hordes of blanketed warriors engaging in bloody disputes regularly made the headlines. Reports of train station crowds fleeing as Russian gangs joined in combat, officials and spectators scrambling to safety as opposing

⁹⁷ Interview, BF, Lesotho, 8 August 1998. Numerous other interviews confirm that Marashea began as one entity and then split into the rival factions.

⁹⁸ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 164.

gangs continued their fights in the courtroom, and trials in which dozens of Russians were charged with public violence were all a result of internal rivalries.⁹⁹ Russian disputes in mining districts attracted less attention because they took place in more isolated areas away from official scrutiny and tended to be less of a spectacle than the Rand battles. Still, fights in the Free State appeared in newspapers as well as police reports and mining correspondence.¹⁰⁰

As bloody as fights between rival Marashea factions were, veterans draw a clear distinction between these conflicts and the battles Marashea fought with outsiders. There was a definite recreational aspect to early internecine battles as groups fought for bragging rights as Basotho. When veterans recount fights with rival groups, they describe rousing encounters. Before the battle the women would encourage the men by singing their praises and celebrations would follow a victory. During the week when Matsekha and Matsieng worked side by side in the mines and factories they would discuss previous battles, speak admiringly of brave and accomplished fighters, and predict victory in upcoming conflicts. ‘The fighting was good,’ claims DB, a Matsieng veteran of the 1950s, ‘Although it was tough, we did not regret it because it was our choice and we enjoyed

⁹⁹ *World*, 8 March 1965; *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 May 1949; *World*, 10 September 1974. White newspapers mentioned the Russians following attacks on white police officers or particularly spectacular battles, but Johannesburg-based African newspapers from the 1950s to the 1970s contain literally hundreds of stories of Russian activities. The Newclare battles of the 1950s attracted more press attention than any other series of events in which the Marashea was involved. The conflict and its coverage in the press are the focus of Chapter 6.

¹⁰⁰ FSA, PNV 1/2 and 1/3 contain numerous reports of Marashea conflicts in the Free State.

fighting.¹⁰¹ These conflicts generally lacked the ruthlessness that characterised fighting between Marashea and other groups. NT, who also fought as a member of Matsieng in the 1950s, relates the fighting to that of his childhood in Lesotho.

We were happy to fight because it was a sort of play, at that time we were not killing. When we beat you with *melamu* and you fell we would leave you and chase your friends. We fought on Saturdays and Sundays, during the week we went to work because all of us were working. It was nice because it was like when Basotho boys play *melamu* at home.¹⁰²

Guy and Thabane have discussed this phenomenon as it applied to the Rand conflicts of the 1950s.

Interneccine fighting amongst the *Ma-Rashea* could possibly so weaken them that they could no longer effectively fulfil their function as defenders of the Basotho. It might leave them open to destruction by other groups – criminal or ethnic – or by the coercive arm of the state. Thus, deadly and violent as these confrontations were, there were certain devices that the Basotho factions adopted which limited the ultimate outcome – devices which they could use because there were certain assumptions that they as Basotho, could share, and which they could not share with other groups.¹⁰³

Thus, in the course of a battle when a man was wounded and helpless, his opponent might stand over him to ensure he was not killed. On some occasions defeated opponents were released after being beaten and forced to relinquish their valuables. 1950s veteran HM explains: ‘We even showed mercy to other Marashea in a fight. We would just take your clothes and send you to your *morena*, we would not kill you.’¹⁰⁴ ML, a 1970s veteran,

¹⁰¹ Interview, DB, Soweto, 16 December 1998.

¹⁰² Interview, NT, Soweto, 14 December 1998.

¹⁰³ Guy and Thabane, ‘The Ma-Rashea’, p. 447.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, HM, Lesotho 22 August 1998.

describes much the same practice: 'When we chase one and catch him, we kill him. But if he is well dressed in smart clothes, wearing a blanket like this one, we take the blanket and send him away and say, "Go!", so that tomorrow when one of us is caught during a fight his clothing will be taken, but he will not be killed.'¹⁰⁵

In the heat of battle men were sometimes struck down and mercilessly killed – there were no guarantees of protection. However, in the early years the different groups generally adhered to a moral code, that when violated, could result in severe consequences. Mamalinyane, who led a powerful group of Marashea, mainly composed of Hlubi, in the 1950s, was specifically targeted for assassination by a combined Matsieng-Molapo force precisely because he broke the rules of the time.

In those days *marena* were not supposed to be killed. If *morena* was captured he would be taken to *lekholla* and asked about his group. When he answered those questions, he was supposed to be released, not killed, and then his group would go and fight back. But Mamalinyane killed *Morena* Bifa from QwaQwa in Masakeng. He stabbed him with a spear and Marashea from Molapo and Matsieng joined to attack Mamalinyane.¹⁰⁶

Mamalinyane was killed in his house in 1956, reportedly stabbed in the same way he killed Bifa.¹⁰⁷

When the Marashea began in the 1940s and 1950s most combatants used *melamu*, battle axes or swords and it was relatively easy to limit hand-to-hand conflicts. As firearms became more prevalent, it was difficult to control the fights and this practice, as

¹⁰⁵ Interview, ML.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, NT.

¹⁰⁷ Multiple interviews.

well as the tendency to prearrange battles, gradually died out. BM, who has more than thirty years of experience as Lerashea, gives his perspective on these changes:

The fight between Marashea started a long time ago, around the 1940s. I do not know how it started but we are told many stories about it. It was like a game when one person hits another – the rule was that if he falls down he should not be hit again, rather you would just take his blanket. After the blanket is taken the owner would want to claim it back by fighting. It would be an ongoing fight. There were notices from the attacking group to the other group in order to make them prepared for the fight. Somebody would be given a letter telling the *morena* of the other group that on such and such a day we will come and fight over our blankets which you captured last time. He would be given a drink as we are drinking now and they would reply and say, okay, we shall be waiting for you, or we will not be in a position to fight because of a funeral or stokvel or anything. But these days things have changed. If there is a fight, it is a fight, not a game. If we were to send someone to Thabong now, they would kill him, he would never come back.¹⁰⁸

The proliferation of firearms has eroded the practice of ritualistic combat governed by a recognisable set of rules. Rather than the prearranged, set piece battles of former days, hit and run raids using taxis are the method of choice in recent years. However, battles between Marashea groups are still viewed in a different light than fights with non-Basotho. A Matsekha veteran, active in the 1980s and 1990s, explains the contemporary rivalry in these terms: 'I can say it is like football clubs like the [Orlando] Pirates and the [Kaiser] Chiefs. People are fighting because some are Matsekha and others are Makaota, so they are always fighting. This is like play, although people die.'¹⁰⁹ Most importantly, when Basotho become involved in fights with other ethnic groups, for example during

¹⁰⁸ Interview, BM.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, BS, Lesotho, 8 August 1998.

faction fights on the mines, Marashea temporarily shelve their internal rivalries and join together against the outsiders.

In the 1950s and 1960s before dead Marashea were transported back to Lesotho for burial, funerals often erupted in violence when groups attempted to prevent rivals from burying their dead.¹¹⁰ 'It was difficult to bury Lerashea because when we were taking the body to the cemetery the other group would come and start a fight at the funeral. If they defeated us, before they buried the body they would break the coffin and sometimes even pour petrol on the body and burn it.'¹¹¹ Funeral conflicts could also be prearranged. NN, a Matsekha veteran, explains that 'If Lerashea died in a fight, before he was buried we would invite the Matsieng group and fight with *melamu* before the burial began.'¹¹² Less often, fights have occurred at funerals in Lesotho when one group follows a rival back home to disrupt the proceedings. In 1996, members of a rogue Matsieng group attacked Matsekha during a funeral service near the university town of Roma, killing several people.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ As transport became more readily available in the 1970s and 1980s, Marashea groups began to accompany the bodies of fallen members to their home villages in Lesotho where they conducted funeral ceremonies. For accounts of fights at funerals see CAD, SAP 367, file 15/60/44, vol. 2, Riots at Pimville Location, 19 February, 1958; CAD, SAP 397, file 15/21/47, Unrest: Benoni Location, 10 May 1959; *World*, 16 May 1959, 22 March 1965 and 29 August 1966; *Golden City Post*, 17 May 1959.

¹¹¹ Interview, HM.

¹¹² Interview, NN, Lesotho, 20 May 1998.

¹¹³ I am grateful to David Ambrose for bringing this incident to my attention as reported in *Lentsoe la Basotho*, 22 February 1997. Some of the details were later supplied during interviews.

Impromptu battles also took place, especially on trains, when groups met on the way to dances and other celebrations. With a near constant state of warfare between rivals, spontaneous fights erupted for the most trivial reasons. Molefi Thabane was at a loss to explain these internecine conflicts: ‘Really there is no reason why Marashea fight each other. I still remember at times in court when we were asked why we fought. The answer was puzzling, and only fit to be given by an insane person – “These Masupha people despise us.”¹¹⁴ KP remembers that ‘The cause of those fights was when Molapo people called us girls and we had to prove that we were not girls.’¹¹⁵ A classic explanation is given by DS: ‘I met with some difficulties while I was at the diamond mine. Someone from the Molapo group said that we were farting and we had to go outside. The fight started and my head was injured by a sword.’¹¹⁶

Not all fights were so whimsical; specific circumstances led to conflicts. Raids to abduct women and counter raids to reclaim abducted women featured prominently. Fighting was precipitated by the desertion of members to a rival group and assaults on individual members sometimes instigated large-scale revenge attacks. Groups also fought for material gain and to increase their power. Raids on rival settlements had an economic rationale because of the prospects of booty. Victorious raiders carried away all transportable valuables. ‘When they defeat the other group, they take away watches,

¹¹⁴ Interview, Molefi Thabane, (Bonner transcript).

¹¹⁵ Interview, KP, Lesotho, 9 August 1998.

¹¹⁶ Interview, DS.

clothes, everything a person has."¹¹⁷ Thus an attack to avenge the abduction of a female member was also potentially lucrative. Large confrontations were sometimes initiated by *marena* attempting to extend their power over neighbouring groups. 'Sometimes they fight for power as when one leader wants to rule over another. He attacks and tries to defeat him in order to rule over him as in politics.'¹¹⁸ It seems that some battles were territorial in the sense that the aggressors made a concerted effort to drive their opponents from a specific area in order to settle there themselves. Marashea groups were sometimes available for hire as mercenaries and in the 1980s Matsieng from Phiri were hired by a particular taxi company to defend them against the assaults of a rival taxi association. The rivals immediately hired Matsekha from Germiston and the ensuing war lasted for years and costs dozens of lives including that of *morena* Tsotsi Raliemere.¹¹⁹

The men and women interviewed for this thesis supplied dozens of accounts of fights between different Marashea gangs. Three of these accounts will be cited here to demonstrate some of the conditions and consequences of these conflicts. SC was Lerashea with a Matsekha group on the East Rand in the 1950s where he worked as a miner. He attended meetings and dances and fought alongside his colleagues on weekends. His experience illustrates how membership in the Marashea could put individuals at considerable risk even when they were not engaged in group fights.

¹¹⁷ Interview, 'Me' TF.

¹¹⁸ Interview, KK, Lesotho, 8 August 1998.

¹¹⁹ See Bank, 'The Making of the QwaQwa "Mafia"?' for an account of the taxi conflict. Tsotsi was killed in 1985 by Molapo rivals in the taxi war who bribed the police to arrest

One Sunday morning I was with two friends and we jumped the fence to the location. At that time I didn't drink *joala*. We went to where the women hid *joala* by burying the cans and we saw some of the containers above the ground. We took all the *joala* ... to an isolated place and hid in the grass because we were afraid of the police. I was the one who poured the *joala* until I decided to drink it myself and that was my first time. We were busy drinking and then we saw a crowd of men coming towards us. They were Matsieng.... My friends ran away but I was not able and they beat me. I tried to fight but it was useless because the Matsieng were many.... I was beaten unconscious and when I regained consciousness my head was covered in blood and my hand was badly injured. I felt the grass on my back and realised I had no clothes – they left me with only my trousers. When a person is badly beaten we say *limohatile* [to be run over by horses or cattle]. I tried until I managed to stand. I did not know where I was because I was afraid and drunk. I walked until.... I saw another crowd of men and gave up because I thought they were Matsieng, but they were Molapo.... My group went in front of a car driven by a white woman, forced her to stop and ordered her to take me to the hospital at the mine where I worked.¹²⁰

Many Marashea fights resulted when a woman absconded to, or was kidnapped by, a rival group. Either way, her original group was honour bound to attempt her reclamation. 'Me' ID, who was a member of a group in Carletonville in the 1980s and early 1990s, explains the consequences of one such fight.

Most of the fights between Marashea are caused by women. Although I cannot recall all the details, I remember a fight over a woman called Ntsoaki from Qacha's Nek [Lesotho] next to White Hill. She had been staying with Lerashea at Kloof [informal settlement near Kloof Gold Mine] when I was at Bekkersdal. Ntsoaki had run away from Kloof to stay at Phiri where she was discovered two months after her escape. Marashea from Khutsong, Kloof and Bekkersdal came together to go to Phiri and return with Ntsoaki. They left in the afternoon with six taxis and one van. They came back with her around nine the next morning. She was badly

Tsotsi and then turn him over to them. Both Molapo and Matsieng informants told the same story of Tsotsi's murder.

¹²⁰ Interview, SC, Lesotho, 7 June 1998.

wounded, stabbed in many places. They did not tell us the exact number of those from Phiri who died, but for us three died and two were badly injured.¹²¹

Revenge attacks were also commonplace and LG, Matsieng Lerashea under Tsotsi Raliemere in the 1980s, describes how Tsotsi engineered revenge after LG suffered at the hands of a rival group.

I was beaten by Matsekha at Carletonville. I went to the hospital at Deep Level [mine]. Marashea of Matsieng went to Phiri and told them I was beaten by Matsekha. Raliemere told them they would come to see me. I was beaten and went to the hospital on Saturday. On Sunday members of my group arrived at the hospital and Raliemere gave me R40. He told me I must go to the dance next Saturday and did not care whether I was discharged or not. I was badly injured but I had to go to the dance at Phiri. On Wednesday I was discharged and on Saturday I took the train to Phiri. My head was aching but I could not refuse. At twelve o'clock the whistle was blown and Marashea came and made a group. At two o'clock we all bathed with *moriana*. I did not know where we were going. At eight o'clock three vehicles arrived, two taxis and Raliemere's private car. Some entered the taxis and I was with Sanki, Bothlennyane, Mohlomi and Raliemere in the private car. We left going straight for Carletonville. Before we entered the location, the vehicles stopped and they locked me inside a taxi and they attacked that location. I heard many gunshots. When they came back I did not know what had happened but they took me to the scene of the fight and there were fifteen people dead.¹²²

As Marashea became established in the Free State from the 1950s, some of the groups ignored the Matsieng-Matsekha divide that had caused so much fighting on the Rand. Given time, however, this split was replicated in the Free State. BM recounts how his group was torn apart:

¹²¹ Interview, 'Me' ID.

¹²² Interview, LG, Soweto, 7 February 1999.

There was a fight between Marashea that caused a division between us. We were united as Basotho. The fight was caused by a woman named Mantoa who was staying with *Nate* Sootho. This led to the groups of Ha Molapo and Matsieng that did not exist in the Free State, only in Gauteng and some other places. In the Free State we had only one group that did not belong to either Molapo or Matsieng. A young man from Leribe called Maseko happened to fall in love with Sootho's woman. People from Matsieng did not like this because they thought that this young man was being unfair to the old man. Those from Leribe supported Maseko when he took Sootho's woman. This led to a serious dispute between the two parties. That is why we fought each other. The fight began in the morning around five. They had already left Virginia to go to Thabong before the fight began. Our men left Virginia to go to Thabong early and surround their area before they realised we were there. We started throwing stones at their houses and it seemed as if they were expecting us. The fighting continued until around ten [a.m.] and nobody died but many were injured. Since that day we have never been together with the people of Molapo.¹²³

By the 1970s, the Free State factions were as divided as their compatriots in Gauteng. Alliances between Free State and Rand groups reflected this division as a Matsieng faction from Virginia would call on Matsieng from Soweto for assistance and vice versa. Matsieng established strongholds in the Virginia and Klerksdorp areas, while Matsekha enjoyed supremacy in the vicinity of Welkom.

The Matsieng-Matsekha rivalry was not responsible for all internecine fighting within Marashea. Disputes over leadership sometimes led to fighting and resulted in the proliferation of splinter groups. Commonly recited examples include the cases of Mashai and Lenkoane. A renegade Matsieng group based in Carletonville led by Mashai fought many battles with Matsieng from Soweto in the 1980s, and continues to defy the

¹²³ Interview, BM.

authority of the leader of Matsieng in the Free State. Lenkoane, a powerful Matsieng leader in 1960s Soweto, was assassinated by a man who aspired to his position. This led to fighting between those who had supported Lenkoane and the followers of his assassin, Teboho Majoro.¹²⁴

Retirement

Elderly Marashea often returned home to Lesotho when they and the group decided the time had come for them to retire. In such circumstances veterans received transport money and perhaps a little extra. ‘There is no big sum – at his farewell he gets something, but not enough for him to live on at home. However, we are responsible for his funeral like any other Lerashea.’¹²⁵ BM explains that ‘The old Lerashea is advised to go home, but if he does not want to go back home we do not force him, especially those Marashea who joined a long time ago who abandoned their families in Lesotho and do not have a home to go to.’¹²⁶ Those who stayed were not expected to contribute as warriors. ‘He is not required to go to the fights because he would get killed.’¹²⁷ Instead, they utilised their experience and acted as advisors for fights and for dealings with the authorities. They also fulfilled other functions as DG explains: ‘When Lerashea is old he

¹²⁴ These examples were described in detail by numerous informants.

¹²⁵ Interview, KI.

¹²⁶ Interview, BM.

¹²⁷ Interview, DS.

stays looking after the women. He is given a simple job and he must make sure the [kidnapped] women do not escape.’¹²⁸

Probably more women than men remained in South Africa because Marashea women are considered outcasts and prostitutes by many people in Lesotho. Men typically maintained families in Lesotho and returned to them when they retired. Many women did not have that option and became estranged from their families. ‘If a woman is old she stays until she dies or her man dies – the old women are always selling *joala*. Others become *lingaka* (traditional doctors, singular is *ngaka*) giving *moriana* to Marashea. When the men go to fights and meetings she prepares her *moriana* to make them strong.’¹²⁹

Social Practices

Organised dances, concerts and stokvels played an important function in the social and economic life of Marashea. Relations between groups were cemented on these occasions that also acted as fundraisers. Many members, male and female, remarked that social affairs were an enjoyable part of their lives as Marashea. Funerals, dances and feasts reinforced the bonds between members and between allied groups. For example, BM has an annual feast and celebration for all the members in each one of the settlements under his control. Additionally, Matsieng from the Free State maintained relations with Matsieng on the Rand by means of feasts and funerals. Some activities, especially funeral rites, were Marashea inventions that distinguished members from other

¹²⁸ Interview, DG.

migrant Basotho. The following description of a ceremony and the answer to a research assistant's question reveal how the Marashea saw themselves as a distinct organisation.

At the vigil for the dead we do not pray or sing hymns rather we talk a lot of nonsense about this man. We tell him to go and tell Satan about his deeds on earth because he killed people. We jump over his coffin. There is no singing of hymns but the accordian is played the whole night just like at *stokvels*. His blanket and *molamu* and other weapons are placed on top of him. When we proceed to the cemetery the coffin is shot three times, or it is hit with *melamu*. The coffin is swung up and down as we walk towards the graveyard while the women are marching and yelling.

Question: But are you Christians?

Yes, I am Catholic, but in Marashea one forgets all those things.¹³⁰

Marashea women on the Rand in the 1950s and 1960s were famous for their enticing displays when they performed the *famo*, a dance in which the buttocks and sometimes even the genitals were displayed to cheering men. One of Coplan's informants provides a detailed description:

A *famo* is like a [church] "tea-meeting" with an accordian [laughter]. The women are there. And the men are naked under their blankets, and we are in a circle, and there is a command: *Likepi!* [steel pick – euphemism for penis] Then we lay our pricks on the table. And the women are not wearing any panties under their skirts. It's a *stokvel*, for money. When the *famo* dance is done, there shouldn't be any laughter; it's quite serious. They display themselves to the men. They even shave their vulvas, and put some lipstick, called "stoplight," around them. The man who is the good dancer and a good stick fighter is the one who the women want, and he gets whatever woman he wants.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Interview, 'Me' RB, Lesotho, 25 November 1998.

¹³⁰ Interview, 'Me' LW, Lesotho, 15 January 1999.

¹³¹ Coplan, *Cannibals*, p. 188.

The *famo* seems to have been a particularly effective recruiting device as it convinced visiting miners and other non-members of the benefits of membership. 'Women make a living making *famos*, they show their naked buttocks and the men feel very attracted and want to take them to bed.'¹³² The *famo*, as far as I can ascertain, was a Marashea creation that was never practised in Lesotho and seems to have died out in recent years. 'In the past there was a dance called *famo* – this dance was so dirty I could not enjoy watching it. Women would pull up their dresses to expose their private parts to men who were sitting down in front of them watching.' The demise of the *famo* might be related to the proliferation of firearms which increased the costs of fights between group members. 'These dances caused great jealousy among the men because it provoked them so much.'¹³³

Normative sexual mores, as they were understood in Lesotho, were largely abandoned. For example, several women reported that sexual behaviour in Marashea deviated from accepted practice in Lesotho in that intercourse was not kept private. These accounts stress that women in Lesotho were accorded a degree of respect noticeably absent in Borashea. 'There were no moral standards. More than ten men and women were sleeping together in one room. Sex was just like eating *papa* [maize meal – the staple food of Basotho], there was no respect at all.'¹³⁴ There are several possible reasons for changes in sexual behaviour. Many Marashea women worked as prostitutes

¹³² Interview, PL.

¹³³ Interview, 'Me' OW, Lesotho, 7 January 1999.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

and had already abandoned conventional notions of appropriate behaviour. Others traded sexual services for protection. In such an environment an aggressive assertion of sexuality could reap dividends. Marashea groups competed fiercely for women whom they regarded as trophies and abduction and rape were common activities. Most men had several *linyatsi* and this was seen as one of the most coveted aspects of membership. Finally, group survival was dependent on the economic support of mineworkers. To attract miners the groups had to market the sexual services of Marashea women. Given these conditions, it is not surprising that the Marashea deviated from traditional Sesotho concepts of acceptable sexual behaviour.

Family Life

Most Marashea men maintained families in Lesotho and kept *linyatsi* in South Africa. In the early years on the Rand it was more common for Marashea who worked in factories and were eligible for housing and pensions to remain in South Africa after they stopped working. A few of these men managed to bring their wives from Lesotho, but they were the exception. Bonner has explored the tendency of male Basotho workers on the Rand in the years following the Second World War to sever their connections with Lesotho and to become immigrants in the urban centres. To cite one example: 'To begin with Pelanyane, along with many other of his fellow workers, retained his links with the countryside, remitting money to his family and periodically returning home. However, in

the face of the many temptations of urban life, that resolve eventually crumbled.¹³⁵ As stated previously, Bonner's informants tended to be Marashea who had left the mines to settle in the urban areas, a group that comprised a minority among the Marashea on the Rand. The majority of men worked on the mines and lived in mining compounds, or survived through a combination of informal and criminal economic ventures and returned to Lesotho once they retired from the Marashea.

Due to working conditions, finances, distance and transport difficulties, Bonner's Marashea of the 1950s were more isolated from Lesotho than later groups. This relative isolation might account for the lack of contact with a dead Lerashea's family during this period. 'If a member was killed during battle they would collect money to buy a coffin and to pay for his funeral, but would not even bother to notify his wife back home.'¹³⁶ Since the mines opened in the Free State and bus and taxi services between the mines and Lesotho have become more affordable and dependable, it has become easier for Marashea (and mineworkers) to visit home more frequently and to maintain families there. KI, who was Lerashea from 1975 to 1985 in the Welkom area, explains that 'Most Marashea have real families in Lesotho which they visit at least monthly. Just like myself, I used to visit my family every month.' Additionally, KI had a steady *nyatsi* in South Africa with whom he operated a dagga selling business.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 171.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 176.

¹³⁷ Interview, KI.

Easier access has also resulted in bodies being returned to Lesotho and financial compensation being paid to relatives as a regular practice. PL explains these changes over time: 'We did not bring them home, we buried them in South Africa, but now they are brought home to their relatives.... We buy an ox for food and everything is bought by Marashea. We give R1000 to his relatives.'¹³⁸ Other interviews confirm that this has been standard practice for many years now. Retired members and their families are accorded the same privilege by some groups. 'We tell them to make their families aware that when they die we must be notified so that we can come and bury them – it is our obligation. For their funeral we buy two sheep, one cow, a coffin, some groceries and we give the family of the deceased R1000.'¹³⁹

A large majority of the men consulted for this study indicated that their 'real' families were in Lesotho. 'Most Marashea still have families in Lesotho. The women in South Africa are just on a temporary basis.'¹⁴⁰ Some men assumed responsibility for the children conceived with their *linyatsi* but many did not. It was common for male veterans to retire to Lesotho and sever connections with their female companions. 'We have two families,' explains PL. 'When we leave Lesotho and go to work in South Africa we marry another woman who will help us in South Africa. When we come back the wives at home are here looking after families and agriculture.'¹⁴¹ CN, who resides in a squatter camp adjacent to Vaal Reefs Mine, summarises the relationships between male and female

¹³⁸ Interview, PL.

¹³⁹ Interview, CN.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, ML.

Marashea as follows: ‘They are *linyatsi – masehlalisane* [let’s stay together]. We part when we go home.’¹⁴²

Some male Marashea were introduced to the group through family connections, often an uncle or a cousin. I am also aware of several instances of brothers belonging to the same group and sons following fathers into the Marashea. However, there has never been an established pattern of generational succession in the Marashea. Indeed, some informants report that groups discouraged close relatives from joining because of the dangerous lives led by Marashea. ‘People from the same family were not allowed to join. That was done so that when my brother dies I would support his family and also to prevent the death of two people in the same family.’¹⁴³ Most veterans we spoke with, male and female, regard Borashea as a harsh life and hope for something better for their children. I have not learned of a single father or mother encouraging their children to become Marashea, and several informants indicated that they forbade their children to join. However, as we have seen, some young men became Marashea against their fathers’ wishes. As DB replied when asked whether it was common for the sons or brothers of Marashea to join the group: ‘It happened because when you are here, your son goes to the mines somewhere and one day you see him holding *molamu* and there is

¹⁴¹ Interview, PL.

¹⁴² Interview, CN.

¹⁴³ Interview, DG. GB adds: ‘It was not common for brothers to join because there were many fights and it would hurt very badly if all the family members died in one incident.’ Interview, GB, Lesotho, 26 November 1998.

nothing you can do.'¹⁴⁴ Certainly sons did not succeed fathers as leaders and there was no core of family at the heart of the organisation as with the Cape Town area 'mafia' gangs.¹⁴⁵

The large majority of Marashea women did not have husbands and stable families back in Lesotho. Children born in South Africa were often sent back to Lesotho to stay with relatives, and if possible to attend school. It was difficult for women to travel back and forth between Lesotho and South Africa for visits. The stigma of being Marashea women mitigated against their return as did their illegal status in South Africa that rendered border crossings risky or expensive (due to bribes). Additionally, women did not have the same freedom of movement as men. 'Most women have abandoned their families. It is difficult for women because men will not allow them to go home fearing they will not come back.'¹⁴⁶ Despite these obstacles, some Marashea women achieved a measure of familial stability with their *linyatsi*. More likely, a woman was only one of several *linyatsi* kept by a male Lerashea. And, as men retired, died or were jailed, women were passed from one man to the next.

Change and Continuity

Like any other society, and especially one as diffuse as the Marashea, the Russians have changed over time. The changes have come about because of shifts in the regional

¹⁴⁴ Interview, DB.

¹⁴⁵ See Pinnock, 'Stone's Boys'.

¹⁴⁶ Interview, 'Me' ID.

economy and South African legislation, technological advances and political developments. The greatest change (discussed in detail in Chapter 7) was the expansion into the rural mining areas of the West Rand and Free State that began in the 1950s. This movement can be traced to the contraction of the gold mining industry on the Rand, the opening of mines in these new areas and the 1963 legislation that made it illegal for Basotho (with very few exceptions) to work in South Africa outside of the agricultural and mining sectors. Increased police pressure in Johannesburg may also have played a part in the exodus from the Rand.

In the formative years, a large majority of Marashea were employed as miners, in secondary industry and a variety of other occupations. After 1963, migrants encountered severely restricted urban employment possibilities outside of the mines. As a result the numbers of 'loafers' increased and the activities of the Marashea became more remunerative. The gangs gradually assumed a more commercial nature and unemployed members looked to group activities for at least a portion of their income. Some of this income came from robberies, intimidation and assassination and mercenary endeavours, but the bulk came from the patronage of mineworkers. Marashea camps and mining compounds established close ties as the gangs supplied mineworkers with commercial sex, liquor, dagga and recreation. Much more than their predecessors and counterparts on the Rand, mining area gangs became dependent on their links with mineworkers. This involvement caused the Marashea to take a direct interest in mining disputes and politics

and there were very few instances of conflict in which the Marashea did not play a conspicuous role.

With the exhaustion of the Johannesburg area gold mines, the gangs that continued to operate on the Rand also experienced financial hardship and stepped up their illegal activities. They remained active, but the strength of the Marashea shifted to the Free State and West Rand.

Changes in weaponry have had a great impact on Marashea activities. There is universal agreement among veterans and active members that contemporary Marashea rely on guns – the time of *melamu* is finished. Consequently, the character and tactics of Marashea battles have changed and the days of hundreds of Russians engaging in hand-to-hand combat are relics of the past. Older veterans sometimes see the current Marashea as a more violent movement because the moral codes that governed earlier fights have been abandoned. Their Marashea primarily fought for the right to claim supremacy over rival factions. But 'nowadays they will just attack you in your house and kill you.'¹⁴⁷ Some even deny that Borashea as they knew it still exists. 'As I see it there are no more Russians now. There are only groups like tsotsis – they haven't any discipline. We used to obey our elders.'¹⁴⁸ As dismissive as some of these veterans are of present day Marashea, there may well be a selectivity to their memory, especially with regard to killing and violence. As Bonner noted, even in the 1950s, the rudimentary

¹⁴⁷ Interview, RC, Welkom, 20 May 1999.

¹⁴⁸ Interview, PG, Lesotho, 12 September 1998.

moral code 'was not uniformly applied by all Russian factions and began to fray over time.'¹⁴⁹

Contemporary Marashea, and those active recently, tend to emphasise that the Marashea of old were thugs interested in fighting and robbery whereas recent gangs concentrate on economic activities that supply a living for migrant Basotho. 'There are no longer those fights like there used to be. Now Marashea is like a commercial body which is mainly concerned with making money for living while in the past it was like a gang involved in many criminal activities.'¹⁵⁰ BM, along with several other informants, remarked that in years past my research assistant and I would never have been able to safely enter a Marashea settlement to conduct interviews.

Marashea in the past were feared because they were killers and robbers, they did not have an organised burial association like we do today. We are friends to the people, not a threat. In the past you could not come here with this white man, you could not enter this place.... But look where you are now, you are sitting here with us talking to us asking us a lot of questions. The Marashea of the past would not answer even one of them. We have changed so rapidly. In the past it was all about crimes and threatening people.¹⁵¹

It is disingenuous for contemporary Marashea to portray themselves as members of a law-abiding civic-minded organisation, although some groups are less blatantly criminal than others. It does seem true, however, that the Marashea of today are primarily concerned

¹⁴⁹ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 179.

¹⁵⁰ Interview, KI.

¹⁵¹ Interview, BM.

with making money, while the formative groups largely consisted of employed members whose **Borashea** was not remunerative.

The widespread development of the taxi industry had important spin-offs for the **Marashea**. Johannesburg area groups travelled by train, but the more isolated mining gangs did not have this option. Taxis increased their mobility and also represented a business opportunity. Thus, the mining gangs were quick to become involved and soon became important players in the industry, including the various taxi wars. Gangs on the **Rand** also became involved in taxi violence in the 1980s. Taxis enabled **Marashea** groups to return to Lesotho more frequently and it became more common for members to retain family connections in their home areas and to transport their dead back home for burial.

Political change in South Africa had significant implications for the **Marashea**. In the 1980s and 1990s several groups became involved in vicious conflicts with **ANC** and **NUM** supporters. Some of these groups allied with police and mining officials to protect their interests and as a result the **Marashea** were vilified as puppets and hirelings of the apartheid regime. It was a difficult time for the **Marashea** and a number of gangs suffered severe defeats.

The **Marashea** has survived these changes and setbacks. It remains a **Basotho** organisation made up largely of migrants and retains many of the cultural trappings of former years. Funerals, dances and feasts continue much as they always have. The basic organisation and rules have changed very little. Gangs extract protection fees as they have done since the society began. The **Matsieng - Matsekha** divide remains a source of

tension and the gangs continue to fight over women, albeit probably not to the extent of former years. The Marashea draws its livelihood from the mining industry as it has done since the expansion period and still survives largely through the patronage of mineworkers. The gangs remain a power to be reckoned with in the gold mining areas of South Africa.

CHAPTER 4

'WOMEN ARE NOT FREE': GENDER RELATIONS IN THE MARASHEA

Women's main function is for our social life; to brew beer and for dances, also to generate income by selling beer and dagga and above all to attract men from the mines to come and donate money. Women are the support people of Marashea, they help us socially and economically. Women are the cause of most of the fighting in Marashea. In fact they are the foundation of Marashea. If there were no women, the Marashea would dissolve.¹

South Africa has long been one of the most violent societies in the world and currently lays claim to the world's highest reported incidence of rape. Various analysts contend that the ubiquity of violence against women in South Africa is largely a function of the apartheid system that emasculated black men. After studying the gendered nature of violence during the recent conflict in KwaZulu-Natal, Campbell concluded that 'The ability of men to control women, or keep them in line, and the use of violence to ensure this control, is one area where the power of working-class men has not been threatened by a racial capitalist society.'² Glaser's exploration of gender relations within the *tsotsi* gangs on the Rand revealed that,

As black, working-class youths, *tsotsis* were structurally subordinate in terms of race, class and generation. But, as males, *tsotsis* were structurally *dominant*. Gender was the one sphere in which they found themselves "naturally" in the ascendant. Hence the need to assert their masculinity

¹ Interview, LT, Lesotho, July 1998.

² Campbell, 'Learning to Kill?', p. 625. For similar arguments see Glaser, 'The Mark of Zorro'.

and sexual difference. They defended their one area of privilege vigorously.³

This particular explanation for male violence fits Marashea men, who, as foreign migrants, were one of the most marginalised male segments of apartheid society.

It is widely recognised that male subcultures, especially gangs, typically assert and define their masculinity at least partially through the violent domination of girls and women. Thus, 'A *tsotsi* was a man but his masculinity was unconvincing if he did not have a woman to dominate.'⁴ In the South African context, various studies of different gangs have uncovered the centrality of gender violence. This is true of rural gangs such as the Mpondo *indlavini* of the 1930s-1950s, the *tsotsi* subculture that pervaded urban South Africa from the 1940s, and the more recent 'jackroller' gangs in Soweto for whom rape is an organised group activity.⁵ In environments where females were not readily available, some gangs used violence to control male sexuality.⁶

Forced sex, abduction, sexual exploitation and the concept of women as trophies have been common elements in gangs' gender relations. Glaser argues that within gangs, 'Women tend to be the rewards, the trophies for male successes. Apart from providing sexual and domestic services to males they are the symbols of status to be won or lost in

³ Glaser, 'The Mark of Zorro', p. 62.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Beinart, 'The Origins of the *Indlavini*'; Mokwena, 'The Era of the Jackrollers'.

⁶ For example, the Isitshozi gangs that operated from mining compounds on the Rand in the 1920s-1940s. Breckenridge, 'Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting'. See also van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, Chapter 4 for a discussion of the homosexual practices of the Ninevite gangsters based in prisons on the Rand.

the male exclusive spheres such as fighting.⁷⁷ Gender relations within the Marashea fit this general typology but also exhibit specific characteristics. The control of women has been crucial to the economic survival of the gangs and abduction of women was taken to extremes and became common practice between competing factions. Furthermore, women have been fully integrated members of Marashea society, as opposed to many gangs where females were confined to the periphery. This chapter explores gender relations within the Marashea from both male and female perspectives and examines how these dynamics influenced individual lives and the society as a whole.

The key to the survival of the Marashea gangs throughout their history, but especially in the post-1950s when they became more reliant on mineworkers as a source of income, has been their ability to exploit women as an economic resource. Women were instrumental in attracting mineworkers to spend their wages in Marashea settlements. Miners frequented Marashea camps primarily for the comforts that women provided – beer, sex and dances. Additionally, new recruits, so important to maintaining and replenishing the strength of groups that lost members to death, imprisonment, desertion and retirement, were attracted to the Marashea largely because membership provided access to women. Matsieng *morena* BM, who presides over a number of Marashea settlements in mining areas, acknowledges the importance of female members. 'If there were no women here, these men from the mines would not come.'⁸

⁷ Glaser, 'The Mark of Zorro', p. 51.

⁸ Interview, BM.

Along with their value as a material resource, women have also played a crucial role as symbols of prestige. They became trophies in the internecine violence that has characterised Borashea from its beginnings. Power and gender relations were bound together in a network of connections with a plurality of meanings. Women were regarded as Marashea, as full members of the group who enjoyed many of the rights of men. Women were given ceremonial burials; they had their legal expenses paid when arrested on group business, and they were protected from assault and robbery. Men and women celebrated at feasts and stokvels and many couples worked together in productive economic unions. Women sang men's praises before battles and even fought alongside them on occasion. By virtue of special skills, physical beauty, relationships with powerful men and seniority within the group, a small minority of women were accorded elevated status and put in positions of authority over other women. At the same time, women as a group were regarded as property to be exploited both materially and as spoils of war. Women's sexual lives and freedoms were closely regulated as were their personal relationships with male partners. Whereas men frequently had multiple lovers, each woman belonged to a certain man, or if no man wanted her, she was expected to prostitute herself for the group.

The status of women and gender relations within the Marashea has never been examined in detail.⁹ Bonner discusses the importance of women to recruiting and the gangs' determination to control independent Basotho women on the Rand in the 1940s

and 1950s. Guy and Thabane note Rantoa's insistence that women precipitated some of the major conflicts between groups and warn, 'The role of women in the history of *Ma-Rashea* needs careful treatment.'¹⁰ A careful treatment of the subject reveals that although some men and women forged strong bonds, Coplan's assertion that 'Russians and their women were mutually supportive and independent counterparts'¹¹ needs to be rethought. An examination of gender relations uncovers the centrality of gender domination in *Borashea*. The livelihood and identity of *Marashea* men was dependent on the subjugation of *Marashea* women.

There was an economic imperative to the control of women, but the cycle of raid and counter raid with women as the targets, often specific women valued for their beauty, singing talents or relationship with a leader, indicates that women possessed an emblematic value that transcended economics. Male veterans acknowledge that the gangs led harsh and often brutal lives. Most were arrested and all saw comrades die. They do not, as a rule, romanticise their lives as *Marashea*. The one area that most veterans look back on fondly is the access to and control over women that their status as *Marashea* afforded. This determination to maintain control, combined with environments in which women needed protection, ensured the subject status of women within the *Marashea*. *Marashea* groups relied on violence to survive and the foremost expression of this

⁹ And, given the small number (16) of female informants consulted for this study, much work remains to be done on the experiences of female *Marashea*.

¹⁰ Guy and Thabane, 'The *Ma-Rashea*', p. 440.

¹¹ Coplan, *Cannibals*, p. 191.

violence took a gendered form. The subordination of women was maintained through force.

Female Migrancy

Large numbers of Basotho women have migrated to the urban and mining centres of South Africa since at least the early 1900s. Like their male counterparts these women have typically come from the underclass of Basotho society. Male migrants have at least had the possibility of waged work in the formal sector, especially as mineworkers, whereas women have been largely consigned to the economic margins, depending to a great extent on domestic service, hawking, beer brewing and sex work. A few identifiable categories of Basotho women have been prone to migrancy. Maloka, Bonner and Gay all assert that widows and abandoned wives made up the largest proportion of female migrants from the early years of the century to the 1970s.¹² These women left Lesotho for a variety of reasons – ill treatment by in-laws or husbands, the search for husbands who failed to send remittances, and desperate economic circumstances. Oral evidence indicates that these motivations, especially the economic imperative, continue to be the prime 'push' factors driving women to leave Lesotho.

Female migrants generally lacked the qualifications to compete for the more prestigious formal sector positions open to women such as nursing and teaching and were

¹² Maloka, 'Canteens, Brothels and Labour Migrancy'; Bonner, 'Desirable or undesirable Basotho women'; Judy Gay, 'Wage Employment of Rural Basotho Women: a case study', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 6, 4, (1980).

largely confined to searching for jobs as factory and janitorial labourers. Even these positions were closed to foreign migrants following the 1963 ruling that restricted Basotho workers to the mining and agricultural sectors. Consequently, seasonal agricultural labour was virtually the only legal employment available to Basotho women in South Africa.¹³ Domestic service was the easiest form of waged employment for these migrants to obtain, but poor pay and demeaning conditions deterred many women, especially as their illegal status encouraged exploitation. Gay reports that some of her informants who brewed and sold beer to miners in the Free State during the 1970s earned up to R40 per week, much more than domestic workers were paid at the time. Furthermore, these women 'said they enjoyed the independence and freedom from degrading subservience required in work for a white 'madam''.¹⁴

Bonner states that by the late 1920s Basotho women dominated the brewing business on the Rand¹⁵ and the opening of the Free State mines in the 1950s, combined with the 1963 legislation, ensured that large numbers of female migrants continued to rely on brewing for their livelihood. The experience of Mamohau, as related to Gay, indicates the difficulties and insecurities of such a life.

Mamohau, who had been deserted by her husband, told how she had been earning only R10 a month as a house maid in South Africa in 1958 so had gone to brew in a part of the Orange Free State where new gold mines were being opened up. She said that she and other women made temporary shelters in a farmer's field, giving the farmer strainings from

¹³ Unless they had documentary proof of continuous employment for a period of ten years.

¹⁴ Gay, 'Wage Employment', p. 45.

¹⁵ Bonner, 'Desirable or undesirable Basotho women', p. 228.

their brewing to feed his pigs in return for squatting rights, firewood and a degree of protection from the police. They bought ingredients for brewing and contraband brandy from itinerant Indian traders. They hid what they had brewed in pits in the ground and in the evening they sold the beer to men who had come to do the initial diggings for a new mine. Once the mine was opened, the land was fenced, and the company had established its own facilities, the women were forced to move on to a new frontier.¹⁶

Despite the uncertainties and risks, brewing represented the best prospect for thousands of migrant Basotho women in South Africa. It allowed a certain freedom and Basotho women acquired a reputation for independence. Albert Mduli remarked to the Vereeniging Riots Commission in 1937 that women 'do not stick to the men through whom they get their lodgers' permits. When a woman thinks she has sufficient money, she drives the man away and gets another.' This stereotype also occurs in Sesotho novels. In *Liakhela*, a story of migrant life on the Rand in the 1950s, Simon Majara writes that, 'When a man is not bringing money home he is left and she goes to a new man.'¹⁷ Jane Parpart noted that Zambian women on the Copperbelt in the 1950s employed similar strategies to evade male control and preserve a measure of independence. For the purposes of economic support and to avoid harassment from the authorities, women who made their living from beer brewing and prostitution often entered into liaisons with men, but many preferred informal arrangements from which they could more easily extricate

¹⁶ Gay, 'Wage Employment', p. 45.

¹⁷ Both sources quoted in Bonner, 'Desirable or undesirable Basotho women', p. 247.

themselves if their partners proved unsatisfactory.¹⁸ Membership in the Marashea placed severe limits on this sort of mobility.

Variations in Status

Women as a group were clearly at the bottom of the power structure within the Marashea, but the position of individual women varied depending on mode of entry, relationships with male partners, seniority, and the ability to enhance the prestige or security of the group. There were three basic categories of women: kidnapping victims, women without a male partner, and *linyatsi*, the lovers of specific men. Kidnapped women were treated as captives with virtually no rights until they were integrated. During the initial period of captivity they were especially vulnerable to abuse. 'Those like myself who are kidnapped are available to any man who is interested.'¹⁹ Women who joined the group, but did not have a recognised relationship with a male member, were available to all and sometimes forced into prostitution. 'If a woman does not have *nyatsi* she is given to any man and told to sleep with him. She has no choice about that.'²⁰ Unattached women also lacked a male partner who could speak on their behalf and from whom they might reap some economic benefits, from the proceeds of robberies for example. Women who enjoyed good relationships with their partners were not usually prostituted against their will and at least had the possibility of sharing men's earnings.

¹⁸ Parpart, 'Sexuality and Power', p.123.

¹⁹ Interview, 'Me' KW, Lesotho, 18 December 1998.

²⁰ Interview, 'Me' OW.

Fully integrated women with an established male partner, especially those attached to powerful men, had some standing in the group and a degree of protection that unattached and kidnapped women did not enjoy. Women valued for their beauty or singing ability were less likely to be routinely abused because their attributes enhanced the group's status. Such women were prized by all Marashea and groups had a vested interest in treating them well to prevent them from absconding to rival factions to seek protection. Female traditional doctors contributed essential services and seem to have commanded respect. However, they were only valued for as long as they were seen to be effective. Senior women, who had been with the group for long periods of time and had proven themselves to be trustworthy, were put in charge of kidnapped women and were often given the authority to resolve disputes between their junior colleagues. These female veterans were entitled to a degree of respect, but were still subject to male control.

The women who reflect positively on their experience as Marashea tend to have had either a caring partner or a *morena* who treated the women in the group fairly. 'Me' MD and 'Me' TW evaluated their lives as Marashea at least partially through the lenses of their relationships. 'Me' MD explains: 'I lived a nice life because my husband was honest with me. I was not beaten or arrested.'²¹ As one of Tsotsi Raliemere's *linyatsi*, 'Me' TW reports, 'I lived a good life because of the man I lived with.'²² This despite the fact that she was once tortured mercilessly by the police for refusing to divulge Tsotsi's whereabouts. Tsotsi was almost universally appreciated by informants, both male and

²¹ Interview, 'Me' MD, Soweto, 22 December 1998.

female, who belonged to his group prior to his death. 'He was a good *morena*. If a woman went to him and asked for money, he would go to the man and ask why his wife was looking for money. He was the father of all. If I quarrelled with my husband I would report to him.'²³ The various *marena* regarded and treated their female members differently. Some are remembered as benign while others are condemned for their cruelty. LW, who was Lerashea in Phiri after the death of Tsotsi, envied the women in another group who fared much better.

In Phiri, women live a different life. In CNC [squatter camp in the Free State] I learned that women were happier and freer than women in Phiri. Most of them I heard were able to come home with money and clothes for their children. But at Phiri most of us were just used by these men to satisfy their needs; they never cared for us.²⁴

Gender and Power

The structural position of women within Marashea was little different than in Lesotho. Basotho patriarchal society delegated the vast majority of women to the position of minors – access to land was mediated by their relationships with male relatives, their role in the public domain was restricted and physical abuse of female spouses was widespread.²⁵ If anything women within Marashea tended to have less freedom and be even more subject to abuse than women in Lesotho. Female informants

²² Interview, 'Me' TW.

²³ Interview, 'Me' MD.

²⁴ Interview, 'Me' LW.

²⁵ Maloka, 'Canteens, Brothels and Labour Migrancy', p. 103; Epprecht demonstrates how the colonial state in Lesotho reinforced and enforced patriarchal norms, especially

emphasised their lack of power in relation to the men who controlled virtually all aspects of Marashea society. 'Me' ID reported that '[Women] are full members but in some cases it is just like they are used by Marashea to work for them because women do not have a say in decision making, only men take part in making decisions.'²⁶ When asked about the role of men within Marashea, 'Me' KW responded, 'Men are the ones who protect us. They are the ones who fight when there is fighting to be done. The management of the group is run by men.'²⁷ 'Me' LW summarised the status of women: 'Women are just like babies or animals, they have no say, no choice – they are not free.'²⁸ Perceptions of gender roles indicate the extent to which male violence was regarded as an integral element of Borashea. Men identified with their role as warriors and considered the use of violence to obtain and control women to be normative. 'Me' LW's response to the question, 'How do men contribute to the group?' – 'Their role is to kill, commit robberies and kidnap women'²⁹ – reflects a common understanding of the male function in Borashea.

Although women never collectively challenged male dominance within the Marashea, individual women resisted particularly oppressive conditions, most often by fleeing, but sometimes more directly as DS experienced. He had kidnapped a woman who took her revenge upon him by attempting to tip a burning coal stove on him while

through the courts. Marc Epprecht, 'Women, Class and Politics in Colonial Lesotho, 1930-1965' Ph.D. dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1992.

²⁶ Interview, 'Me' ID.

²⁷ Interview, 'Me' KW.

²⁸ Interview, 'Me' LW.

he was sleeping.³⁰ Such actions seem to have been the exception, no doubt because of the danger involved in active resistance. For the most part, the women of Marashea did not directly challenge male control; they seem to have accepted gender relations within Marashea as an unjust but basically immutable fact of life within the groups. An example of this fatalism is the role of fully integrated women as the primary guards preventing the escape of female kidnap victims. This argument mirrors Campbell's conclusion regarding female attitudes to violence and subordination in KwaZulu-Natal: 'So entrenched were these patriarchal norms in the lives of these young women that avoidance or tolerance were the only two options mentioned for dealing with male violence. None of them mentioned the possibility of redefining gender relations.'³¹

Gendered notions of leaders and heroes reflects the relative status of men and women within the Marashea. Many men take pride in their identity as Marashea – they revel in the groups' ferocious reputation, specifically as defenders of the Basotho, they boast about their control over women and their sexual exploits as gang members, and relish old courtroom and battlefield victories. The Marashea evoke fear, but also a degree of admiration amongst some Basotho. Leslie Bank, who researched taxi violence in 1980s QwaQwa (the ethnic homeland of Basotho in South Africa), observed that the taxi drivers 'were enamoured by the mystique of the Russians; they admired their tradition of resistance and survival and spoke proudly of their relationships with

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview, DS.

³¹ Campbell, 'Learning to Kill?', p. 627.

individual gangsters.³² It was a hard life, but there are aspects of their struggle as Marashea to which veterans cling proudly. Thus, many men continue to identify closely with the group and venerate leaders who achieved heroic status.

The female Marashea interviewed judge *marena* by entirely different criteria than their male counterparts. In Basotho society the women of Marashea benefit from none of the positive imagery commonly associated with the men. They are not regarded with awe, they are not feared and they are not glamorised. Rather, the women of Marashea, when acknowledged, are typically dismissed as prostitutes and considered outcasts. *Marena* as heroes is a much less relevant concept to women who do not bask in the reflected glory. Their marginalised status, both within Marashea and Basotho society, ensures that women have little stake in the Marashea's reputation and thus accrue no benefits from the creation of heroes who represent an idealised masculine version of the history and values of the association.

Oppression and Control

The degree of women's subjugation within the Marashea is perhaps best illustrated by exploring issues of personal autonomy and control over sexuality, movement and material resources. Women, once they joined, belonged to the group in the most fundamental sense. When asked what happens to female Lerashea if her man dies or goes to prison for an extended period of time, 'Me' ID replied, 'A woman is taken

³² Bank, 'A Culture of Violence', p. 135.

by another man in the group or by the *morena*. She is not allowed to go home or to join another group – she belongs to the group, not individual Lerashea.³³ This theme appears time and again in oral testimony. ‘Me’ FD states simply – ‘They tell you that you have to be *nyatsi* of another Lerashea.’³⁴ When women first joined the group, unless they were brought by a specific man and hence considered his property, they were allocated out to members by the *morena*. If no man was interested she was considered communal property. KI explains:

If a woman arrives, she reports to *morena* and he will announce that a new woman has come and asks who wants her. Then if someone wants her, he takes her. If nobody volunteers to take her, she will be accepted into the group and when miners come for drinking she will be told that if a certain man wants her that “*Hei uena* [you], take this man and sleep with him.” She has to accept that order without hesitation.³⁵

The Marashea’s control over resident women also impinged on men’s freedoms. Mineworkers not affiliated with the group were forced to pay to visit women in the settlements. Former miner TL remembers:

If one of the miners who was not a member had maybe a woman outside, say a girlfriend or so, the Marashea would say that since that person is not a member he should pay something like a protection fee ... because they are protecting all women outside. So these guys had to pay such fees, and if they didn’t pay, they take the woman away and she’s not going to be yours anymore. It was not like there were some negotiations, they would do what they wanted to do because they were a large group and they could force people into whatever idea they wanted.³⁶

³³ Interview, ‘Me’ ID.

³⁴ Interview, ‘Me’ FD.

³⁵ Interview, KI.

When describing fights between Marashea groups, HM's perception of women as possessions emerges when he compares them to blankets. 'When we were fighting with people if they ran away we were supposed to take their blankets. If we stole blankets then that group would come back for revenge, just like with women.'³⁷ Chiefly privileges were sometimes invoked when new women were brought into the group. 'When these women arrive at our place *morena* chooses first and when he is satisfied he gives some to us.'³⁸ If for some reason, a woman did leave the group, compensation was expected. 'Me' EW's *nyatsi* retired and went back to Lesotho and she moved in with a man who was not affiliated with the Marashea. This caused her great difficulty.

After I started living with a man who was not Lerashea I had to pay a lot of money. My man had to pay R1000 so they would let him stay with me. They also beat him. I ended up hating them because of what they did to me. They came to collect from the man I lived with every time they had a funeral.³⁹

Like male Marashea, women were not allowed to leave the group without permission. When they did a search was almost always mounted, and if they were caught, these women were invariably beaten and sometimes killed. There was an additional risk for women who were kidnapped by a rival gang and then recaptured by their original group as they were sometimes suspected of being complicit in the abduction. In these instances the women were treated as run-aways and punished

³⁶ Interview, TL, Lesotho, 23 April 1998. TL is a former miner, but not Lerashea.

³⁷ Interview, HM.

³⁸ Interview, WL.

³⁹ Interview, 'Me' EW, Soweto, 20 December 1998.

accordingly. Not only were women forbidden to leave the group, their movements were closely monitored to ensure that male Marashea maintained control over their sexuality. To take a lover or even sleep with a man other than one's official *nyatsi* was to invite harsh retribution. This was probably the one offence for which women were most commonly disciplined. Men usually had more than one woman, often under the same roof, an arrangement bitterly resented by some women but one over which they had very little control. 'The man can stay with two women. We are not supposed to complain, if we complain we are punished until we do what he wants.'⁴⁰ LG provides the male perspective: 'A man chooses where to sleep among three women, none of those women can refuse to sleep with me because I would beat her and force her to go to bed with me.'⁴¹

A woman could not choose to renounce her *nyatsi*. 'Only men can decide to leave a woman and take another one, or have both of them.' If she was unfaithful she could be made an example of in a chilling public spectacle. Men were not penalised for sleeping with other women, only for transgressing with a woman of a fellow group member – even then the punishment was not nearly as severe.

I was told that a woman should not sleep with a man other than her own and if found guilty of this crime a woman was beaten to death – they call it *kola* – that means the woman is beaten by everyone around. It is not just the man who stays with her that beats her, but every Marashea including the Lerashea you slept with. As for the man who sleeps with another Lerashea's woman, he is fined maybe R100.⁴²

⁴⁰ Interview, 'Me' RB.

⁴¹ Interview, LG.

⁴² Interview, 'Me' LW.

A few female informants reported a particularly horrible punishment for infidelity. 'Sometimes they even push *molamu* into her vagina as a torture because sleeping with another man is the most terrible crime a woman can commit.'⁴³ Even mere suspicion could result in beatings. 'Me' TW's group in Phiri was being visited by a group from Welkom and the men from Phiri watched their women very closely. 'I went to the store after we had been told not to leave the house. They all beat me – they thought I went to meet a man. We were not allowed to talk to the men from Welkom because our men were jealous.'⁴⁴ Exceptions were made with male consent if the act was remunerative. 'They do not want any man to come close to you unless they agreed that man could use you as his wife – that man must then pay money for being with you.'⁴⁵

Economic resources were controlled and distributed by the men. *Marena* and their committees made financial decisions for the group. The extent of earnings that individual women were allowed to keep depended on their relationships with male partners. Some men appropriated virtually all of the earnings of their *linyatsi*, while others shared more equitably. 'Me' OW split her earnings with her man: 'One week I brewed *joala* and sold it for him, the next week the money comes to me.'⁴⁶ 'Me' TF explains the finances of prostitution.

They send you to attract men at the mines.... At the mine you are proposed to by a man and you are allowed to bring him back to the *mekhukhu* [informal settlement], but after his departure you have to give

⁴³ Interview, 'Me' KW.

⁴⁴ Interview, 'Me' TW.

⁴⁵ Interview, 'Me' RB.

⁴⁶ Interview, 'Me' OW.

money.... Marashea are moving all around on the weekends and that is the time to have sex with other men.... There are old women staying there and if you try to keep that money for yourself they will tell Marashea that the man was there, so then they want the money and if you do not give it, they beat you.⁴⁷

Kidnapped women were not allowed to keep any money for a long while, as it was feared they might utilise it to escape.

The Culture of Kidnapping

Women joined Marashea voluntarily for reasons elaborated in the previous chapter, but, unlike men, some women were kidnapped and forced into the society. There is a tradition of elopement and abduction in Lesotho that is traceable to the precipitous rise in *bohali* (bridewealth) prices in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s and 1930s, *chobeliso* – the practice of eloping with a man while appearing to offer resistance – ‘became almost commonplace as *bohali* spiralled out of the reach of most men.’⁴⁸ *Chobeliso* was transformed by Marashea men who did not require a woman’s acquiescence to abduct her. In some instances, especially when a woman was kidnapped from one group to another, the act was prearranged with her consent, but this seems to have made up a minority of such cases.⁴⁹ Women were occasionally abducted from Lesotho and taken back to South Africa by Marashea groups that had returned to bury

⁴⁷ Interview, ‘Me’ TF.

⁴⁸ Maloka, ‘Canteens, Brothels and Labour Migrancy’, p. 103. See also, Bonner, ‘Russians on the Reef’, p. 170.

their dead,⁵⁰ but migrant women already in South Africa were the usual victims. One of Bonner's informants explained that these women were chosen for their vulnerability as they lacked the protection of a chief or male kin in the urban setting.⁵¹ However, even attached women were not safe from Marashea as a single man was easily overpowered by a group of armed Russians.

African newspapers in the 1950s and 1960s featured accounts of women abducted by Marashea. A 1958 story that chronicled a kidnapping, declared that the woman 'was a victim of the Russian habit of simply taking a woman if they want her whether she is married or not.' The kidnappers reportedly told the victim's mother that 'If a Russian liked a woman he took her, even if she was married. If her husband interfered, they would kill him.'⁵² Similar sentiments were expressed by informants. SM, active in the 1940s and 1950s, remembers that 'Maybe a woman from Lesotho is visiting her husband and we would kidnap her at the train station.... [If] we find you with your wife you were given the choice of being killed or to give up that woman. We would take her to our place and give her to one of our members to marry.'⁵³ Especially sensational were those occasions when armed bands of Russians surrounded and broke into houses to carry away the women they wanted.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Both male and female informants stated that women sometimes assisted in their own 'abduction' when they had been having an affair with a man from another group.

⁵⁰ Interview, Detective M, Lesotho.

⁵¹ Bonner, 'Desirable or undesirable Basotho women', p. 249.

⁵² *World*, 2 July 1958.

⁵³ Interview, SM.

⁵⁴ See *Post*, 30 December 1962 and 29 March 1964 for two such accounts.

Although newspaper coverage of such events was limited to the early days of the Marashea on the Rand, kidnapping has remained an integral part of Borashea. A veteran from Thabong, who retired in 1989, reflects fondly that 'It was nice because if I loved a woman from another place I just invited my friends and we would go there and kidnap that woman.'⁵⁵ And just as in earlier years, OB's more recent account of acquiring a woman illustrates that men were often helpless to protect their women from Marashea.

One of the best things was that I was given a woman to marry. I took her from another man who was not Lerashea. I was at Vaal Reefs under the control of Mokhemele and they told that woman that I am her husband and she is my wife.... Her husband did not have a chance to fight for her because he was not Lerashea and I was with a group of people.⁵⁶

Rather than preying exclusively on vulnerable women, Marashea groups often specifically targeted women from rival factions. Such activities inevitably led to violence and, judging by many accounts, were the foremost cause of internecine fighting within the Marashea.

The earliest recorded Matsieng-Molapo clashes in Vereeniging in the 1940s were reportedly due to 'the abduction by a member of the Matsieng clan of a woman of the Molapo clan.'⁵⁷ Newspapers commented on the propensity of the Marashea to raid and counter raid for women. In 1957, the *World* carried an editorial on Marashea clashes that were plaguing the Sotho zones of what was to become Soweto. The editorial declared:

⁵⁵ Interview, KF, Lesotho, 25 November 1998.

⁵⁶ Interview, OB, Lesotho, 4 February 1999.

⁵⁷ CAD, NTS 4179 file 33/313, Native Commissioner, Vereeniging to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 6 December 1946.

‘We learn that one of the causes of fights between these factions is the indecent habit of woman-grabbing.’⁵⁸ As the Marashea extended into the Free State so did the internecine battles that often revolved around women. A 1960 clash in Thabong was said to have begun when ‘A member of one of the two groups was accused of having an affair with the wife of one of the members of the other group.’⁵⁹ Oral evidence indicates that kidnapping has been a common activity throughout Marashea history and remains a cause of fighting between contemporary groups.

During the days when Marashea groups would formally agree on a date and place for a battle, women were sometimes the reward for victory. NN’s account illustrates the status of women as prizes in these factional battles. ‘We had our women but if one of our members did not have one we would write a letter to Matsieng challenging them to a fight and if we defeated them we would take their wives and that was how those who did not have wives obtained them.’⁶⁰ The symbolic importance of women to the Marashea rivalries is explained by a veteran of the fighting on the Rand in the 1950s:

Women are the cause of fighting in Marashea. One group of Marashea will see a beautiful woman and they will want her or their *morena* will want her. Then they will have to fight that group to get that woman. And if they are successful the group that lost her will want her back so the fight will continue until one group decides to stop or is defeated entirely.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *World*, 5 January 1957.

⁵⁹ FSA, PNV, FS1302/vol 1/21, Major, District Command, Welkom to Deputy Commissioner, Bloemfontein, 3 June 1960.

⁶⁰ Interview, NN.

⁶¹ Interview, MR, Lesotho, 6 July 1998.

The trophy aspect is emphasised by the fact that groups often kidnapped women renowned for their beauty or singing talent.⁶² Other favourite targets were the women of faction leaders. As the passage below indicates, such acts were deliberate provocations designed to demonstrate contempt for a rival group.

Marashea of Molapo came to our place and kidnapped our *morena's nyalsi*. They took her to the mountain and bound her for three days. On Friday we rode in the taxis and attacked those people in order to rescue the *nyalsi* of our *morena*. We found her on the mountain bound and unable to speak but we managed to come back with her ... she had not been given food or water for three days.⁶³

The unchanging nature of disputes over women is illustrated by the following two accounts. The description of a raid and counter raid for a woman on the 1950s Rand is remarkably similar to a 1990s battle near Carletonville. 'Me' OW joined Marashea in the late 1940s and vividly recalls a kidnapping-related battle.

The alarm was raised and when we came out we saw a large truck full of household equipment. We were told those things belonged to a woman who had been kidnapped from Germiston. She had been brutally beaten. She had come all the way through Johannesburg naked and beaten. Guards were posted and also spies in Germiston because they expected those people to follow them.... She arrived at night. In the morning we were worried that something was going to happen. In the afternoon I heard whistles blowing from the bush at the back of our place. We scattered and ran as we heard gunshots from that side. The men tried to drive away with her in the truck but they were stopped and had to run away. When we came back we found that five of the Marashea from Germiston had been killed but they managed to take back that woman as well as all her belongings.⁶⁴

⁶² Coplan notes that famous singer Puseletso Seema, who was Lerashea, was kidnapped numerous times. *Cannibals*, p. 197.

⁶³ Interview, DG.

⁶⁴ Interview, 'Me' OW.

A woman, who was herself kidnapped and held captive in a squatter camp near Khutsong in the early 1990s, describes a raid in which an aggrieved group sought revenge against rivals who had kidnapped one of their woman – Moelo.

One day I heard a whistle blowing far away. I did not know what it meant because I was still new to Marashea but then somebody raised the alarm saying that there was another group of Marashea attacking us. They came and surrounded the camp while others went from house to house searching for her. It was easy for them because there were only a few men; most had gone to Randfontein for a stokvel. Those who remained resisted but they didn't stand a chance and some of them were killed. After about thirty minutes Moelo was found and taken to their taxis which they had parked some way from the camp.... Houses were damaged and destroyed, I have never seen such an atrocity.⁶⁵

Clearly the danger involved and the losses suffered in initial raids and recovery expeditions outweighed the material value of any one woman. These activities have been a key element in the struggles between Marashea factions. When a group was raided and its women abducted, a failure to respond quickly and decisively indicated weakness. Not only was reclamation a matter of prestige; power relations between bitter rivals were at stake. It is important to remember that it has never been the goal of Marashea groups to eradicate rival gangs, rather a defining element of Borashea was demonstrating supremacy and gaining boasting rights within the society. In this way successfully kidnapping a prestigious woman from a rival gang was as significant a victory as routing opponents in battle. Indeed the first usually preceded the latter, in effect adding insult to injury. It is here that the symbolic value of women comes to the fore. For Marashea,

⁶⁵ Interview, 'Me' KW.

capturing a high profile woman from a rival group was in many ways analogous to capturing the enemy's colours in nineteenth century European conflicts.

Perceptions and experiences of kidnapping indicate the centrality of gender domination in the Marashea. There is an obvious contrast between the typical, matter of fact attitude of men – ‘When you loved a woman from Ha-Molapo you just kidnapped her without any negotiations. When you were attracted to a woman you just told your members and they would assist you to go and kidnap her’⁶⁶ – and the experiences of women victimised by such actions. ‘Me’ LW was kidnapped in 1992 by a group of Marashea who spotted her at a shebeen in Soweto. They followed ‘Me’ LW to her employer’s house where she worked as a domestic servant and the next day they broke into the house, assaulted and abducted her. She was taken by taxi to a neighbouring township and endured terrible abuse.

My wound [from the initial assault] was so painful but nobody cared and they said they would beat me again. I was told to sleep with that very man who stared at me when we were at the shebeen. I think he is the one who suggested my kidnapping. I was told that if I tried to run away they would go and burn all my relatives’ homes at my home [in Lesotho] and kill my family. Hei! *ntate*, Marashea are not good people. We had sex right there, sleeping one couple right next to the other.⁶⁷

After about a year ‘Me’ LW’s mother learned of her whereabouts and came from Lesotho to beg for her release, fabricating a story about a death in the family. The leader allowed her to go back to Lesotho for the funeral and LW never returned.

⁶⁶ Interview, HM.

⁶⁷ Interview, ‘Me’ LW.

'Me' KW was abducted from her husband's house in Bekkersdal in 1991 during a visit from Lesotho. Her husband had a Russian friend who visited them and whose secret advances 'Me' KW refused. Her abductor waited to strike until her husband worked the night shift. After she had been settled in a Marashea camp she was required to brew and sell beer, handing over the proceeds to the man who had engineered her kidnapping. She secreted away small amounts until she had enough for taxi fare to the Lesotho border. Eventually her captors relaxed their vigilance and 'Me' KW was allowed to go into town accompanied by other women. On the pretext of going to the toilet she managed to separate from the women watching her and quickly ran to the taxi rank where she boarded a taxi to Lesotho. Just like 'Me' LW her ordeal with the gang had been horrific.

At night as I was sleeping alone I heard a noise at the door and then about ten men burst in. They woke me up harshly and covered my mouth with a scarf to prevent me from screaming. They threw me into a bakkie [pick-up truck] and drove me to a place I didn't know. When we arrived, M raped me and then I was locked in a house. I was always guarded by women and was tied with a rope. M would come at any time to rape me and then leave. The worse part was that I was beaten like a dog on the way and was badly hurt, but no one cared and my wounds were not even treated. I was unable to wash myself or even eat but no one helped me. Instead he just came and forced me to have sex by undressing me and doing what he wanted and then just leaving me undressed. I stayed with them for a year without a chance to escape.⁶⁸

To terrorise kidnapped women into submission the Marashea resorted to intimidation and violence. When asked what prevented women who had been abducted from attempting to escape, KI responded:

⁶⁸ Interview, 'Me' KW.

She is told that she must not run away or she will be killed. But above all she is guarded by men and women who don't work. If she is wild we beat her so that she is unable to walk for several weeks. If she then looks calm we keep her tied with a rope for many days and then we untie her but still watch her closely.⁶⁹

Much the same story is told by 'Me' ID: 'Some Marashea men and women are assigned to watch her and they are always with her. She is never allowed anywhere alone until they are satisfied that she has been tamed. She is not even allowed to go to dances until she has proven that she has accepted being with the group.'⁷⁰ LG recounted an episode in which his group in Soweto kidnapped some women from the Free State who managed to get away from their captors after some time. 'They escaped but we found them at Merafe Station. One of them was thrown on the train tracks and her leg was cut off by the train. She was sent to the hospital and the others were severely beaten.'⁷¹

Gender Roles

Marashea men managed the groups. They made the major decisions, negotiated with police and lawyers, dictated and dispensed discipline, and engaged in the violence that publicly defined Borashea.

Women were the economic backbone of Marashea but they also fulfilled a number of other roles, primarily in a support capacity. The relationship between women, mineworkers and Marashea that remains the lifeblood of the organisation is explored in

⁶⁹ Interview, KI.

⁷⁰ Interview, 'Me' ID.

Chapter 7 and their auxiliary roles will also be examined as part of the groups' survival strategies, so a brief outline here will suffice. As we have seen, long term female members guarded kidnapped women and of course, women did all the domestic work. In addition, the women of Marashea often acted as messengers and couriers when men were jailed and at trial. On such occasions they would take their male compatriots food and clothing that contained *moriana* to assist them in winning their cases. Crowds of women also provided public support for men on trial by appearing at the courthouse dressed in blankets that were the insignia of their particular group.⁷² Women encouraged the men as they prepared for battle, singing their praises and participating in rituals to bring the men good fortune. The *famo* dance was instrumental in this regard as Coplan has noted. '[It] was both a lusty good time and a preparation for battle, at which women did and said everything possible to fire up their men.'⁷³ 'Me' TF remembers that when the men were 'going to fight they put their *melamu* down and we as women take our clothes off to show our breasts and jump over the *melamu*.'⁷⁴

Hiding men's weapons was an important responsibility. When groups of Marashea were travelling on trains or by taxi and were at risk of being stopped by the police, women routinely carried the guns in their undergarments. When police raided Marashea houses and settlements, women were also responsible for concealing weapons. 'We hide their weapons especially when we travel on taxis, the guns are hidden under our

⁷¹ Interview, LG.

⁷² *World*, 6 March 1962.

⁷³ Coplan, *Cannibals*, p. 188.

breasts. We even cross the Lesotho border like that because the police do not normally search women.⁷⁵

In the years before guns became commonplace, Marashea women sometimes took an active part in street battles. KP remembers the crucial role played by women in a victorious encounter.

We fought the Zulu and Mapondo together at Meadowlands. We defeated them because we were using bricks and our women helped us. They wanted to force us out of our houses so we chased them and when one of them would fall the women would throw bricks at him and many were badly injured.⁷⁶

Both male and female informants reported that women only fought in defence of their homes. 'When our men were fighting we would help them. We threw stones at their enemies but that only happened when our place was attacked.'⁷⁷ Debby Bonnin notes that women played a similar role in the recent fighting in KwaZulu-Natal.

While it may have been primarily men who were directly involved with the fighting, this did not necessarily mean that women were unconcerned with it, but they operated in a supportive capacity, which did not necessarily challenge or shift their traditional gender roles.⁷⁸

Marashea women engaged in a variety of income generating activities. Their primary means of support was beer brewing, but many also smuggled and sold dagga.

⁷⁴ Interview, 'Me' TF.

⁷⁵ Interview, 'Me' ID. A Lerashea woman was given a six month suspended sentence for concealing a gun following a battle on the trains between rival Marashea groups on the East Rand in 1971. *World*, 22 July 1971.

⁷⁶ Interview, KP.

⁷⁷ Interview, 'Me' MG also MC, Lesotho, 30 May 1998.

and worked as hawkers and domestic servants; a few even worked in factories. MB reports that 'Most of the money-making activities are performed by women. They sell beer for us, run our stokvels, sell dagga and some who do not have partners amongst us works as prostitutes in order to bring money to the group.'⁷⁹ Some of the typical ways in which Marashea women supported themselves and the group are listed by 'Me' XL:

They were hawkers at the mines. They worked at people's shops, they sold *joala*, peaches and mealie cobs. I used to go to Magaliesburg to buy meal and sell it at the station.... Some worked at the factories but not many because they did not have Ids [documents to show they had the legal right to work and reside in South Africa]. Many did washing and cleaning.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

There has been little change in the status of Marashea women over the years. If anything women who have catered to mineworkers in the rural Free State and West Rand have been more prone to fall under the control of the Marashea. Migrant Basotho women naturally gravitated to informal settlements populated by Basotho where the language was familiar and there was the possibility of meeting relatives or friends from their home areas. These camps were run by Marashea and the women who settled there became Marashea. They were usually allowed to keep some of the proceeds from their earnings but they paid rent/protection fees, contributed to a fund for burial and legal

⁷⁸ Debby Bonnin, 'Claiming Spaces, Changing Places: Political Violence and Women's Protests in KwaZulu-Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 2, (2000), p. 310.

⁷⁹ Interview, MB, Lesotho, July 1998.

⁸⁰ Interview, 'Me' XL, Soweto, 19 December 1998.

expenses and were subject to group, that is to say male, discipline. Their business and personal lives all took place within the confines of a Russian controlled area. Marashea women on the Rand were probably not as constrained as the women in rural shack settlements because they had greater occupational diversity and would not have been monitored as closely. Thus they almost certainly had more opportunities to manage their finances and engage in personal relationships beyond group scrutiny.

Life as Marashea was harsh for all members, but more so for women who had to contend with male violence as a fundamental condition of group life. A few relatively privileged women exercised a greater degree of agency than their less fortunate counterparts. However, even these women were forced to submit to the male conceptualisation of gender relations and abide by group regulations designed to ensure their subordination. In its most heinous form, gender oppression in the Marashea was no better than slavery. Women were abducted, beaten and raped into submission and held as captives. Furthermore, the practice of fighting over women as a group display of masculinity has resulted in a great deal of bloodshed. This gendered violence has been a definitive feature of Borashea from its inception to the present day and has, to a large extent, determined the history and activities of the society.

CHAPTER 5

MAKING A LIVING: SURVIVAL IN SOUTH AFRICA

We called ourselves that name because we knew that Russians were those people who were fighting with the world. That's why we called ourselves Russians. We took that part of Russians – Marashea – because we said we are fighting the world.¹

Over the course of its fifty-year history the Marashea has been faced with a formidable array of obstacles to its survival. As black, foreign, often illegal migrants partially dependent on criminal activities, members of the Marashea have carved out an existence in hostile environments. They developed strategies to deal with a state dedicated to the maintenance of white domination, a police force tasked with subjugating the black population, a justice system stacked against blacks, an economic climate inimical to black advancement and the enmity of various black South African groups. The resourcefulness of the Marashea supports the argument made throughout the thesis regarding the limitations of the resistance framework. For example, the very nature of Marashea-police interactions, characterised by shifting alliances, situational co-operation and occasional episodes of conflict, highlights the folly of categorising the Marashea as either resisters or collaborators. Moreover, Russian relations with local residents and surrounding communities underscore the inability of the apartheid regime to effectively administer urban African life. The Marashea were able to appeal to township and squatter camp residents specifically because the police did little to combat crime in black

areas. The Marashea gangs' success over the years is attributable to their flexibility and adaptability in the face of changing conditions.

Economics

Marashea have to make money for living. Whatever comes their way they use it to gain money.²

As we have seen, Marashea men on the Rand prior to 1963 were usually engaged in waged work on the mines, in secondary industries or in the commercial sector. In fact, Guy and Thabane claim that 'there was no income to be derived from one's activities with *Ma-Rashea*'.³ When their informant Rantoa was out of work he robbed as a member of a separate gang. Bonner's broader study led him to conclude that while most 1950s Russians on the Rand were employed, 'from a relatively early stage a section of the Russians remained unemployed ... and it may have been they who levered the Russians' general propensity for violence into more anti-social and personally remunerative directions.'⁴ The 1963 legislation, coupled with the exhaustion of the gold mines around Johannesburg, forced the 'Russians on the Reef' to diversify their economic activities as they simply could not rely on obtaining waged jobs. Non-mineworker Marashea in the Free State and West Rand were almost all *malofa* – those without formal employment. These men functioned as squatter lords, collecting rent and protection fees and

¹ Interview, SC.

² Interview, KI.

³ Guy and Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea', p. 440.

overseeing the women who supplied liquor and commercial sex to mineworkers in the camps adjacent to the mines. However, in the absence of waged work outside the mines, many Marashea men were compelled to find alternate ways of generating income and some developed a degree of financial dependence on more visible criminal activities.

With the exception of *marena* and perhaps a few of their closest advisors, individuals did not make money simply by being Marashea – no salaries were paid. The income generated from protection fees, dances, *stokvels*, and mercenary endeavours went into the central treasury, as did fines and membership dues. These funds supported the *marena* and were allocated for group transport, legal and burial expenses, for bribery, to purchase guns and to pay traditional doctors. The sale of liquor was almost certainly the primary source of most groups' funds. Inspector de Kock remembers that a Marashea settlement located near Vaal Reefs purchased considerable amounts of liquor each month, which they then resold to mineworkers. 'At that time when the mines were full, the delivery of beer ... was R40,000 per month. Now we're talking about the 1970s and R40,000 was a lot of money.'⁵ The profits from such an undertaking would have been substantial.

The basic economic unit of Marashea was the household and each man and the woman or women he stayed with were responsible for their own upkeep. KI explains: 'An individual Lerashea together with his *nyatsi* has his own ways of making money which he keeps. As for the group – *stokvels*, contributions, protection fees and fines are for the

⁵ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 180.

group and the *morena*.⁵⁶ When jobs were plentiful on the Rand most men were able to live on their wages, along with whatever their *linyatsi* brought in as domestic servants, brewers and prostitutes. When jobs became more difficult to obtain, both around Johannesburg and in the rural mining areas, men had to become more entrepreneurial. This sometimes meant engaging in blatantly predatory practices, especially robbery, but also branching out into the informal sector. The ways in which Marashea men raised money can be divided into two basic categories: monies raised through violence which usually involved a collective effort as Marashea; and those accruing from entrepreneurial activities, including illegal practices, that were primarily individual initiatives.

A limited range of options existed for Marashea men who were not employed in waged work. Women were expected to raise money but a man could not always depend on this. Obviously, 'loafers' needed money to live, and they were also under pressure to pay their membership dues as forfeiture usually resulted in a beating. HL testifies that this provided the impetus for stock theft. 'Every man must pay his contribution. Every Thursday he must pay. Those who were not working used to go and steal cattle and sheep so they could pay the contribution.'⁵⁷ One popular alternative was selling dagga. KI, who worked as a miner, supplemented his income in this way.

I used to sell dagga with the woman I was staying with. She would go to Lesotho to buy big bags of dagga and smuggle it into South Africa. My role was to take this dagga into the mine hostel and sell it there. I had a friend who was a mine security guard and I would enter when he was on

⁵ Interview, SAPS Inspector Dan de Kock, Potchefstroom, 7 June 1999.

⁶ Interview, KI.

⁷ Interview, HL.

duty at the gate. I only gave him R50 to take in 20 litres of dagga that I packed into matchboxes and sold for R2 each. I made a lot of money that way.⁸

Many *malofa* forged economic partnerships with mineworkers. Miners who stole gold or diamonds entrusted Marashea on the outside to peddle it for them.

[T]hose who have connections with those who work at the gold plant ... would buy some raw stuff and refine it on their own and sell it. In Thabong most of the Marashea make their living selling gold. Some are rich, now they have bought taxis and most of them are owners of Majakathata Taxi Association.⁹

DS reports that he was the intermediary in a lucrative network: 'I was involved in diamond dealing. The miners brought diamonds and I was an agent between the buyers who were white people and the suppliers who were miners. I negotiated the prices.'¹⁰ It appears, however, that such dealings were individual initiatives rather than organised group activities. The Russians were well placed to acquire and transport gold and diamonds because of their connections with the mines and their involvement in the taxi industry, but the extent to which different groups participated in the illegal trade is difficult to ascertain. Although gold and diamonds were the normal proceeds from mines, GB spent two years in jail for selling copper he had obtained from miners.¹¹

⁸ Interview, KI.

⁹ Interview, WL.

¹⁰ Interview, DS. More Marashea were involved in the illicit gold trade because of the numbers of Basotho miners on the gold mines. Most Marashea who dealt in diamonds acquired the stones in Lesotho and smuggled them into South Africa for sale.

¹¹ Interview, GB.

Miners were an important market for Marashea entrepreneurs. Men visited the mines to hawk their wares and relied on mineworkers who frequented the settlements on weekends to buy their products.

We sell clothes to the miners on the compound.... Some buy and sell things like saddles. I remember one old man who was Lerashea. He bought saddles from Johannesburg and sold them to miners who took them home. Marashea do whatever they can to get money. Some have small shops and others are singers and they make money from that music – from concerts and from selling tapes.¹²

A number of Marashea have been involved in the taxi industry. As mentioned above, Majakathata Taxi Association in particular is known to have Marashea affiliations. Some Marashea groups ran money-lending operations but this does not seem to have been a popular activity.¹³

There is a darker side to the economics of the Marashea, whose reputation as thugs and assassins is not wholly without foundation. Despite the claims by many veterans that Borashea opposed robbing and victimising ordinary people, evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. These contradictions may, to some extent, reflect the heterogeneity of the Marashea. Different groups had different policies and engaged in different activities. Some *marena* seem to have enforced strict injunctions against robbery and assault while others had no such compunction. There is no doubt that some Marashea groups have reaped financial gains by engaging in robberies, assassinations and hiring out as 'muscle.'

¹² Interview, KI. Two Marashea interviewed for this thesis are recording artists.

Johannesburg newspapers are littered with dozens of references to assaults and robberies conducted by Marashea and police reports indicate that Russians were also involved in robberies in the Free State.¹⁴ Oral evidence confirms that some Marashea committed muggings and break-ins as a matter of course. As with Rantoa, it is likely that some men participated in criminal activities as individuals separate from the group; however, it is evident that members took advantage of their numbers and strength to rob and kill collectively as Marashea.

Marashea robberies have followed two general patterns. Looting rival Russian settlements has been a favourite activity. Successful attacks were concluded by wholesale plundering. LG reports that after one such raid on a squatter camp, 'We came back with women, televisions and other household articles.'¹⁵ Additionally, common people were robbed and mugged. Some *malofa* made a career of robbery, as 'Me' LW relates:

Every Friday Marashea go for what they call *ho tsoara poho* [to get hold of the bull – a euphemism for violent robbery], where they go to a certain place to break in and rob – money, property and especially clothes. These

¹³ 'Me' RB reports that Tsotsi Raliemere, the leader of Matsieng in Phiri, gave out 'soft loans' to people in the community and a long time mineworker on Harmony Mine near Virginia mentioned that Marashea engaged in money lending within the compound.

¹⁴ I have uncovered 29 newspaper reports that mention Russian involvement in robberies (distinct from fights, assaults, public violence and murder) from 1949-1970 on the Rand. Archival documents paint a similar picture. Free State Russians are mentioned in police and mining reports primarily for robbing mineworkers and security at Harmony Mine stated that Russians were feared because they were known to assault and rob mineworkers off mine premises. For example a 1972 report from Vaal Reefs characterised Russians as 'thugs ... who derive their income from illicit liquor selling, prostitution and robbery.' CAD, KKD 2/1/8, file N1/9/2 (7), A.N. Shand, Manager, West Division, Vaal Reefs Exploration and Mining Company to Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Klerksdorp, 19 February, 1973.

¹⁵ Interview, LG.

clothes were given to us women to wash even if they were stained with blood.¹⁶

Marashea men tell stories of how they went out in groups searching for victims to rob. SM states that 'because we were not working we would rob people on pay-day, taking their clothes and money ... we would see a person at the station and ask him where he was from, then we would ask him for money and if he didn't give it to us we would beat him.'¹⁷ Marashea also augmented their wardrobes through robbery. 'Our clothes came from other people because if you were wearing beautiful clothes we would stop you and take them from you.'¹⁸ And contrary to their image as ferocious fighters, KL states that, 'We went on the night trains to rob people of their luggage, especially women.'¹⁹ In SM's case, one of the robberies backfired.

One day we took a box from a train that was going to Johannesburg. The train was slowly going up a hill and we climbed on it and pushed a big box off. We loaded it onto a truck and took it to a house, locked the door and opened the box. That was when we found that it contained a snake going to the zoo. We were afraid and shouting and there was no chance to open the door and the people outside heard us trying to escape. The police came and we were all arrested.²⁰

¹⁶ Interview, 'Me' LW.

¹⁷ Interview, SM.

¹⁸ Interview, PK.

¹⁹ Interview, KL.

²⁰ Interview, SM.

Occasionally, Marashea would hold up stores and restaurants, but this was not a routine practice.²¹

More commonly, Marashea were hired to intimidate or kill people. The *World* characterised the 1950s gangs on the Rand as ‘won’t-work Basuto Russians who have made a profession of killing and fighting. For a small fee they will go and attack, kill and cause damage to an area.’²² Intimidation was obviously cheaper and less hazardous than assassination. SO describes how Marashea terrorised their appointed targets.

When we found that person we would take him to an isolated area and frighten him. We told him that we were going to kill him and we would ask him about the trouble with the person who hired us and we told him that that man was our brother. We would then beat him and put him in the boot of the car and drop him near his house. We warned him never to interfere with that man again or we would kill him.²³

PK states that ‘If you want us to kill someone, it depends on how hungry we are,’²⁴ but for the right price, some Marashea would do contract murders.

If you want to have someone killed, you hire Marashea to do that job for you and they will kill that person.... Because that is a tough job that can send someone to prison we ask R5000 but sometimes we negotiate the price. We are usually hired by business people to kill their rivals.²⁵

²¹ OB described an incident in which he and some fellow Marashea robbed a shebeen at sword point. In 1968 one Michael Nhlapo was sentenced to hang for his role in the shooting death of a white merchant in Johannesburg. It was reported that Nhlapo fired the fatal shots during a robbery committed by five Russian gang members. *World*, 9 August, 1968.

²² *World*, 24 May, 1958.

²³ Interview, SO.

²⁴ Interview, PK.

²⁵ Interview, MM.

People in Lesotho knew that Marashea provided this service. 'Even in Lesotho if someone wants to move you out of his way he can hire Marashea to come and kill you.'²⁶

Marashea have a history of acting as mercenaries in taxi conflicts. In the 1980s, Molapo from Germiston and Matsieng from Phiri, already fierce rivals, backed competing taxi associations in a drawn out and bloody conflict. During his study of the migrant taxi trade Leslie Bank followed these events.

Running gun battles between the competing gangs inside the townships were rife and I collected numerous case studies of taxi owners who had had their vehicles plugged with bullet holes and who had witnessed the death of gangsters and friends in broad daylight on the streets.²⁷

In the beginning the Marashea were mere hirelings but over time they extended their influence and came to dominate Majakathata.²⁸ In 1991, one of Bank's informants explained:

The *Ma-Rashea* now runs this association. They are not people who have been paid for a service. They now have their own taxis given to them by the association. That is how they are paid now. When they arrive in Welkom or QwaQwa, they simply take their vehicles to the front of the queue and load them straight away. No-one is brave enough to stop them. You dare not let the *Ma-Rashea* go hungry!²⁹

Taxi wars continue unabated in many areas of South Africa and because many Marashea have a direct stake in the taxi business, they inevitably become embroiled in taxi disputes.

²⁶ Interview, DG.

²⁷ Bank, 'Making of the QwaQwa "Mafia"?', p. 84.

²⁸ It is common knowledge in Lesotho, and the South African townships served by Majakathata, that the association is run by Marashea.

²⁹ Bank, 'A Culture of Violence', p. 134.

Even those not directly involved can be hired as muscle.³⁰ For example, in a 1990 conflict between N1 Speedy Taxi Organisation and Muhahlwule Taxi Organisation in Kutlwanong township (Odendaalsrus), a group of Marashea was reportedly hired to attack the members of Speedy. Several people were killed and the house of a prominent Speedy owner was burned down.³¹

Finally, gambling was a very popular pastime that is almost invariably mentioned when Marashea are asked how *malofa* made money. It seems that many Marashea were habitual dice players (some also played cards and bet on horse races) but with the exception of a very few sufficiently lucky or skilled players it is difficult to envision people supporting themselves through gambling.

Police Relations

Given their participation in criminal activities and the day-to-day regulation and harassment to which all Africans were subjected, the Marashea came into frequent contact with the police. As will be discussed in later chapters, the police and different Marashea groups occasionally worked together against a common antagonist (typically one with ANC affiliations). The state did not perceive the Marashea as a subversive group that posed a threat to its authority. And, for all the violence in which the Marashea was involved, whites were very rarely victimised. On occasion, the police

³⁰ Interview, BM.

³¹ Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression, *Monthly Reports*, November 1990, University of the Witwatersrand, pp. 10-11.

persecuted specific Russian factions; however, the Marashea's value as vigilantes, especially from the 1970s when nationalist groups began to openly challenge the government, more than compensated for its criminal activities. As a result, while the Marashea was sometimes regarded as a nuisance, the state made no sustained attempt to eradicate the gangs.

Whenever possible, Marashea gangs purchased the assistance of the police through bribery and by acting as informants. To curry favour and make money, the Marashea sometimes assisted the police, occasionally even assassinating police targets. 'They would hire Marashea to kill people they did not like at the location. They would pay Marashea for that.'³² If they were unable to neutralise the police, Marashea typically avoided conflict. When confronted, Marashea members usually fled and even when cornered would often submit to arrest. In desperate situations or when they had the advantage the gangs sometimes chose to fight rather than submit.

The most common method of gaining police assistance was outright bribery and the different groups cultivated specific officers in this manner. Bonner's research revealed that of all the Russians' stratagems for dealing with the police, 'The most favoured was to gain the ear and support of a Basotho [sic] sergeant in the charge office or police station with a view either to incriminating the opposing side or gaining advance notice of arrests.'³³ Oral testimony confirms that this was a popular tactic employed by many

³² Interview, OE, Lesotho, 13 September 1998.

³³ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 183. For example, in 1951 it was alleged that a Corporal Molapo and Sergeant Majola intimidated witnesses who wanted to press

Marashea groups. 'Some police helped the Matsieng group and others helped Molapo depending on which area they lived in.'³⁴ Basotho police were even known to join in the internecine fighting³⁵ and AT reports that police assisted in other ways. 'When Lerashea has a friend who is a policeman he would tell his group and they would call that policeman to come and train them how to use guns so as to help them in their fights.'³⁶

The Marashea also bribed police to assist them with specific situations – often fights with a rival group.

We might work with the police if we realised the other group was stronger. Then we would go to the police and pay a bribe with the money from contributions and tell them to arrest those people so they would be dispersed. If we wanted to defeat them we would go to the police and give them money and the police would use their guns so we could defeat them.³⁷

ML remembers that the police could be hired to get rid of a particularly feared or hated enemy. 'In an incident in Thabong some time ago, Marashea bribed the police to go and help them kill the *morena* of a rival group.... The police came and provided them with a searchlight. He was on the ground hiding and they shot him dead.'³⁸ The Molapo rivals of Tsotsi Raliemere secured his death in a similar manner. They paid the police to arrest

complaints against Marashea. CAD, NTS 7921, file 520/400(12), L.I. Venables, Manager, Non-European Affairs Department to The Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 25 June 1951.

³⁴ Interview, HM.

³⁵ A municipal police officer, along with nine other Marashea, was arrested for his part in a series of robberies and assaults said to have been committed by a Russian gang in Kliptown. *World*, 25 June 1970.

³⁶ Interview, AT, Lesotho, 15 May 1998.

³⁷ Interview, SO. Informants supplied many accounts similar to this one.

Tsotsi at Turfontein racetrack and hand him over. Tsotsi was then tortured and killed by Molapo Marashea.³⁹ The Marashea also enlisted the aid of the police for more routine procedures. 'If we had cases we could go to them and give them money to destroy the information.'⁴⁰

As Brewer has pointed out, the SAP had insufficient resources to adequately police black residential areas, were poorly trained and lacked investigative skills.⁴¹ It is hardly surprising that they relied so heavily on informants (and coerced confessions). Some Marashea worked closely with the police in this capacity, both as individuals and on behalf of their groups. These arrangements have been a consistent theme in Marashea-police relations over the decades. PL, a Matsieng *morena* on the Rand in the late 1950s and 1960s, was approached by the police to be an informer.

They gave me a letter to show I was a police informer and I was not to be arrested by the police. If I showed them the letter, they left me alone. I helped them to arrest the most wanted tsotsis and robbers. I knew them because we played dice together. They were playing with us because we as Marashea depended on dice to have something to live on. There were many tsotsis in that group so I helped Frederick catch those tsotsis. I did not do that for nothing. When I helped them catch a tsotsi the police gave me money.⁴²

³⁸ Interview, ML.

³⁹ Multiple interviews.

⁴⁰ Interview, MM.

⁴¹ Brewer, *Black and Blue*.

⁴² Interview, PL.

This association had multiple benefits for PL and his group. Not only was it lucrative, PL's position also allowed him to finger rivals and enemies for arrest, a situation he was quick to take advantage of.

Inspector de Kock 'managed' a group of Marashea in the Free State from the 1970s to the early 1990s to their mutual benefit. The implications of this alliance were far reaching. De Kock's main contact was Mokhemele, a powerful Matsieng *morena* who also had ties to the infamous Bureau of State Security (BOSS).⁴³

Mokimbelele [Mokhemele] started things at first. He just called me one day. I was always working to get crime down so we always caught a lot of people for trespassing and so on. We took in 80-100 of them in a weekend just to get the crime down, because all the people were saying the MaRussians were doing murders. If there was something wrong they said it was the MaRussians. After I worked about a year like that catching them, Mokimbelele invited me to – you could say his kraal. And we talked and we came to an agreement that if there was something wrong I could contact him and tell him what's wrong and he would hand the criminals to me.

Question: So you reached an agreement that he would help you – what would you do for him?

No, from my side I didn't make any agreement, but as soon as he started helping me it wasn't necessary for me to arrest all those guys to get information. If the crime is down it isn't necessary to do all that work.⁴⁴

In return for their co-operation Mokhemele's group was allowed to operate without interference. MB's observation indicates the extent to which some Marashea were given *carte blanche* by the police.

⁴³ See Chapter 8.

⁴⁴ Interview, de Kock.

The police gave me a gun to do away with the tsotsis and other gangs in the locations. The police realised that we were the strongest movement that could help them stop crime. They became our friends and even came to our feasts where they would celebrate with us.⁴⁵

Current Marashea state that they enjoy congenial relations with the police.

We are friends these days, we do not fight. Let me tell you one thing. If the police want to arrest one of us here they just tell me – We want to arrest so and so in connection with a certain crime. I tell them to come and take him. Even if he has hidden somewhere I order him to come and surrender to the police. All in all we work together with the police.⁴⁶

Of course, not all police were corrupt and even if they had been the Marashea lacked the resources to purchase blanket immunity. As a result, conflict with the police was inevitable. Oral testimony, police reports and newspaper accounts are all replete with stories of fights between Russians and the police. The Marashea were particularly aggressive with African police. In Springs on the East Rand, for instance, nine municipal police were attacked by about fifty Marashea when they entered a house and demanded permits from the occupants who were staging a party. 'The blackjacks ran for their lives, leaving their bicycles and caps. Three of them were seriously injured and suffered gaping head injuries.'⁴⁷ Municipal police or 'blackjacks' bore the brunt of Marashea assaults because they were present in the townships in greater numbers, were not as well armed as white police (many black police were not issued firearms until the 1970s), and attacks on

⁴⁵ Interview, MB.

⁴⁶ Interview, BM.

⁴⁷ *World*, 27 August 1969.

white officers generated a much more forceful response. That said, white police were not immune from Marashea violence.

Russian assaults were sufficiently common for the SAP to treat seriously a 1956 report that Marashea from Evaton had been hired to attack the municipal police at Kroonstad. Apparently the Evaton Russians had been paid £40 to 'attack the Municipality native constables because they were catching too many natives in the Kroonstad location for possession of illegal kaffir beer.' Railway police were put on alert and commanding officers in neighbouring towns were called out to set up roadblocks and search vehicles going to Kroonstad. The Kroonstad police blocked all the roads leading into the location. Door to door searches were conducted and weapons confiscated following information that resident Africans might be in league with the visiting Russians. As it turned out, several vehicles from Evaton were stopped and turned back and no attack emerged.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the magnitude of their reaction indicates that the police believed in the possibility of a Marashea attack.

The police treated Marashea with caution precisely because they had first hand experience of Russian belligerence. Rantoa relished an incident in which Matsieng had attacked Molapo prisoners in Benoni's magistrates' courts 'forcing the magistrate and other officers of the court into unseemly headlong flight.'⁴⁹ Thus it is not surprising that when a group of Russians showed up at court to lend support to one of their members

⁴⁸ FSA, PNV file 1302/vol. 1/4, Captain Kruger, District Command, No. 23 District to the Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Bloemfontein, 5 November, 1956.

⁴⁹ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 184.

being tried for murder, police armed with sten guns and drawn revolvers surrounded and searched them, locking up those in possession of weapons or without passes.⁵⁰ Marashea-police conflicts were well documented on the Rand but as the groups expanded into the Free State, Russian groups there also fought with the police. In Stilfontein in 1970, a police patrol investigating a stokvel on farm property clashed with Marashea. They were forced to retreat and call reinforcements. A larger police force returned to the scene and engaged in a heated battle with the Russians.⁵¹

Marashea assaults on white police attracted the most attention. In February of 1950 eleven police (seven whites armed with revolvers and 4 Africans) intervened in a conflict between Molapo and Matsieng groups. As they arrived on the scene they were surrounded and attacked by the Molapo contingent. The police retreated, firing as they gave way. Most of the group sustained injuries including Detective Constable du Plessis whose ear was split in two with a battle axe. When they reached safety it became apparent that a Sergeant Notnagel was missing. Once reinforcements arrived the police returned to the scene and discovered his mutilated body.⁵² Notnagel's death sparked an

⁵⁰ *World*, 6 March, 1962.

⁵¹ CAD, KKD 2/1/8, file N1/9/2(5), Bantu Commissioner, Klerksdorp to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Mafikeng, 20 April, 1970. This is one of a number of similar reports contained in police files. It seems that Marashea were quick to attack when they held a large numerical advantage and the police were forced to retreat and return with reinforcements on numerous occasions. CAD, SAP 602 and 532 and FSA, PNV 1302 contain several files detailing such incidents.

⁵² CAD, NTS 7689, file 325/332, Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Commanding Witwatersrand Division to the Commissioner of the SAP, Cape Town, 23 February, 1950. Bonner's informants reported that Notnagel's genitals were hacked off and taken as a trophy. Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 184.

inquiry in the House of Assembly and shortly thereafter sten guns were issued to the Benoni Location Police Station.⁵³ Molapo leader Matsarapane was sentenced to hang for the murder of Notnagel. As he was transported from court, Marashea who had boarded the same train overpowered the guards and secured his release.⁵⁴ In 1958, Brakpan police reportedly 'declared war' on the Marashea after two white policemen and one African constable were injured in a pitched brawl with Russians⁵⁵ and in 1965 Matsieng *morena* Tseule Tsilo became the object of a massive manhunt when he shot three white police officers.⁵⁶

Most confrontations occurred when police attempted to separate groups during fights or to arrest combatants once a fight was finished. Beer and pass raids also led to conflict. Oral testimony indicates that Marashea were selective about confronting the police. If flight was not possible, they occasionally resisted arrest. Maliehe Khoeli, a veteran of dozens of conflicts on the Reef, provided examples of both situations. Following a battle with Zulu antagonists at a railway station, Khoeli and his men were surrounded by police who demanded to search them. The police were outnumbered and the Russians were well armed so rather than surrender, they opened fire and forced the police to retreat.

⁵³ CAD, SAP 397, file 15/21/47, undated memo; CAD, NTS 7689, file 325/332.

⁵⁴ Interview, BH; Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', pp. 184-5. Matsarapane escaped to Lesotho, but then made his way to the Free State where he was informed upon by Matsieng. He was rearrested and hanged in Pretoria.

⁵⁵ *World*, 25 October 1958.

⁵⁶ Tsilo's story will be dealt with at length later in this chapter.

On another occasion, Khoeli's group was trapped by the police after a train battle with Matsieng rivals. During the fight, Khoeli had held a gun to the head of the white engineer to make him stop the train. The police came in hot pursuit and when they caught up with the Marashea, Khoeli's men had already given their guns to women who had boarded taxis back to their homes. Armed only with *melamu*, the Russians had no choice but to submit.⁵⁷

Marashea women also suffered at the hands of the police. Women were arrested and deported or fined for liquor and pass offences, but more seriously were sometimes tortured by the police to reveal the whereabouts of Marashea men. For example, women bore the brunt of police retribution following the murder of a police officer in the mid-1980s by a Matsieng group in Phiri. 'The police took N and me and beat us to get us to tell them where the men were.... They took us to Protea police station and they beat us until I shit myself.'⁵⁸ Several other women reported similar occurrences including electric shocks and on one occasion a woman was put into a sack and thrown into a dam by the police.⁵⁹

Marashea and the Law

The Marashea's manipulation of the justice system was critical to its survival. The gangs depended heavily on lawyers to keep them out of prison and paid them

⁵⁷ These stories are taken from, Litabe, 'Marashea: A Participant's Experience.'

⁵⁸ Interview, 'Me' NL.

⁵⁹ Interviews, 'Me' TW, Soweto, 18 December 1998, also 'Me' MD and 'Me' LW'.

accordingly. Relatively few Russians were imprisoned because they routinely bribed the police, employed excellent legal counsel, intimidated potential witnesses and because the nature of their activities often rendered prosecution difficult. Achieving convictions against individuals involved in large-scale confrontations was problematic. An advocate who represented Marashea in a large number of cases from the 1950s through the 1970s explained that the gangsters typically issued blanket denials of involvement and provided false alibis. The lawyer's job was then to 'dispute identification and we usually got them off without any difficulties.'⁶⁰ Marashea also devised strategies to assist in their own defence, as KF explains: 'If ten of us were arrested we would put the blame on one man and the lawyer would represent that one man instead of all ten.... If such a man is found guilty, he will go to jail for us all but we will collect money to pay his fine.'⁶¹

The different Marashea factions all had their respective lawyers on retainer and the decision to employ representation was made on a case by case basis. 'In Marashea if a member is arrested we meet as men of the council and decide whether or not to get him a lawyer.'⁶² When a member was arrested while on group business, funds were usually allocated for a lawyer. Sometimes there were judgement calls, as related by BM:

There are many cases when we make use of lawyers, like that man you met at CNC ... he has just finished serving five years. It was because of a lawyer that he was given five years instead of twenty or thirty. I sent some of my men to go to a certain place to fetch a certain man to come to me or submit to my orders. Instead of bringing him alive, they decided to kill him. We decided to get them a lawyer because they were sent by the

⁶⁰ Interview, Michael Hodes, Johannesburg, 3 March 1998.

⁶¹ Interview, KF.

⁶² Interview, KI.

group even though they broke the rules. They lost the case in court but because of the lawyer they were sentenced to only five years.⁶³

Almost every man interviewed told of how a lawyer saved him from incarceration or at least reduced his jail time. DB's example is typical:

Once fifteen of us were arrested and the people of Ha-Masupha were also arrested because people were killed. We won that case because of our lawyers. The Molapo people had come from Meadowlands to attack us and the lawyers made it clear we were attacked. The magistrate only fined us because it was bad to kill people and we were warned not to appear in court again.⁶⁴

Because of his ability to speak English, PG acted as his group's liaison with their lawyers and was responsible for handling the legal fund in the 1950s. He dealt with one lawyer in particular, Isaacs, 'the best lawyer in my life' who regularly charged up to £500 for his services. Isaacs delivered value for money especially in the case of a Masupha leader arraigned on murder charges:

[Matsabang] shot about three people dead in the night. We were working together in the General Post Office in Johannesburg. He was arrested and immediately I went to see Isaacs. He paid the bail for him. Really the case was very, very difficult, but he was discharged on those murders.⁶⁵

⁶³ Interview, BM.

⁶⁴ Interview, DB.

⁶⁵ Interview, PG.

Another Matsekha commander claims his group phoned their lawyer prior to pre-arranged conflicts to arrange for him to meet those who had been arrested at the police station to post bail.⁶⁶

A large part of the Marashea's financial resources were spent defending their members in court and each group had a communal fund for this purpose. A search of a Russian commander's room at Harmony Mine in 1956 uncovered a record of such funds.

During May 1956 Mokefi's room was raided and notes of a meeting attended by 29 natives when he was elected leader of the group of Russians were confiscated. A list of names, a copy of which accompanies this, was also found in his possession.... Everyone on the list gave £1 towards legal advice.⁶⁷

Murder cases in particular required expert and expensive legal representation and in such cases groups sometimes called on their brothers from affiliated factions for financial assistance. This was the case in the 1980s when Matsieng members from Phiri were charged with killing a police officer and two Matsieng groups in the Free State contributed several thousand rands for the defence.⁶⁸ When several Marashea were arrested at a single time and the expenses were overwhelming, all people living in the area under that group's control were required to contribute to an emergency fund. Primarily because of good counsel and *moriana* (see below) those involved remember that 'we used to

⁶⁶ Interview, ST, Lesotho, 23 August 1998.

⁶⁷ FSA, PNV, file 1302, vol. 1/27, Deputy Commissioner, Orange Free State to the District Commander, SAP, Welkom, 2 January 1957. The practice of contributing to a communal legal fund was also reported in newspaper stories covering court cases. See for example, *Post*, 12 June, 1966.

⁶⁸ Interview, TS, Soweto, 22 December 1998.

win almost all the cases against our members'⁶⁹ – an assessment substantially supported by archival and newspaper references.⁷⁰ Many Marashea spent significant amounts of time in jail and a handful were hanged; however, without excellent legal representation, the numbers would have been far greater.

Basotho Unity

Despite ferocious internecine fighting a common thread in the history of the Marashea has been the propensity to unite against outside antagonists. Indeed, many veterans insist that Borashea was born of a need to protect Basotho who were being victimised on the Rand. Speaking of these assaults, Rantoa stated that 'This was one of the things that brought Basotho together, that united the Basotho in fighting.'⁷¹ Tsotsis are mentioned in these narratives but it is other ethnically organised gangs that posed the greatest threat. Tsotsis were viewed as cowards who preyed on lone travellers but were unwilling to risk battle with Marashea. Unlike tsotsis, Zulu and Mpondo adversaries organised themselves for combat and engaged Marashea in open confrontations that

⁶⁹ Interview, MC.

⁷⁰ Newspapers and police reports often listed the numbers of men arrested and announced those who were acquitted or released. On a number of occasions all those arrested were discharged because of a lack of evidence. Michael Hodes, for example, successfully argued that none of the 13 men he represented, who were arrested for public violence and culpable homicide following a street battle between rival factions in which two men were killed, could be proven to have taken part in the attack. His clients were subsequently acquitted. *Post*, 29 August 1965. Of the 78 men charged with public violence following a fight between two Marashea factions and a subsequent conflict with the police in Benoni, only 22 were convicted. CAD, NTS 7689, file 325/332, 16 November, 1950. There are many such examples.

sometimes involved hundreds of combatants. In such circumstances, Marashea would temporarily shelve internal disputes and come together as Basotho to face the common enemy. 'Our group had about one hundred members but there were many other groups in different places. When we had a problem with a fight we would send a man to collect Marashea from other places. They would hire taxis and come to help us.'⁷²

Although Mpondo figure most prominently in stories of conflict and some truly epic battles were fought against Zulu *impis*, at one time or another Marashea also clashed with Bhaca, Batswana and Xhosa groups. These battles took place in the townships, in mine compounds and in the squatter camps surrounding the mines.

Perhaps the best remembered and documented of these ethnic conflicts occurred between Basotho and Zulu, the first in Benoni in 1950 and the second in Meadowlands in 1957 (sometimes referred to as the Dube Hostel riots). In both episodes Molapo and Matsieng joined together and the Basotho emerged victorious. MK supplies a vivid description of the Benoni conflict.

We attacked from the fence side and pushed them towards the location. Some hid in houses and some were chased into the hospital and were killed there. The head constable of the police told us not to chase them into town because they would disturb and shock the white ladies and their children. We promised that we would not go after them if they ran in the direction of the white quarter but during the fight this was forgotten. We drove them in any direction they took.... Many Zulus died in this fight and the police took a week to collect the bodies. Some were in the toilets, some were in the rubbish pits. They were all over. That is how it went.⁷³

⁷¹ Guy and Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea', p. 443.

⁷² Interview, NN.

According to consistent Marashea testimony, the 1957 fight began after a member of Matsieng was killed and mutilated at the hostel shebeen by a group of Zulu. A Matsekha veteran recalls: 'Although we did not have a good relationship with Matsieng people, a message was passed to us that a Mosotho had been castrated by the Zulus.'⁷⁴ PG left his Matsekha group in the mid-1950s, yet he still took part in the fighting. 'At that time I joined [the fight] because it was binding each and every one – it was a national thing. Matsieng and Molapo came together.'⁷⁵ The conflict had been simmering for some time and the murder of Malefane was the spark that ignited the conflagration.

We took Malefane's body from the mortuary to prepare for the funeral and the burial date was published all over. All the different mines and locations were told of the burial date. The Zulus informed their people and they collected others from Natal who came by truck. We joined together with Molapo because of this. We came together because we learned there was a group of Zulus who wanted to destroy Marashea.⁷⁶

The funeral procession of hundreds of armed Marashea passed by Dube Hostel where the Zulu reportedly attacked. This was the start of several days of conflict that left more than forty people dead. In the end, the combined forces of the Marashea inflicted a severe defeat on the Zulu hostel dwellers.⁷⁷

⁷³ Interview, MK. See also Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 165.

⁷⁴ Interview, ST.

⁷⁵ Interview, PG.

⁷⁶ Interview, HM.

⁷⁷ For more detail see: *World*, 14,15 and 21 September, 1957; *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 September, 1957; South African Institute of Race Relations Files, AD 1646, Records of Unrest and Disturbances, File 3 (Rand Riots), University of the Witwatersrand; Report of the Riots Commission, Dube Hostel, 14/15 September by A. Van de Sandt Centlivres, March/April 1958; CAD, NTS 4573, file 51/313(1), Office of the District Commander,

Newspapers and police reports note several clashes between Marashea and Zulu groups over the years, although these were usually isolated affairs that did not require or involve Marashea alliances. For example, a newspaper headline in 1959 reads as follows:

Nineteen passengers lay unconscious and injured on New Canada station after a train had come to a halt after a nightmare journey, from Naledi to town. A faction fight between Zulus and "Russians" was raging in a rear coach. Men were being flung through the windows.⁷⁸

Even in these lesser conflicts, a sense of nationalism and pride in the collective strength of the Marashea sometimes emerges.

There were many [Marashea] from Phiri to Naledi. They would leave Naledi and visit here [Phiri] and we also visited. We went to Moletsane and Molapo. We occupied all the space in a train when we went to places like Germiston. People were afraid of us and Zulus would not ride the train if we were in it. They were afraid of us because as we walked through the carriages we beat them with *melamu*.⁷⁹

One informant claims that Marashea joined people from the townships in their battles with Zulu hostel dwellers during the June 1976 disturbances in Soweto. Students had called a stay-away and assaulted hostel dwellers who refused to comply. The Zulu migrants responded in kind and an all out battle soon ensued. According to Matsieng veteran TS, people called on the Marashea for help. His group responded largely because the Zulu had allegedly killed people from the Molapo faction.

In 1976 I was involved in a fight against the Zulus at Mzimhlope. The Zulus were fighting with everybody.... There were Marashea from Ha-

SAP, Newlands to Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Johannesburg, re: Unrest in Western Native Areas, 17 September, 1957.

⁷⁸ *World*, 15 August, 1959.

⁷⁹ Interview, BT, Soweto, 16 December 1998.

Molapo and they were near that place and were hated by the Zulus. The people at the location thought that Marashea were the ones who could fight the Zulus. We waited at Dube Station to get them when they left their places to fight. Tsotsi was *morena* at that time. He was good in fights because he was brave and controlled the fight.... We fought the Zulus because we had a witness that they killed our people, they killed people from Ha-Molapo.⁸⁰

The Mpondo occupy a special place in the history of the Marashea and Mpondo-Basotho enmity is featured both in Chapter 7 and in the discussion of famous *morena* Tseule Tsilo in the concluding section of this chapter. One example here will suffice to illustrate how Marashea reacted to assaults against Basotho by other ethnic gangs. In order to collect protection fees with a minimum of opposition, the Marashea had to demonstrate the ability to safeguard their clients. This basic reality explains the forceful response elicited by the rape of a Mosotho woman by a group of Mpondo.

It happened that the Mapondo raped a Mosotho woman who had just been married. They took her from her husband and raped her... At that time we had no particular dispute with the Mapondo. But then we were told what they had done to that lady.... I told my men that I intended to attack as soon as we were told.... At sunrise I released thirty-eight men. I said to them, "Men, these Mapondo are said to be at that side of the valley, go and fight them!" We then waited outside and some men were playing dice. I heard women exclaiming, "Look at that." Some men were running and I was confused. I did not know whether they were my men or Mapondo because the Mapondo sometimes also wore red blankets. We went to meet them and on the way we met one man. I called to him and he said "Baba" and I saw he was Pondo. I told him to come to me and when he approached I hit him in the forehead with my sword and he died. I turned him over and chopped his head in two. Then we climbed the hill to the location where there were some squatter camps called Matjotjo.... My men came to me and reported, "We have killed six Mapondo, here are their swords." I asked where the rest were and they said they didn't know.

⁸⁰ Interview, TS.

I said, "Go and prevent them from going to that side, make them come this side so we can kill them all." We then killed seven more.⁸¹

In order to survive, Marashea groups could not be completely insular, they needed a degree of support from surrounding communities and on occasion from fellow groups, even fierce rivals. Their status as foreign migrants was not forgotten and when push came to shove Marashea would rally together against outside antagonists. This is a consistent theme throughout Marashea history. "We formed different alliances. If any of the groups had problems they called their members from other places. If we were attacked by other tribes, Matsieng and Matsekha would come together as one group but after that we went back to our own fights."⁸² In an extreme example of nationalist sentiment, members of Marashea interrupted a soccer game in Johannesburg in which Lesotho was being defeated by a South African team. The Russians invaded the pitch brandishing knives and guns to bring an end to the match once a loss seemed imminent.⁸³

Traditional Medicine and Magical Protection

Basotho society, like other many societies world-wide, has a deep seated belief in magic and the powers of magical practitioners. People seek the assistance of traditional healers in Lesotho for any number of situations: for ill health; to encourage success in business, politics or at school; to thwart enemies and thieves; and to protect animals,

⁸¹ Interview, MK.

⁸² Interview, NN.

⁸³ *Bantu World*, 4 September, 1954.

crops and homes. ‘The use of medicines does not stop at the curing of sickness,’ Ashton observed, ‘but extends far beyond, to almost every situation where a man [sic] requires help to control natural and social phenomena, or is faced with difficulty, danger and uncertainty.’⁸⁴ In its most sinister guise these beliefs are manifested in *lirello* (ritual killings or medicine murders), in which body parts are used to make powerful potions. Most Basotho have lived a tenuous existence in an impoverished environment and the use of and belief in *moriana* is one way in which people have attempted to acquire a measure of security against misfortune and to improve their position in life. *Moriana* is especially critical in crisis situations when people feel threatened. The Marashea’s reliance on *moriana* was a natural development. When veterans were asked how the Marashea has managed to survive, the most common answer by far was to attribute the society’s success to the potency of its magical protection. ‘We made use of *lingaka*, we could not do without them... The Marashea have survived for so long because of *moriana*.’⁸⁵

In general, *moriana* was used to strengthen Marashea, to ward off evil and to bring good fortune.

Morena finds the *ngaka* for the group who incises members with strong *moriana* to strengthen them. The *ngaka* also sprinkles some *moriana* all around the area where Marashea are living to protect them from

⁸⁴ Hugh Ashton, *The Basuto: A Social Study of Traditional and Modern Lesotho* (1967), p. 303. For example, Ashton lists the following uses for *moriana*: stock thieves use medicine to make themselves invisible, students use it to prepare for examinations, aspirant mineworkers use it to ensure they pass the medical exam required for employment, and people use it to strengthen their cases in litigation over boundary disputes and other matters. Dating back to the time of Moshoeshe, Basotho warriors have employed *moriana* to doctor themselves and their weapons prior to battle.

⁸⁵ Interview, KL, Lesotho, July 1998.

witchcraft and sorcery. The other *moriana* is used when a *stokvel* is held. It is used to call customers from the mines to come and buy beer.⁸⁶

Moriana was a part of everyday life but it assumed critical importance in two specific circumstances – in battle⁸⁷ and when facing criminal charges. It was inconceivable to enter into battle without being properly fortified with medicines and each group had a doctor or doctors on retainer, much the same as lawyers. Medicines could take the form of powders inserted into incisions, or concoctions that were smeared on the body. It was imperative not to impair this treatment by engaging in sexual relations. To do so was to invite disaster. ‘If one does not follow this rule and it happens that we fight, he will certainly die.’⁸⁸ Many of the male informants related stories of how traditional medicine served them well in a particular situation, usually a fight or court case. Traditional doctors also sometimes assisted the *morena* and council with battle plans. ‘We had *ngaka* who advised us about the fights. He would assess the fight and make a map of the fight before it began and all our weapons were touched by him.’⁸⁹

Moriana could be helpful in several different ways. It commonly rendered the enemy’s weapons harmless. MM’s group fought against ANC comrades in Odendaalsrus and emerged victorious because of the protection proffered by their medicine. ‘They

⁸⁶ Interview, KI.

⁸⁷ A group of rebel diamond diggers in Lesotho that rose against the government in 1970 also made extensive use of magical protection. Interestingly, some of these diggers were former Marashea. Motlatsi Thabane, ‘*Liphokojoe of Kao: a Study of a Diamond Digger Rebel Group in the Lesotho Highlands*’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 1, (2000).

⁸⁸ Interview, MB.

⁸⁹ Interview, TG, Lesotho, 6 September, 1998.

attacked us but their guns produced only water instead of bullets and we managed to shoot them. Six of them were killed and many wounded.⁹⁰ Of course one always ran a risk that one's opponent had engaged a more powerful doctor. This was KI's experience: '*Moriana* played an important part in that fight near Beisa Mine. Those people from Gauteng [a rival Marashea gang] had strong *moriana*, if not for that we would have killed many of them but some of our guns shot only water and fruit instead of bullets.'⁹¹

Sometimes more elaborate preparations than the simple doctoring of weapons was called for. BH, a veteran of conflicts in the 1950s and 1960s, relied on a type of battle indicator supplied by a traditional doctor.

There was a man called Magubane who was staying at Natalspruit. He gave us a small bottle with *moriana* inside. You were supposed to shake it when you went to the fight. When the liquid turned white you knew you would win the fight, but if it turned red that meant danger and you were supposed to avoid fighting because you would be killed.⁹²

Rantoa's group preferred the string method:

Supposing we intend to fight people on the other side of the road. A string would be prepared with the appropriate *moriana*. When we approached those people, we'd pretend as if we were running away. They would follow us until they passed over the string. Then we know that they would be drugged and easy to fight.⁹³

If all else failed, one tactical option was to demoralise the enemy by targeting their doctor.

PK remembers this was the key to victory in a bitter dispute with Zulu opponents.

⁹⁰ Interview, MM.

⁹¹ Interview, KI.

⁹² Interview, BH.

We fought with Zulus in Gauteng at White City. The Zulus were beating people at the locations. They even killed some Basotho. There was only one thing that enabled us to defeat them. Lenkoane attacked their doctor and cut her head off. We took the head and went to the fight. When we arrived, we found that the Basotho were winning the fight. Lenkoane knew that their doctor was very strong.

In a grisly aftermath: ‘The head of the Zulu doctor that Lenkoane cut-off – we used it as *moriana* for our group.’⁹⁴

It should be mentioned that the use of charms and magical protection by soldiers is a longstanding practice in many societies. In the recent fighting between Inkatha supporters and ANC comrades on the Rand and in KwaZulu-Natal, for instance, combatants from both sides have utilised such measures. Sitas discovered that while comrades propagate an image of themselves as fearless warriors, ‘this fearlessness needs treatment against fear: there is a proliferation of *muti* and war medicine in their daily lives and battles.’⁹⁵ Adam and Moodley noted that magic rituals were important to both sides in the conflict and that combatants levied a tax on residents under their control to help offset the cost of war medicines. An informant’s explanation of the purpose of these medicines echoes that of Marashea veterans. ‘Before we go to fighting, some people at the houses near the battlefield stand outside with buckets of water and *muti*. They dip a

⁹³ Interview, Rantoa, (Bonner transcript).

⁹⁴ Interview, PK.

⁹⁵ Sitas, ‘The Making of the “Comrades” Movement’, p. 637.

broom into the mixture and sprinkle it over us as we run past... Comrades believe the *muti* will stop the bullets from hitting them and will give them courage.⁹⁶

No matter how much faith Marashea placed in magical treatments, doctoring did not substitute for fighting skills and common sense. Guerrillas in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle utilised charms designed to protect them but did not dispense with more conventional methods. Lan investigated the links between spirit mediums and guerrillas and concluded: 'The fact is that few if any of the guerrillas relied exclusively for their safety on magical precautions.... Ancestral protection and rigorous military discipline were both essential.'⁹⁷ Thus the use of *moriana* was a method of maximising protection in battle, but not to the exclusion of careful preparation and sound tactics.

The situation was much the same when the battles shifted to a different terrain – the courtroom. The Marashea made a point of engaging expert legal counsel, but at the same time, the judicious use of *moriana* could only bolster one's chances of beating the charge. Women delivering provisions to Marashea in custody fetched powdered medicines from the doctor and mixed it with food or rubbed it into clothing, strengthening the prisoner and bringing him good fortune in his courtroom encounter. DG supplies a typical account:

Tanki, our *morena*, was arrested and I went to a woman at Khutsong who was called Machakane. She told me to come with Tanki's clothes and not to wash them. When we arrived she slaughtered two chickens and soaked the clothes in the blood. She cooked the chickens and gave me back the

⁹⁶ Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, 'Political Violence, "Tribalism" and Inkatha', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30, 3, (1992), p. 507.

⁹⁷ David Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, (1985), p. 209.

clothes to take to Tanki and to exchange them for the clothes he was wearing. On the following day Tanki was with us and I believed that *moriana* really worked. He was discharged.⁹⁸

Sometimes, medicine could invoke the powers of nature: ‘Marashea are very strong with *moriana*. It can happen that while a case is proceeding a storm will come and take all the papers from the magistrate’s desk and the accused will be discharged.’⁹⁹ The lizard method is a particularly impressive example of *moriana* at work:

When our members were taken to court our *ngaka* would give us a lizard and it was put inside a bottle and taken to court by the women. When the case proceeded members of the jury were there in order to decide the case. The lizard was nodding its head inside the bottle and all the jurors became sleepy and did not follow what was said and our member would be discharged. One Lerashea named Moruti was falsely accused of killing a policeman and our women took a lizard to court and all the people fell asleep and Moruti was found not guilty.¹⁰⁰

Traditional doctors and magical powers could also play an important role in group relations, specifically between the *marena* and their followers. Some *marena* pointed out that they were careful to keep essential secrets regarding *moriana* from their men lest this information be turned against them. PL reported: ‘I was *morena* and I would find *ngaka* for the group. My members should not know him because if they turned against me, they could then find *moriana* that could kill me.’¹⁰¹ He had witnessed his *morena*

⁹⁸ Interview, DG.

⁹⁹ Interview, LG.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, MC.

¹⁰¹ Interview, PL.

Lenkoane killed by an ambitious subordinate and was not eager to suffer the same fate.

BM is adamant that *moriana* allows him to rule.

You asked me about *moriana*, you cannot lead people without the use of *moriana*. The *moriana* is used to strengthen, unite and make these men brave. But above all it is used to make the men listen and obey the leaders. The *moriana* that makes them strong must also make them submissive to their *morena*. That is my responsibility – to make them obey me. If I don't do that they will rebel against me. These men could defeat me in a fight, that is why I have to give them something to make them listen and accept me as their *morena*. You know how long I have been *morena* – twenty-five years. You think I don't make mistakes, or that they love me? No, it is because of my *moriana* that makes them believe in me.¹⁰²

Marashea were discriminating when it came to their doctors. Some were given trial runs and if they proved unsatisfactory their services were dispensed with. It was essential to employ a reputable practitioner and to avoid charlatans. 'We would learn from the first fight if the *ngaka* was good or not. We would pay him half and give him the balance after the fight.'¹⁰³ As BH observed, 'Some *lingaka* were very good, but others were just cheating.'¹⁰⁴

This attitude about the contingency of magical protection fits what I believe to be the wider utility of *moriana* to Marashea. A belief in magical protection allowed members to rationalise defeat, either on the battlefield or in the courts. Failure could be attributed to the group's doctor or alternately to the power of the enemy's medicine. Either way there was hope for the next confrontation because doctors could be changed and in

¹⁰² Interview, BM.

¹⁰³ Interview, NN.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, BH.

extreme circumstances, the opponent's doctor could be killed and his or her remains used to produce potent medicines. In all circumstances *moriana* was used to fortify Marashea in the harsh world they inhabited and to supplement other protective measures.

Community Relations

Much like their relationship with the police, Marashea relations with the communities in which they were situated were a study in co-operation and conflict. The most common intersection between Marashea and non-Marashea was the payment of protection fees. Without exception, Marashea informants, both male and female, report that residents in areas under Russian control were expected to pay for their protection. Rantoa, who resided in the Russian stronghold of Newclare in the 1950s, explains how this policy was developed:

We would say that every house would have to pay so much. Originally we would collect from Basotho only. Later we realised we were also protecting people of different ethnic groups who were not contributing. Then the collection was extended to everyone who stayed in the same area irrespective of ethnicity.¹⁰⁵

People had no choice regarding payment. GB lived in a succession of Marashea informal settlements in the Free State until he retired in the early 1990s. 'We meet the people who are not Marashea when we collect protection fees and when Lerashea is dead we collect burial fees. We claim protection because everyone is under our protection. If you do not

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Rantoa (Bonner transcript).

want to pay that money, you have to leave and find another place.’¹⁰⁶ The fees people were required to pay varied from group to group and according to the circumstances. Some groups levied a set amount, while others collected on a contingency basis. *Morena* PL operated on the latter system. ‘They paid whatever we paid. When we wanted R50 they had to pay it. For instance if the lawyer needs money in the middle of the month, they pay it.’¹⁰⁷

The ‘protection’ to which Marashea refer was primarily protection from assault and robbery by tsotsis, but also from other ethnic gangs and Marashea rivals. Marashea veterans are quick to claim that they were more effective than the police in controlling the tsotsi menace and people regularly turned to them for assistance. In this way, the Marashea functioned as an alternative justice system. ‘If the people who were not Marashea had problems with tsotsis we would go and find that tsotsi and order him to return what he took from that person and we even gave him some strokes.... We chased tsotsis so they admired us very much.’¹⁰⁸ Marashea would even deal with wayward children. ‘People of the location were coming to the *morena* of Marashea to report when they were harassed by their children.’¹⁰⁹ *Morena* BM argues that safety is what attracts people to stay in camps under Marashea control.

These people prefer to live with us here because they are protected and they live a safe life here. In the locations and on the farms where there are no Marashea they are robbed of their property. With us they are safe.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, GB.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, PL.

¹⁰⁸ Interview, NN.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, ‘Me’ XL.

There is no one who can drink their beer without paying them or do anything without the consent of the owner. They have to pay something because we provide protection.¹¹⁰

In Soweto, the Marashea's campaign against tsotsis gained further legitimacy in the 1970s when some Russian groups joined hands with the *makholla* traditional courts set up by local residents to combat crime. The *makholla* were strongest in the townships designated as Sotho including Naledi, Tladi, Moletsane and Molapo. Suspected offenders were dragged to the court, tried and then flogged and/or fined. Marashea would assist the *makholla* when suspects resisted its authority. Glaser classified this arrangement as 'an alliance of convenience. The Russians had a long history of antagonism towards tsotsis and they felt comfortable with the traditionalism of the Makgotla. The Makgotla, for its part, needed the muscle of the Russians.'¹¹¹ However, this was a short-lived phenomenon as the *makholla* lost momentum following the 1976 uprising that catapulted youth to centre stage.

This type of relationship could only exist in an insecure environment in which the state offered little protection or hope of justice to the African majority. Vigilantism has flourished in South Africa largely because black residential areas have been so poorly policed (with the exception of liquor and pass raids). The state abrogated its role as protector of this segment of the citizenry and people often felt forced to pursue justice

¹¹⁰ Interview, BM.

¹¹¹ Clive Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics', p. 273. The Russians' role was not completely altruistic as it seems some of them were paid from the fines exacted by the courts.

through informal channels. The Marashea were, and remain, a beneficiary of these circumstances.

South Africans living in townships and squatter camps have always been vulnerable to criminal violence, especially unattached females. Consequently, some residents probably paid protection fees quite willingly. The Marashea did not limit their activities to controlling tsotsis. Retribution was exacted against those who victimised people under Russian protection, as with the Mpondo gang suspected of having raped a Mosotho woman. Assorted offenders were also subject to judgement and punishment, presumably with a measure of community support.

I remember when one man made a mistake; he was Motswana and he slept with his daughter and made her pregnant. So the rule of Marashea was that man was supposed to be killed. We blew the whistle and went to his house. We took him and pushed him to the *lekholla* and we beat him until he died. The people were all under Marashea control. Like that man, he was not Lerashea but he was living in the same location as Marashea.¹¹²

Some Marashea claim that the group had a positive reputation that resonated beyond their immediate community. 'When we were arrested there was a jailer at No. 4 prison who was called Two Boys. He would say that he liked Marashea because Marashea controlled tsotsis better than the police. When we were riding the train, people were safe because tsotsis would run away.'¹¹³ This idea of Marashea as the arbiters of social order is a consistent theme in Russian testimony. It is commonly claimed that all

¹¹² Interview, MS, Lesotho, 16 August 1998.

¹¹³ Interview, BT.

people benefited because of the stand that Marashea took against tsotsis. Newspaper reports lend some credence to these claims. For example, the infamous Rope gang was put to flight by Marashea in Alexandra when they were terrorising guests at a party. 'One guest advised the host to send an S.O.S. to the Russians. They came faster than was expected and in no time members of the Rope gang had disappeared.'¹¹⁴ Some Marashea veterans report that they worked with the constituted authorities to combat the tsotsi menace. 'When tsotsis were robbing people of their properties we were called, especially during the Christmas period when many people were in town and on the trains. The town council would call us to chase them away.'¹¹⁵ GL maintains that their role was recognised and appreciated by railway employees.

We patrolled all the train coaches looking for tsotsis. When we arrived at the train station we paid for one ticket even if we were twenty or more. The one who bought the ticket entered first and we followed him. We went to places like Springs and Germiston with a ticket for one person and we were not disturbed because we were government people who controlled the tsotsis on the trains so we were not required to pay for the train. We stopped crime so when the ticket examiner saw us he would not say anything.¹¹⁶

He does not seem to consider the possibility that the ticket examiner was too intimidated to question twenty men belonging to a group with a reputation for violence.

¹¹⁴ *World*, 23 January, 1963. See also, *World*, 4 February, 1963.

¹¹⁵ Interview, WL.

¹¹⁶ Interview, GL.

The idea of Marashea as crime fighters, however ironic, is deeply ingrained in Marashea identity. This is especially true when Basotho are the perceived victims as KI's story makes evident.

There is a place near Thabong just above the Mothusi railway station. It is a big shopping complex where most of the miners go for shopping. Miners from President Steyn, President Brand and Saiplaas go there for shopping. There were tsotsis who used to rob Basotho of their property especially at month's end. As Marashea we could not allow anything that hurt Basotho. These tsotsis made many Basotho afraid to go to that area for shopping and that made us take a very serious step.... On a certain Saturday we went to that area in the morning around 9 o'clock. We surrounded the whole complex but we were all in disguise, hiding our weapons beneath our blankets and going in groups of two or three. There were Marashea in every corner of the area and there was no way to escape... We had instructed some men to go and buy things in the shops and to expose their money in order to attract the tsotsis. After about thirty minutes someone raised the alarm. We had placed a man so he could see what was happening on every corner. A whistle blew right next to the place where I was positioned and immediately I saw three men in black suits running towards me. I waited until the first one was close to me and I pulled my assegai [stabbing spear] out and stabbed him in the chest and he was down on the ground bleeding to death. When I turned around I saw that the other two were also lying on the ground dead.¹¹⁷

KI reports that he and several others waited for the police to arrest them. The case was dismissed because the police had no real interest in prosecuting. 'They said they only arrested us because we committed a crime, but we were also preventing crime which even the police failed to prevent.'

There is of course another side to the relationships between residents and Marashea members. Many people have viewed Marashea as no better than thugs and

¹¹⁷ Interview, KI.

murderers. Even in Lesotho people are split in their assessment of Marashea. Some regard them as protectors of Basotho in South Africa, while others condemn them as violent criminals whose activities bring all Basotho into disrepute. There is evidence that the small contingent of middle class Basotho on the Rand, educators, clerks, ministers and the like, had no time for the blanketed gangsters. A few felt compelled to publicly distinguish between Marashea and the Basotho people as a whole. A Simon Matolo addressed a letter to the editor of the *World* in response to a previous missive that had criticised the criminal behaviour of 'foreign' Africans from the Protectorates, specifically Basutoland. He implored: 'Admittedly a few of them – the "Russians" – are well known criminals but is it fair to assume that the whole population of these territories are criminally inclined?'¹¹⁸ Although African newspapers often spoke out against the Russians, the relevance of this is questionable as the literate elite were not the people the Marashea was attempting to win over. Their support, such as it was, came from the poorer classes, specifically fellow migrants, particularly, but not exclusively Basotho. These were the people the Marashea gangs needed to cultivate in order to establish solid bases in their urban enclaves. That said, it is unclear to what extent the Marashea achieved popular as opposed to coerced support.

Newspaper and archival records indicate a level of resentment against Marashea activities, primarily robberies and extortion rackets. Many people objected to paying protection fees and the Marashea resorted to violence to ensure collection. In 1951, the

¹¹⁸ *World*, 12 April, 1958.

Director of Native Labour in Johannesburg noted in a report regarding Russian protection schemes that ‘Refusals to pay are met by acts of extreme violence on the persons concerned.’¹¹⁹ In the same year, the *Sunday Express* proclaimed that the Marashea ‘fleece the poorest families, by demanding protection money every week, which they are forced to give as the only alternative to assault and possibly crippling injury.’¹²⁰ Marashea were occasionally arrested for extortion¹²¹ and newspapers carried stories of protection rackets through the 1970s. In 1968, Russians were reportedly harassing residents of Daveyton on the East Rand demanding R30 per household¹²² and in 1975 the more philanthropic gangs in Phiri required working households to pay R5, and business owners to pay extra.¹²³ In both cases residents were threatened with violence.

Newspapers also reported Russian robberies and assaults and recorded the victims’ expressions of outrage. A 1967 headline in the *Post* read, ‘End Russian Terror. Angry Women Plead’ and announced that women from Mapetla (Soweto) marched to the Moroka police station ‘to ask for protection against the notorious blanketed Russian gangsters.’¹²⁴ Such stories appear throughout the period of Russian activity on the Rand. It was difficult for the Marashea to force resident populations into compliance on the

¹¹⁹ CAD, NTS 7921, file 520/400(12), Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 20 February, 1951.

¹²⁰ *Sunday Express*, 23 September, 1951.

¹²¹ In 1952, for example, 13 members of Matsieng leader Solomon Hlalele’s gang were charged with extortion, including Hlalele himself. CAD, WRO 352/2, Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Johannesburg to The Manager, Non-European Affairs Department, 28 June, 1952.

¹²² *World*, 22 August 1968.

¹²³ *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 November, 1975; *World*, 25 November, 1975.

Reef. In the urban setting, township dwellers could more readily organise resistance against Russian depredations or alternately move to an area free of Russian influence.¹²⁵ Sometimes residents reacted spontaneously to Marashea aggression as in Chiawelo (Soweto) in 1965. Marashea were reportedly indiscriminately assaulting people in the streets 'when all the men in the area came out armed with an assortment of weapons. The fight was sharp and short. One of the Russians was hacked to death. Several men on both sides were severely injured.'¹²⁶ Beleaguered urbanites could also appeal to the police and to local government officials. Even in this more regulated environment, the Marashea established a formidable presence.

In the Free State and West Rand mining areas, the Marashea established settlements over which they maintained complete control. People coming to settle in a Russian camp knew that they were placing themselves under the dominion of the Marashea. There was no police presence in the settlements, no local officials to appeal to and no media to take up people's appeals. In their squatter camps the Marashea were a law unto themselves.

Male Marashea are quick to admit that protection fees were demanded from residents and that those who refused to pay were forced out of their homes or dealt with in an equally violent fashion. Without exception they insist, however, that the Marashea

¹²⁴ *Post*, 9 July, 1967.

¹²⁵ The Civil Guard movements discussed in the following chapter were partly a response to Russian activities and similar initiatives cropped up from time to time. Russians also clashed with Guards in a series of conflicts in Natalspruit in the mid-1950s.

¹²⁶ *World*, 1 November, 1965.

enjoyed harmonious relations with their neighbours and fellow residents because of the protection they provided. A few women tell a different story. 'Me' RW provides a balanced account: 'Some liked them – the place we were living was nice because Tsotsi did not allow any disturbances, he gave people soft loans. But other people said that Marashea kill innocent people and they hated them.'¹²⁷ Other women did not equivocate. 'Me' MG declared that 'They were afraid of Marashea. They pretended to like them because they had no choice. People hated Basotho because of Marashea, even now it is still the same.'¹²⁸ No doubt, popular support for Marashea was highest among their Basotho compatriots, but it is difficult to gauge the degree of this support.

Lesotho as Sanctuary

When Marashea were wanted by the police for serious offences, members often fled to Lesotho. South African police were not empowered to cross the border and were unfamiliar with the country. There was no extradition treaty between Lesotho and South Africa so if Marashea fugitives gained the border they were safe. Since Marashea as an organisation operated exclusively in South Africa, these fugitives usually returned once they were confident the police were no longer prioritising their pursuit. The police were aware of this tendency and sometimes set up roadblocks to intercept Marashea fleeing the Rand for Lesotho. A police raid in Soweto in 1967 resulted in the arrest of fifteen Russians suspected of a number of offences. The remainder of the targeted group were

¹²⁷ Interview, 'Me' RW.

reportedly 'heading for hide-outs in Lesotho.'¹²⁹ In a 1975 case against 58 Marashea, who participated in a station battle resulting in the deaths of three men, only 32 appeared at the hearing. 'Some of the [absent] men are reported to have died during faction fights, some have been arrested for being in South Africa without necessary documents and have been deported to Lesotho and others are said to have skipped the country to Lesotho.'¹³⁰

A number of informants testified that they fled South Africa to avoid arrest. TS killed a man in front of witnesses and knew the police would come looking for him. 'I went to report to the manager where I was working that I was needed at home and I got a leave and my money and went to Lesotho to escape that case. I spent a year in Lesotho and then came back.'¹³¹ The majority of Marashea had family connections in Lesotho and had little problem passing time until they judged it safe to return. After a big fight in Khutsong in which several people were killed, Tsotsi feared the police would seek him out. He returned to Phiri, collected 'Me' TW and fled the country, only returning after a long while.¹³² RC and HS both spent time in Lesotho to avoid murder charges.¹³³ Both returned to South Africa when they deemed it safe and neither was arrested. It was clear that in these circumstances, the Marashea's status as foreign migrants served them well. They could rely on Lesotho as a haven and return to South Africa to continue as Marashea once the police lost interest in their cases.

¹²⁸ Interview, 'Me' MG.

¹²⁹ *Post*, 19 March, 1967.

¹³⁰ *Sunday Times*, 20 July, 1975.

¹³¹ Interview, TS.

¹³² Interview, 'Me' TW

Mythology and Survival

Tseule Tsilo, Matsieng *morena* in the Carletonville area in the 1960s and 1970s, is revered by men as an icon of Marashea. His story and the manner in which he is remembered indicate that Marashea have constructed a hero representative of their society. The Marashea had no specific ideology beyond survival. They had no political program – their reason for existence was to carve out a niche for migrant Basotho in the forbidding environs of South Africa. Tsilo is remembered by male informants as the quintessential Lerashea who possessed all the qualities necessary for survival (and prosperity) in the harsh world inhabited by Marashea. Tsilo is celebrated by those who knew him and remembered by others who have been told of his exploits. Every man interviewed had heard of Tsilo and many related stories of his powers and prowess. The heroic figure of Tsilo represents the larger set of values embraced by male Marashea. His deeds, powers and code of ethics are eulogised and an examination of the legend of Tsilo reveals much about the culture of the Marashea as understood and expressed by men.

Known to the press as **Big King**, Tsilo was accorded the status of public enemy number one after wounding three white police officers in a November 1965 shootout outside Carletonville, a small mining town south-west of Johannesburg.¹³⁴ Already wanted for the murders of six members of a Mpondo gang,¹³⁵ and having previously escaped from custody while being held on a charge of culpable homicide, Tsilo became

¹³³ Interviews, HS, Soweto, January 1999 and RC.

¹³⁴ Tsilo was never convicted but numerous Marashea, one who claims to have witnessed the act, confirm that he was the shooter. Interview, TB, Lesotho, 6 September, 1998.

the subject of a nation-wide search. Two hundred officers, dogs and a helicopter participated in the initial search but Tsilo escaped – shooting his way out of a trap at one point. He then disappeared for the next eighteen months, despite the posting of a R500 reward and police assurances that ‘The search for **Big King** continues on every square inch of this planet.’¹³⁶ Tsilo was finally caught near Theunnissen in the Free State in June 1967 and stood trial on a variety of charges over the next two months. Unfortunately, the trial records no longer exist and we know little about the proceedings other than Tsilo was acquitted on all charges with the possible exception of a passbook offence. The newspapers report that African witnesses refused to testify against Tsilo because they feared the power of his *muti*. The widow of Sergeant M, an officer Tsilo shot through the head, was shocked and embittered by the acquittal. Her husband was unable to testify, but she is adamant that the other two officers wounded in the incident positively identified Tsilo as the shooter and remains astounded by the judge’s verdict that there was not sufficient evidence to merit a conviction.¹³⁷ After he was discharged, Tsilo remained in the area as the leader of Matsieng until he was stabbed to death in the late 1970s.

It seems that Tsilo, like so many other Marashea, began his migrant life with a ‘join’ on the mines. One report claims he began work in 1957 at Blyvooruitzicht mine and rose to ‘Boss Boy’ at Western Deep Levels before leaving the mines to become full

¹³⁵ *World*, 14 December 1965.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 21 January 1966.

¹³⁷ Interview, Mrs M., Carletonville, March 1998.

time Lerashea.¹³⁸ Tsilo 'was influenced to join Marashea when his brother was attacked by a group of Marashea near the mine compound. He joined in order to get revenge and he became *morena* of Marashea.'¹³⁹ Despite his desire for revenge, Tsilo is remembered for attempting to foster unity between the rival factions.

Conflict between the Matsekha and Matsieng factions has been a feature of Marashea life in South Africa for more than fifty years, but many veterans lament the schism. BF, who joined Matsekha around 1950, reminisces somewhat wistfully, 'Marashea began at Benoni, people from Lesotho were friends. There was brotherhood from Leribe to Matsieng but we ended up separating because of women.'¹⁴⁰ Informants acknowledge the destructiveness of these fights and stress how rival groups of Marashea united in the face of outside threats. Members report that some leaders worked to achieve peace between warring groups, but that squabbles always resumed, in part because a warrior mentality was central to Marashea identity. The ideal of Basotho unity was recognised despite the internecine violence and Tsilo is remembered as an advocate of Basotho solidarity. He acted as an arbitrator between warring Marashea factions and was quick to come to the aid of other groups embroiled in conflicts with non-Basotho antagonists. Tsilo 'was respected by other *marena*. When a *morena* from another place had a problem, he would write a letter and then we would go to his rescue.'¹⁴¹ One of Tsilo's

¹³⁸ *Post*, 5 December 1965; *World*, 9 December 1965.

¹³⁹ Interview, MR.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, BF.

¹⁴¹ Interview, DS.

subordinates recalls that ‘He did not like us to fight with other Basotho, he wanted co-operation to fight against the MaPondo.’¹⁴²

The Mpondo, in particular, are demonised as persecutors of Basotho and Mpondo assaults are often cited as the reason behind the formation of the Marashea. Tsilo is venerated as the Mpondo-slayer who mercilessly pursued these enemies of the Basotho. A man who served under Tsilo remembers that ‘He fought tough fights especially in the times of the MaPondo fights. He fought MaPondo and he finished them because of his bravery in those fights.’¹⁴³ Another Lerashea who never laid eyes on Tsilo relates that ‘He was famous for killing many MaPondo, that is all I know of him.’¹⁴⁴ The founding purpose of Marashea was to unite Basotho against outside threats, of which the Mpondo were judged particularly dangerous. Tsilo, then, represents the ideal Marashea leader who worked to overcome rivalries within the Basotho community while at the same time waging a relentless campaign against the Mpondo enemy.

Miners provided contributions, bought beer, dagga and prostitutes, gambled with Marashea and paid protection money for their women. It was essential to maintain a good working relationship with these customers and Tsilo is remembered for being protective of mineworkers in order to cultivate and preserve a strong client base. ‘Tsilo loved miners,’¹⁴⁵ remembers ML – a judgement shared by one of Tsilo’s subordinates:

¹⁴² Interview, SO.

¹⁴³ Interview, PK.

¹⁴⁴ Interview, KK.

¹⁴⁵ Interview, ML.

People from the mines would visit the locations and some Marashea attacked them. Tseule was against that. If he saw you as Lerashea robbing someone who was not Lerashea he would call all Marashea and summon you and ask why you took the money and how you thought Marashea would make money since you were robbing miners ... he told us that all the miners were not to be robbed or beaten because they brought money to Marashea and that they were allowed to propose to our women because they brought money to the location.¹⁴⁶

His keen business sense benefited his group and enabled him to amass significant personal wealth – ‘Tseule had three taxis, two vans and one private car’¹⁴⁷ – yet another measure of the successful Lerashea. Tsilo’s interest in protecting miners and uniting Basotho against outside enemies came to the fore in the ethnic conflicts, often referred to as faction fights, which occasionally broke out inside the mine compounds. In one account, he is credited with originating the practice of Marashea gangs from the locations and squatter camps coming to the aid of Basotho mineworkers in these clashes.¹⁴⁸

Because physical confrontations played such a prominent role in the lives of Marashea, the groups valued courage, perhaps second only to intelligence, in their *marena*. Tsilo was seen as both brave and cunning. ‘He was a hero. His leadership was remarkable, he did not only send his men to fight, he led them himself.’¹⁴⁹ Marashea veterans confirm that the most accomplished fighters and strategists were appointed as leaders. What distinguishes Tsilo from other *marena* was the magnitude of his magical prowess. Stories of his special abilities abound and account for his success in battle and

¹⁴⁶ Interview, SO.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, GK.

¹⁴⁸ Interview, GB.

against the forces of the law. Tsilo, more than any other Lerashea, is famed for the strength of his medicine. When chased by the police, Tsilo outwitted them by shifting shapes into a dead dog, a sickly old ram, a hen with young chicks, a mother suckling an infant or various other guises. 'When the Boers came to arrest him he would vanish around a corner and turn into a dead and rotten dog because of his *moriana*. As soon as the police went away disappointed, he would turn back into a man.'¹⁵⁰ On other occasions, Tsilo simply vanished into thin air – 'He was using strong *moriana* and when his enemies came to attack him he would feel it in his blood and run away. One time I was with him and the MaPondo came to attack us and he disappeared and we did not see him anymore. Tseule was strong in *moriana*.'¹⁵¹

According to legend, Tsilo's extraordinary powers enabled him to evade the massive manhunt for so long and to eventually be acquitted on all charges. The search for Tsilo obviously made an impression on his colleagues: 'He had very strong *moriana*, if he was on a hill or a peak that was surrounded by the police, he could escape, even from a helicopter.'¹⁵² During his time as a fugitive, Tsilo's reputed powers were detailed by the *Post*.

He claims that his warnings of danger come from small straps which he wears around his upper arm. On the straps are rolls of muti. These give off sensations as soon as the police start a new search for him anywhere in

¹⁴⁹ Interview, KB.

¹⁵⁰ Interview, ML. See also, AT and WL.

¹⁵¹ Interview, PL.

¹⁵² Interview, MB.

the country, he claims.... He also believes that this muti will protect him when he is found by the police.¹⁵³

Thus, it came as no surprise to the Marashea when he was set free – ‘he was discharged because of his *moriana*.’¹⁵⁴

It is difficult to understand why Tsilo was discharged. Oral testimony and a newspaper report indicate that African witnesses were reluctant to come forward. The *World* claimed that ‘The reason why Tsuelo [sic] Tsilo (32), alias “Big King,” was set free was that all the witnesses had run away. They have disappeared and are nowhere to be found.’ The prosecutor told the court ‘there was no case if all the witnesses who were to give evidence against “Big King” had gone.’¹⁵⁵ These statements, however, refer to the charges of murder and culpable homicide stemming from the killing of the Mpondo gang members; the English language papers carry no references to the trial concerning the shooting of the three white police officers.¹⁵⁶

Tsilo was known for cultivating working relations with the police both before the shooting and after his acquittal:

We used the money from contributions to bribe the police if we could see that a fight would be tough and that was the idea of Tseule and Raliemere. They took the contribution money and bribed senior officers of the police telling them that we will be attacked and we need their help. When the people came to attack us the police fired at them with guns and when they dispersed, Tseule and his men would beat them. That was how he won many fights. If

¹⁵³ *Post*, 29 January 1967.

¹⁵⁴ Interview, TB.

¹⁵⁵ *World*, 25 August 1967.

¹⁵⁶ It is difficult to account for the absence of coverage of Tsilo’s trial in the English media that covered the shootings – even the local paper, the Carletonville *Herald*, devoted no coverage to the trials.

the police were without money they would go to the shantytowns and meet Tseule who would give them money from our contributions and no one would say anything.¹⁵⁷

Other men also remember that Tsilo was given guns by the police and that he worked as a police informer.¹⁵⁸ NN remarked on Tsilo's connections with the local police – 'Because of his bravery, the police trusted him. They put him in charge of the shantytown in Carletonville.'¹⁵⁹ At the same time, as we know, Tsilo shot three police officers. This seeming incongruence is typical of Marashea-police relations. For every story of police bribery there is a corresponding one of arrests by, or battles with, police. Tsilo sought to consolidate his position by working with the police, but when he was directly threatened he resorted to deadly force to escape. This is typical of how the Marashea have dealt with the police, and Tsilo was particularly successful in this regard.

Given the paucity of evidence, it is impossible to do more than speculate about Tsilo's acquittal and the fact that after being accused of the shootings of three white officers, two of whom reportedly testified against him, he stayed in the area and continued as the head of an organisation involved in illegal activities. One respondent reports that Tsilo had a magistrate on his payroll along with several police officers, and if this is so, it is possible that Tsilo was acquitted in return for his silence.¹⁶⁰ His courtroom demeanour indicates a certain confidence. A reporter noted that he was 'smiling happily and gazing at the number of spectators in the small courtroom' and Mrs. M observed that

¹⁵⁷ Interview, PG.

¹⁵⁸ Interviews, TB and KL.

¹⁵⁹ Interview, NN.

he was 'very arrogant and very sure of himself.'¹⁶¹ Certainly, in the South Africa of 1967, it is mystifying that a black gangster accused of shooting three white officers was permitted to return to business as usual following his acquittal. Tsilo's ability to escape conviction and police retribution, which fellow Marashea credited to the strength of his *moriana* and his ability to influence state officials, cemented his stature as a mythical figure.

There are as many stories of Tsilo's death as there are Marashea willing to discuss it. These stories vary widely but the perfidy of a woman is almost invariably the critical factor in his demise. Tsilo was too powerful to die in battle or at the hands of the police, only the wiles of a seductress could render him vulnerable. Here too is a consistent theme in Marashea ideology – the ambivalent role of women. Women were prized for their beauty and their income generating ability, but were also regarded as the primary cause of conflict between Marashea gangs. When asked why different groups of Marashea fought each other, the most common response is, 'because of women.'

The most common version of the murder of Tsilo is relatively simple. Tsilo was reputed to be a relentless womaniser and the gist of the story is that a beautiful woman who was aware of Tsilo's weakness for female companionship made herself available to him on an ongoing basis. After a while, Tsilo grew to trust her and would visit her place. Thus the trap was set – only when Tsilo was asleep and defenceless did a man emerge from hiding and stab him to death. A number of Matsieng veterans claim it was a Mpondo trap, while a Matsekha member insists his group lured Tsilo to his death:

¹⁶⁰ Interview, AT.

He died in this way: He was sent a woman who made him trust her. Tsilo, who had a good appetite for women, fell for her – she was big and beautiful.... That woman informed the man she was with that Tsilo would come. The man hid but was on his guard. Tsilo came to spend the night with that woman. He was relaxed when that man came out and stabbed Tsilo. The man who killed Tsilo was in our group but Tsilo didn't know him because the man was working in the factories. We plotted against him in this way because we couldn't get him in a fair fight.¹⁶²

In another popular account, one of Tsilo's lovers had taken up with another man with whom she plotted Tsilo's murder. She hid Tsilo's arm belt that contained all his medicines and only when Tsilo was powerless did her partner dare to attack the Marashea leader.¹⁶³ This version speaks both to the inherent duplicity of women and the critical importance of magical protection.

It seems the police collected Tsilo's body. Mrs. M claims that the police brought the body to her house to show her husband that the man who shot him was finally dead. For the Marashea, the actions of the police were further proof of the power of Tsilo. 'After his death, the police came to make sure he was dead. They even smashed his head with bullets to make sure he was dead because they were afraid of him.'¹⁶⁴

The Marashea is an organisation dominated by migrant men who have struggled to survive in South Africa. They have created a hero emblematic of that struggle, one who prospered due to the powers and strategies that have served the association as a whole over the past fifty years. Tsilo triumphed over ethnic rivals, neutralised the

¹⁶¹ *World*, 19 June 1967; interview, Mrs. M.

¹⁶² Interview, ML.

¹⁶³ See especially interview with WL.

potentially deadly forces of the South African state, minimised conflict between the rival Marashea factions, accumulated a significant degree of personal wealth, and was renowned for his prolific sexuality. Such a man could not be destroyed in battle, but succumbed to feminine treachery – only in this manner can his death be understood and accepted. The life and death of Tseule Tsilo – 'A man among men' – and the making of his legend, are instructive in laying bare the fundamental values of male Marashea.

Conclusion

The vast majority of Marashea, both men and women, were poorly educated migrants. The urban and mining centres of South Africa were forbidding environments for such migrants, many of whom were forced to eke out a living on the margins of the formal economy. Originally formed as a protective association for Basotho on the Rand, Marashea gangs assumed a more commercial function over the years. The prearranged battles with rival groups, that were an integral part of Borashea in the early years, gradually died out as firearms proliferated. However, the Marashea gangs continued to engage in collective violence with a host of antagonists. At the same time, their involvement in a range of illegal activities put members at risk of imprisonment. In order to make a living the gangs developed tactics and strategies to deal with these difficulties. They devised methods of neutralising and evading the forces of the law, vanquishing opponents, gaining the support of local communities (through a combination of services

¹⁶⁴ Interview, LG.

rendered and coercion) and establishing economic networks to sustain themselves. These strategies have enabled the gangs to survive and even prosper as migrant criminal outfits from the 1940s to the present.

CHAPTER 6

THE 'RUSSIAN ZONE': A CASE STUDY OF NEWCLARE SOUTH, 1950-57

South African townships and informal settlements have been contested terrain since their inception. Different groups have struggled to control territory, resources and political activities within the confines of the locations and, all too frequently, violence has been an integral part of these struggles. Groups as varied in composition and ideology as squatter movements, well-organised criminal outfits, student groups, vigilantes, traditional courts (*makhotta*), migrant gangs, youth gangs, municipal political groups and national political movements – with much overlapping between these categories – have all at one time or another sought to impose their will on township residents and have regarded violence as an essential element in their campaigns.

While much attention has been deservedly devoted to the violence employed by the state as a means of subjugating, dividing and controlling township residents, the different ways in which black urban groups struggled to assert control over their environments have received relatively little scrutiny. These processes cannot be regarded in isolation from the state's quest for control, but neither should they be subsumed by the larger focus on the struggle against white rule. Rather, I would argue that a more informed understanding of the conditions and challenges faced by black urbanites requires an examination of the nature of localised power and violence within the townships. African groups pursued agendas that served their own interests and had a

considerable impact on social relations and perceptions of power and authority both within the locations and in the broader context of national/racial politics.

This chapter concentrates on an eight-year period in the 1950s when the Marashea were the single most dominant force in the freehold area of Newclare (known by Basotho as *Siteketekeng*), a township on the western fringes of Johannesburg. With the collusion – and sometimes active assistance – of the SAP, the Russian gangs emerged victorious from a series of battles with various opponents and effectively annexed the southern portion of Newclare. They maintained their dominance and functioned as an alternative form of government until Africans were expelled from the township as part of the Western Areas Removal Scheme at the end of the decade. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: it explores the strategies employed by the Marashea to establish and maintain supremacy over Newclare South (paying particular attention to their relationship with the SAP) and then assesses the legacy of their reign in what came to be known as the 'Russian Zone.' The Marashea's term in Newclare provides a case study depicting the lack of a government presence in the day-to-day life of township residents and clearly illustrates the paradoxical nature of Russian-SAP relations.

Siteketekeng

The freehold township of Newclare was even more impoverished than the neighbouring areas of Sophiatown, Martindale and Western Native Township. Housing was of a poorer standard, overcrowding was more prevalent and a larger proportion of

the population supplemented their income (or supported themselves) through beer brewing. The southern portion of Newclare, divided from the north by a railway line, was regarded as an extremely rough neighbourhood. Predominantly populated by Basotho migrant labourers and female beer brewers, *Siteketekeng* suffered from the highest reported incidence of crime in the Western Areas.¹ Free from city council control, and sparsely policed (with the exception of beer and pass raids), Newclare, and especially the South, was known as a haven for criminals.² The Russians flourished in this environment and the Matsieng, which operated in various townships across the Reef, set up its Johannesburg headquarters there.³

Newclare occupies a prominent place in Marashea lore and history. It is remembered as a place where the gangs defeated their enemies to establish absolute control, and stories of the large-scale conflicts have been passed down over the years. A veteran, retired for many years, recalls: 'My father was Lerashea. He was in Newclare where he lost his left arm in the wars.'⁴ Newclare acquired such a reputation in Lesotho that Monare, the protagonist in a popular 1950s novel detailing the vicissitudes of a migrant labourer's existence, implored his city-dwelling companion:

¹ City of Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department, *Survey of the Western Areas, 1950*, 27,50,63; City of Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department, *Report on a Sample Survey of the Native Population Residing in the Western Areas of Johannesburg 1951* (issued 1955), 19, 183.

² CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Undated notes of Gideon Pott, Agent for the High Commission Territories.

³ Interview, PL; Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 177; Guy and Thabane, 'The Marashea', p. 446.

⁴ Interview, LT.

You should take me there one day. I might meet one of our women who lives there – Makalebe. I can remember her telling me of one big fight which took place at Seteketekeng between Molapos and Matsieng people. She said that men, women and children were running like animals, and the streets looked as though they had been painted with blood.⁵

The Russians of Newclare South began to appear in official correspondence and newspaper accounts in 1949 as a result of their conflicts with tsotsis and ethnically organised gangs, as well as their demands for protection fees from Newclare residents.⁶ Although tsotsi gangs rarely fought pitched battles with the Russians, their mutual disregard sometimes resulted in bloodshed. For example, following the funeral of a Russian believed to have been shot by tsotsis, the mourners charged through the streets of Newclare and ‘attacked every tsotsi, or whoever they deemed one, without warning.’⁷ A Matsieng veteran remembers that tsotsis ‘tried to fight us at Newclare but we beat them very much with *melamu*.’⁸ Bhaca migrants and Marashea engaged in a series of clashes in early 1951. One fight, initiated by several Bhaca urinating against a Russian’s door, resulted in the death of five Bhaca and the arrest of thirty-four Marashea.⁹ The violent nature of Marashea activities did not escape police notice, and prior to the Civilian Guard-Russian conflicts of late 1951 and 1952, dozens of Russians were arrested in

⁵ Mopeli-Paulus and Lanham, *Blanket Boy’s Moon*, p. 44.

⁶ CAD, NTS 7722 file 145/333, P. Grobler, Chief Inspector SAP, Johannesburg to Deputy Commissioner SAP, Witwatersrand Division, 1 July 1949.

⁷ *Bantu World*, 12 September 1950.

⁸ Interview, TT, Soweto, 18 June 1998.

⁹ *Bantu World*, 27 January 1951; CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Deputy Commissioner SAP Commanding Witwatersrand Division to the Commissioner, SAP, Pretoria, 5 February 1951.

Newclare, mainly on charges of public violence.¹⁰ The murder of an African detective who had arrested several Russians was widely rumoured to be an act of revenge. In response to these activities, the Johannesburg City Council, the Native Commissioner and senior police officers convened a meeting in February 1951 to discuss strategies to break the power of the Russian gangs.¹¹ Up to this time, it is clear an official consensus existed that the Russians represented a threat to security and order in Newclare. This was to change during the course of the Russian conflicts with the Civilian Guard and its allies.

The Civilian Guards and the Squatters

Communal policing initiatives had been in place in the Western Areas of Johannesburg since the early 1920s and were generally welcomed by residents frustrated by the high incidence of violent crime and the SAP's ineffectiveness. Indeed, due to the incessant and often brutal raids for liquor and passes, most people saw the police as persecutors, not protectors. Military enlistment, which reduced the numbers of the Johannesburg police during the early years of the Second World War, resulted in the formation of the government-administered Civilian Protection Service (CPS). The CPS attracted over a thousand volunteers from across the black townships of Johannesburg, and while the neighbouring areas of Western Native Townships and Sophiatown contributed significant numbers of these volunteers, none came from crime-ridden Newclare. Following the demise of the CPS in 1947, disbanded by the authorities who

¹⁰ *Star*, 20 March 1951.

regarded it as a wartime contingency, residents of the Western Areas persistently, albeit fruitlessly, petitioned for permission to form a replacement organisation. Finally, in August 1951, in the face of police opposition and despite the lack of official sanction, residents, acting through their Advisory Boards and Ratepayer's Associations, formed a Civilian Guard.¹² Guard groups on the Rand were viewed with trepidation by the state primarily because of their links with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). The police saw the Guards as an embarrassment, a testament to their inability to control crime in the locations. The self-proclaimed mandate of these Guards was to patrol the streets, to disarm people found with weapons, and to turn offenders over to the police. Just as in the past, this latest communal policing movement garnered little if any support in Newclare South where the Russians were determined to consolidate a power base.

Shortly after the northern-based Guards began their patrols in *Siteketekeng* in November 1951, fighting erupted. Given the mandate of the Guards – especially with regard to disarming residents – and the nature of the Russian gangs, conflict was unavoidable. A description of an early Guard patrol in Newclare South illustrates the inevitability of the Russian-Guard clashes.

In this 'Russian'-infested area, many armed with sticks and missiles were rounded up. Those who put up opposition against being searched were dealt with in the language they would best understand. A large collection

¹¹ *Sunday Times*, 11 February 1951; *Bantu World*, 24 March 1951.

¹² The information in this paragraph is from Goodhew, 'The People's Police Force.'

of weapons was made in the thorough combing of the township at the weekend.¹³

A number of Marashea veterans insisted that the Guards assaulted everyone found on the streets at night. 'Those people were whipping the people who were walking at night and that became worse when they were beating innocent people. We came together as Marashea to fight them.'¹⁴ A Matsieng member from Benoni reports that 'The Civil Guards were searching Basotho women at the railway station in Johannesburg. They would even search under their dresses. We did not like that and told the Civil Guards to stop but they refused and ... we travelled to Newclare to fight them.'¹⁵ The conflict was initiated when the Guards arrested and assaulted alleged Russians, according to a former Matsekha commander who was much praised by the police for his role in the Newclare battles.

The Civil Guards arrested innocent people saying that they were Marashea. They took them to an isolated place where there was a hall and they whipped them. That meant they were no longer interested in working with us. One person came running to my home to tell me people had been arrested by the Batswana Civil Guards. I called a man named Maliehe, who is now dead, and I told him to blow the whistle. Marashea then came to my home.... We then went to the hall and ... rescued those people. That was how the fight began.¹⁶

The Russians retaliated with a vengeance and attacked patrolling Guards on Christmas Day, 1951. In the ensuing battle eight men were killed and twenty injured.

¹³ *Bantu World*, 17 November 1951.

¹⁴ Interview MC; also SC and PP, Lesotho, 24 May 1998.

¹⁵ Interview, MK.

Violence flared up again in March when thousands of Guards and Russians clashed. This time the death toll reached eleven, 95 were hospitalised and 'all available policemen were necessary to quell the disturbance.'¹⁷ Russian reinforcements came from the mines and several townships, especially Benoni, while the Guards were supported by their colleagues in Sophiatown and Martindale.¹⁸

Following this latest clash the divide between northern and southern Newclare became increasingly rigid. The Guards controlled the north, where they continued their patrols, while the Russians maintained their hold south of the railway tracks. The conflict received much attention in the Johannesburg press, the vast majority of it unfavourable to the Russians, who were branded as thugs opposed to the crime-fighting agenda of the Guards.¹⁹ By this time, however, the Marashea, under the leadership of Solomon Hlalele, had managed to gain the support of the police. Hlalele's stories of Guard aggression were sympathetically received by a police force that found it expedient to

¹⁶ Interview, ST.

¹⁷ CAD, SAP 332 file 1/168/40/2, Deputy Commissioner SAP, Johannesburg to Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 17 May 1952; CAD, WRAD file 352/2, Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 8 April 1952; *Star*, 14 June 1952; *Bantu World*, 5 March 1952.

¹⁸ Interview, MC; CAD, NTS 4573 file 51/313(1), Summary of the Riots in Newclare, Johannesburg in which Basutos were involved, 23 September 1957.

¹⁹ The English press campaign against the Russians may have been partially inspired by anti-National Party sentiment among the liberal papers like the *Star* and the *Rand Daily Mail* that were eager to point out the government's failure to manage 'relations with the Natives.' For instance, in the midst of the squatter crisis the *Star* published an article complete with statistics claiming that racial disturbances under the Nationalists were more common than under United Party rule. *Star*, 5 December 1952. Influential figures such as Father Trevor Huddleston, who claimed that the government refused to act

accept his portrayal of the Russians as staunch government supporters who abhorred communism. An examination of Hlalele and his followers' propaganda campaign demonstrates the Russians' understanding of the government's overriding concern with communism and political dissent, as well as their cynical appreciation of police hostility towards the Guards.

Both in his statements to the press and in various meetings with police and township officials, Hlalele claimed that he had initially supported the formation of a Civilian Guard because his people were also victimised by tsotsis. However,

After watching the activities of the civilian guards we have come to the conclusion that: 1) We would not desire to associate ourselves nor encourage others to do so on the ground that they have little respect for the law and do not respect the police; 2) We would keep out of their movement because it has been refused recognition by the government of South Africa 3) We would not have this movement in our sector because some of its members were desperate tsotsis who found it an opportunity to rob and assault people without reasonable cause.... All we desire is peace.²⁰

Hlalele stated that the initial tension between the Guards and his followers began when Guard supporters and ANC activists like J.B. Marks, Ben Kenosi and Philip Vundla demanded that the Basotho support the 1950 anti-pass campaigns, and join in 'Freedom Day' demonstrations that same year. The Marashea, 'who as citizens of a British Protectorate were even more dependent than their fellow migrant labourers on possessing

against the Russians because the conflict suited its political agenda, also contributed to an English media climate that vilified the Marashea.

²⁰ *Bantu World*, 22 March 1952.

the right documentation,²¹ refused to comply and as a result the Newclare Guard was comprised wholly of residents of Northern Newclare. Shortly thereafter, according to Hlalele, the Guard, which included a strong tsotsi contingent, began assaulting and robbing all Basotho they came across in their patrols. Naturally, the Marashea mobilised to defend their people.²²

Hlalele's campaign served the interests of the police who regarded ANC/communist activists as a grave threat, but perhaps primarily because the Guards' very existence 'was a powerful critique of their failure to tackle crime.'²³ Reacting to township officials who praised the Civilian Guard and the generally favourable press coverage of Guard activities, the Deputy Commissioner of the Johannesburg SAP sent an eight page indictment of the Guards to the Police Commissioner. Most of the report was devoted to listing the various Guard members who were accused of committing offences (very few were convicted) while 'on duty.' It claimed that this list 'provides constructive proof that the members of this body have in fact constituted a grave danger to their own people.' For good measure, the report concluded that the Guards 'are under the control

²¹ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 181.

²² CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Meeting of various Russians with K.B. Morgan, Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 22 April 1952 and Hlalele affidavit given to Sergeant Papendorp, SAP, 19 July 1952; *Bantu World*, 9 February and 22 March 1952; *Star*, 3 April 1952.

²³ Goodhew, 'People's Police Force', p. 465.

of persons who are antagonistic towards the existing laws of this country for the control of natives and its present social structure.’²⁴

It seems that the convergence of police and Russian interests produced a marriage of convenience. Hlalele reported that he was in close communication with the Newlands police station and when he wished to attack the Guards, he would go there to report that the Guards were molesting Basotho. He would then return to Newclare in the company of the police and on his prearranged signal, his men would attack the Guards.²⁵ One of Hlalele’s followers remembers: ‘We reported everything to the police and they would let us fight and only stop the fight when people were dying. We had a translator because our leader Hlalele did not know how to speak English.... He would tell the police what happened because those [Guards] provoked us and we did not allow them to do that.’²⁶

There can be no doubt that the police endorsed the Marashea. Police correspondence and reports elevated the Russians to the status of national heroes protecting the law-abiding and peace-loving residents of Newclare South from the blatant aggression and subversive influence of the communists. In a meeting of various officials to discuss the disturbances at Newclare, Major Talliard of the SAP informed the other participants that ‘after the establishment of the Civic Guard there were quite a number of murders and it was found that those murdered were Basutos. That is what put the

²⁴ CAD, SAP 332 file 1/168/40/2, Deputy-Commissioner SAP, Johannesburg to the Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 17 May 1952.

²⁵ Bonner, ‘Russians on the Reef’, p. 182.

²⁶ Interview, MC.

Basutos against the Civic Guards.²⁷ One police report concluded: 'The Civilian Guard was organised by known Communists, is still controlled by Communists and is directly responsible for the critical situation which exists at Newclare.'²⁸ Such reports were forwarded to various government departments.

A new element was grafted on to the Russian-Guard conflict in May 1952 when the supporters of Mamalinyane Dhlamini, the leader of the non-Basotho people in Newclare South and a former ally of the Russians, were forced out of *Siteketekeng*. This group was often referred to as 'the Hlubis' because Dhlamini and many of his followers came from the Matatiele area on the southern border of Lesotho where there is a large Hlubi population. Dhlamini's people squatted in Newclare North on land administered by the city council, a move that considerably expanded the number of parties interested in Russian activities. The Hlubi immediately sought the support of the Civilian Guard in their conflict with the Russians and large-scale battle once again became a feature of life in Newclare. As political interest in the situation increased, the Marashea, aided by the police, stepped up their propaganda campaign. Dhlamini and the squatters were castigated as aggressors indistinguishable from the communist Guards.

Documentary evidence indicates that the Russian-Hlubi dispute erupted over the misuse of funds collected by Hlalele and his supporters to provide for the legal defence of

²⁷ CAD, WRAD 352/2, Minutes at a Roundtable Talk Held in the Office of the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg on the Question of Disturbances at Newclare, 18 June 1952.

²⁸ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Major Prinsloo, SAP, Johannesburg to The Commissioner, SAP, Pretoria, 28 July 1952.

all residents of Newclare South engaged in the fight against the Civilian Guards. Although the Russians were at the forefront of the battles, non-Basotho residents who also resented Guard activities fought at their side. The fallout was explained by one of Dhlamini's supporters:

It was said by [Hlalele and his deputies] that the main objects and aims of the fund would be for the protection and defence of all tribes in Newclare should they find themselves involved in a court case.... At that time all other tribes living in Newclare South supported the Basutos in their struggle against the Civic Guards wholeheartedly. The disturbing factor came immediately after the members of the S.A. Police had effected the arrest of the persons suspected as ringleaders. Of the arrested persons were Basutos, Xosa, Zulu, Bacas, Shangaans and Hlubis and Betsvanas. This occasion offered a testing ground for the purpose of the tribal fund. The only people who got assistance from the fund were Basutos and the others were left to fight on their own.²⁹

ST provides the Russian account:

One day while we were resting I was with Hlalele when Mathabane arrived to tell us that Mamalinyane was outside the location ready to attack. He was at the ground where I used to play football. I said that Mamalinyane was on our side so we organised ourselves and went to hear from Mamalinyane. He was with some Pondos and people were running all over the place because Mamalinyane was with many people outside the location. We went to them and asked what they were doing. They said we should fight but Mamalinyane stopped them when we reminded him of our agreement. We asked him why he had turned from our agreement because we were given the authority to guard our location and we were friends. Some of Mamalinyane's people had even married Basotho women. They said that we misused the contribution because the money was supposed to pay for lawyers.³⁰

²⁹ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Sworn statement of Joubert Nhlela at the office of the Native Commissioner Johannesburg, 27 May 1952. See also, same file, Dhlamini affidavit to the Native Commissioner, 28 May 1952; and *Star*, 14 June 1952; *Bantu World*, 17 May 1952.

³⁰ Interview, ST.

At this point Dhlamini, previously a close associate of Hlalele's, severed his ties with the Russians and, along with his adherents, refused to pay into the 'protection fund.'³¹ While the disagreement over funds may well have sparked the conflict, the testimony of a number of Marashea supports the view of W.J.P. Carr, Manager of Johannesburg's Non-European Affairs Department, that the fighting was a result of a struggle for supremacy between Dhlamini and Hlalele and their respective followers. MC remembers that the Hlubi were determined not to be dominated by Basotho: 'We were staying together as one group and they separated themselves from the Basotho saying they would not be ruled by Basotho and that was how the fight started.' Another veteran asserts: 'We fought against Mamalinyane because he wanted to be the leader and we objected to that and told him to rule the people of Matatiele and then we beat him with *melamu*.'³²

Shortly thereafter, in mid-May 1952, open conflict broke out as the Russians reportedly insisted that 'there can be no two bulls in one kraal.'³³ Dhlamini and his supporters suffered considerable losses in a series of clashes and were forced to retreat to Newclare North where between 200 and 300 families took refuge by squatting on council-

³¹ CAD, WRAD 158/15 vol. 1, Superintendent Western Native Township to the Manager of the Non-European Affairs Department, Johannesburg, 5 September 1952; CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 4 June 1952.

³² CAD, WRAD 158/15 vol. 1, Report No. 22/1952 of Manager, Non-European Affairs Department, to Non-European Affairs Committee, 26 June 1952; Interviews, MC and TT, Soweto, 18 June 1998.

³³ *Bantu World*, 24 May 1952.

owned land.³⁴ Apparently the Marashea were given a free hand in this initial conflict with Dhlamini's people. 'We asked the police for five minutes for fighting and we promised the police that by that time the MaHlubi would be out of that place. They gave us time and many people died because the fight became uncontrollable.'³⁵ A second set of battles ensued as the Hlubi, now allied with the Guards, launched attacks on Newclare South in an attempt to drive out the Russians and regain their former homes. The Russians repulsed these invasions, retaliated with raids of their own, and maintained complete domination over *Siteketekeng*.³⁶ ST relishes the final humiliation suffered by the squatters: 'We fought and beat Mamalinyane until they moved to the other side of the train tracks and they were living in a shanty town during the winter. We stayed in *Siteketekeng* and ate all their chickens and cats.'³⁷

During this time, the plight of the squatters, who were living in deplorable conditions, was featured in numerous press reports and caused considerable hand wringing amongst township officials, especially members of the city council. The Marashea had clearly demonstrated their superiority on the battlefield. When the arena of conflict shifted into the realm of politics, public relations and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring, they proved every bit as proficient.

³⁴ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to the Director of Native Labour, 4 June 1953; CAD, WRAD 158/15 vol.1, Report of the Manager, Non-European Affairs Department to the Non-European Affairs Committee, 26 June 1952.

³⁵ Interview, MC.

³⁶ CAD, WRAD 158/15 vol. 1, Report of the Manager, Non-European Affairs Department to the Non-European Affairs Committee, 26 June 1952; *Star*, 14 June 1952.

³⁷ Interview, ST.

The local government departments' preferred solution to the crisis, which was garnering damaging publicity, was simply to repatriate the squatters to their former homes. This seemed the easiest and most importantly, the least costly solution to the problem. The squatters, however, refused to return unless the Russians were removed from Newclare or, at the very least, the men identified as leaders of the gang were deported.³⁸ Various township officials urged the police to act accordingly.³⁹ However, neither the police nor the Minister of Native Affairs were inclined to move against the Marashea. Once again the Russians' ace-in-the-hole proved to be the allegedly communist leanings of their opponents, a card Hlalele played to maximum effect. The anti-communist Russian gangs were much lauded by the police, as the following excerpt from a police report describing a Russian-Hlubi (squatter) clash illustrates:

A strong group of Hlubis, supported by Civilian Guards attacked the Basutos.... They entered a portion of the Southern Township occupied by the Basutos under Hlalele and commenced to loot the dwellings. They were met by about 50 Basutos under the leadership of Edward Mohale, a person who hates Communism.⁴⁰

The report then describes with some satisfaction the Russians' victory. Every police report covering the conflict in Newclare identifies the Civilian Guards and

³⁸ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, undated affidavit by Dhlamini given to Sergeant Papendorp; Dhlamini affidavit, 28 May 1952; Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 4 June 1952; Major Prinsloo, SAP to the Commissioner, SAP, Pretoria, 28 July 1952; *Bantu World*, 15 July and 23 August 1952.

³⁹ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Acting Town Clerk, Johannesburg to the Minister of Native Affairs, Pretoria, 11 July 1952; Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg to the Secretary of Native Affairs, Pretoria, 30 June 1952; *Umteteli Wa Bantu*, 20 December 1952; *Star*, 14 June and 18 August 1952; *Egoli*, 1 June 1952; *Bantu World*, 24 May 1952.

squatters/Hlubi as the aggressors and emphasises their communist connections. The Marashea, by contrast, are represented as a pro-government force standing up for order in the township: 'The Basutos refused to co-operate with the Hlubis against the government ... this is the reason for the hostilities between the two sections.'⁴¹

Without the co-operation of the police, township officials were helpless to act against the Marashea, and were forced to find another solution to the squatter crisis. In the end, no attempt was made to re-settle the squatters in Newclare South. Instead, they were removed to an emergency camp in Moroka. Police condemnation convinced the government to ban all Civilian Guards in Johannesburg in mid-1952, and those who continued to patrol were arrested. *Siteketekeng* remained the exclusive domain of the Russians.

The Russian Victory

It is useful at this point to examine the convergence of circumstances that resulted in the Marashea victory. The first stage of the conflict was won on the battlefield where fighting prowess and the frequent superiority of Russian numbers allowed them to carry the day. Although one does not wish to make too much of this, the Marashea were renowned for their bravery and fighting skills. The overwhelming majority had learned the art of stick-fighting as herd-boys, and were extremely proficient in the use of *melamu*;

⁴⁰ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Major Prinsloo, SAP to the Commissioner of the SAP, Pretoria, 28 July 1952.

battle axes and swords were also popular weapons. As one Newclare resident remembers, Russian ferocity was legendary:

We came to associate the name 'Russians' with violence. They would descend upon the township in great battalions, clad in brightly coloured blankets, pants belted high, white shoes and the inevitable stick which was a deadly weapon in the hands of a Mosotho. I had seen a man's jaw shattered at one fell swing of that stick. If you heard a whistle blow, you had to clear off the streets if you valued your life. They were insanely brave, those 'Russians.' It seemed to them that violence was just a game.⁴²

A former Sophiatown tsotsi gang leader, Don Mattera, also remembers the Newclare Russians as impressive fighters. His gang avoided conflict with them if possible because: 'They were deadly guys. These guys never retreated, they came at you all the time.'⁴³

Marashea did not rely solely on their proficiency with *melamu*. Throughout the 1950s, guns became an increasingly important part of their arsenals. These were acquired in a number of ways, including appropriation from fallen enemies and through theft, but most firearms were purchased from Chinese, Indians or whites. 'There was a white man who supplied us with guns. We met him at night and his car dimmed the lights. We would make appointments with him and we would contribute in order to buy those guns.'⁴⁴

Just as important as fighting skill and battlefield tactics was the Russians' ability to call upon a wide network of affiliated gangs for reinforcements. These came from nearby

⁴¹ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Native Affairs Department, undated Memo. Newclare Squatters: Police Report.

⁴² Moteane Melamu, 'The 'Russians' are Coming' in *Children of the Twilight*, (1987), p. 139.

⁴³ Interview, Don Mattera, Johannesburg, 19 February 1998.

⁴⁴ Interview, PP.

mines and on numerous occasions fellow Matsieng were summoned from neighbouring townships to lend assistance. A man who fought with Matsieng in the 1940s and 1950s explained: 'Since Newclare was a place of many fights, we were always fighting there, and that was the place I used to fight with the group controlled by Hlalele.'⁴⁵ Dhlamini also asserted that miners greatly augmented the Russian forces in Newclare South in the evenings and on weekends and it was these reinforcements that made the Basotho so formidable.⁴⁶ Hlalele's group had established strong links with the miners at nearby Rand Leases Gold Mine and it was observed that 'the Induna and at least three of the Basuto Police-boys ... are Hlalele's Underdogs.'⁴⁷ The *Bantu World* also noted the movement of 'foreign' Russians into Newclare:

The Basuto have been inviting comrades from all over the country and one lorry-load of men and taxis came from Benoni; from Kliptown men came by train; from St. Helena and Welkom in the Free State men came by lorries; three lorries came from Vereeniging – two of which were intercepted by the police and one escaped. These vehicles come to Newclare by night, and, after unloading, the men kept in the township in locked rooms.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Interview, PP; CAD, SAP 367 file 15/60/44 vol. 2, Deputy Commissioner SAP, Witwatersrand to the Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 9 September 1956; CAD, WRAD 352/2, Native Commissioner to the Director of Native Labour, 9 April 1952; CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Chief Commissioner Native Affairs, Witwatersrand to the Secretary of Native Affairs Pretoria, 23 February 1957; *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 May, 1952; *Bantu World*, September 2 1950 and May 31 1951.

⁴⁶ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 13 June 1952.

⁴⁷ The Employment Bureau of Africa Archives (hereafter, TEBA), Johannesburg, NRC Files, A.9, Pad 1, Assaults and Disturbances Files, Inspector, Native Recruiting Corporation, LTD., Memorandum to the Chief Inspector, 13 November 1951.

⁴⁸ *Bantu World*, 24 May 1952.

Along with reinforcements, the Marashea were able to gain the assistance of the police on many occasions – this could be helpful in such ways as having opponents disarmed, having members of the police (especially fellow Basotho) join in the fighting, and having enemies arrested. The Russians took great pains to manipulate their relations with the police to their advantage. Guy and Thabane’s informant, Rantoa, asserted that bribery was used frequently – ‘That is one of the things we use. After he has got the money he is now a person who is on our side.’⁴⁹ On occasion, Basotho police actually fought alongside the Marashea, as was the case in 1954 when an off-duty Mosotho sergeant armed with his service revolver was arrested for participating in a large Matsieng-Masupha clash in *Siteketekeng*.⁵⁰

Throughout the conflict with the Guards and the Hlubi faction, Hlalele was in constant contact with the police and made public declarations time and again that ‘We of Siteke-Siteng regard the police as our friends.... We always assist the police.’⁵¹ The evidence indicates that Hlalele was successful in his campaign. In the course of his investigation into the Newclare conflict Detective Sergeant Papendorp of the Special Branch reported that:

Hlalele was neatly dressed, appeared friendly towards us and expressed himself prepared to assist the Police or authorities in any way possible in order to restore peace at Newclare.... I made a careful psychological [sic] study

⁴⁹ Guy and Thabane, ‘The Ma-Rashea’, p. 450.

⁵⁰ *Bantu World*, 5 June 1954.

⁵¹ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Meeting of various Russians with the Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 22 April 1952; Hlalele affidavit, 19 July 1952; Bonner, ‘Russians on the Reef’, 182.

of this man. He openly replied to questions put to him and explained to me his desire to tell the authorities the cause of all the trouble.

This favourable impression extended to the entire sector under Hlalele's control, where 'people were friendly and keen to speak to us and assist in every possible way.' Papendorp's assessment of Dhlamini was entirely negative. He emphasised Dhlamini's hostility towards the authorities and concluded: 'The Hlubi leader, December Dhlamini, is trying to think out a story to suit his purpose, and I did not trust him.'⁵² Evidently, the police were able to persuade at least some local government departments to endorse their version of events. For example, in a letter to his superior, the Under Secretary of Native Affairs advised:

The Police now have evidence (which we cannot refute) that the Civilian Guards alias Hlubis are the real aggressors and that they are communist inspired. The removal of the leaders of the 'Russians' who are said to support the Police and be in favour of law and order may therefore serve no good purpose. In fact, the Police fear that such a step would be regarded as a victory by the Hlubis who may then attempt to take further violent action against the remaining 'Russians.'⁵³

The Russians' confidence in the extent of police support for their cause is apparent in their request that a senior police official 'who is fully conversant with the situation' be present when their lawyers met with the Minister of Native Affairs, Hendrik Verwoerd, to

⁵² CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Sworn statement of Detective Sergeant Gerhardus Paulus van Papendorp, Special Branch, 20 July 1952.

⁵³ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Under-Secretary Native Affairs to the Secretary for Native Affairs, September 1952.

discuss the situation in Newclare.⁵⁴ The Russians also gave numerous press interviews and often met with government officials to present their version of events. In an effort to secure further support, the Marashea petitioned Gideon Pott, Agent for High Commission Territories, and convinced him that the Civilian Guards were dominated by a criminal element that preyed on all Basotho. Pott then recommended to the South African authorities that the Guard be disbanded. Through Pott, the Russians also corresponded with prominent chiefs in Lesotho, claiming they were the victims of the hostilities in Newclare.⁵⁵

Dhlamini and some of the Civilian Guard leaders like Ben Kenosi mounted public relations campaigns of their own. However, Kenosi and his associates fought a losing battle in this regard as they were automatically stigmatised by police and government officials due to their affiliation with the ANC and the SACP. For his part, Dhlamini antagonised the police by virtue of his alliance with the Guards, and alienated potential supporters among local authorities as a result of the illegal brewing and squatting activities he sanctioned amongst his followers. He especially angered township officials when it was discovered that he had informed the squatters he was authorised by the Johannesburg City Council to collect funds from them. The animosity towards Dhlamini reached such a level that W.J.P. Carr informed Dhlamini's lawyer that 'this Department proposed separating the Newclare Squatters for settlement at Moroka with the obvious

⁵⁴ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Gratus Sacks and Bernard Melman, Solicitors, Notaries and Conveyancers, Johannesburg to the Secretary of Justice, Pretoria, 21 August 1952.

intention of breaking up the present groups and destroying the power of December Dhlamini.⁵⁶ Clearly, Dhlamini lacked Hlalele's talent for gaining white patrons.

Because the conflict in Newclare South attracted significant publicity, the Russians retained the services of a law firm to represent their interests. The Russians' counsel met with the Minister of Native Affairs to present their clients' version of events and seemed to have found a sympathetic audience. Advocate Lakier's meeting with Verwoerd illustrates a number of Russian strategies. Lakier stressed to the Minister that the English papers sympathised with the Russians' opponents, advised Verwoerd that 'Communists are behind the agitation against the Russians,' and assured him that the Russians were in close touch with the police. Verwoerd replied that he was aware of the communist agenda of the Guards and the Hlubi.⁵⁷ His statements to the press indicate that Lakier's entreaties did not fall on deaf ears. Verwoerd told reporters that secret government sources had convinced him that 'The so-called "Russians" are at least as much, if not more, sinned against as sinning.'⁵⁸

⁵⁵ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, A series of statements collected by Pott along with his notes on same. February and March 1952.

⁵⁶ CAD, WRAD 158/15 vol. 2, W.J.P. Carr to F. Lowenburg, 18 December 1952; W.J.P. Carr to the Chairman, Non-European Affairs Committee, 27 October 1952; CAD, NTS 6472 file 51/3135(2), Chief Native Commissioner, Witwatersrand to the Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 22 December 1952.

⁵⁷ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Interview between Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, the Honourable the Minister of Native Affairs and Advocate Mr. Lakier and Attorney Mr. Bernard Melman representing Gratus Sacks and Bernard Melman, 6 September 1952.

⁵⁸ *Star*, 10 September 1952.

Fortunately for the Marashea, the conflict in Newclare dovetailed with Verwoerd's political agenda to expedite the Western Areas Removal Scheme. Van Tonder explains:

After the passing of the Group Areas Act in 1950, which became the cornerstone of apartheid, Verwoerd was to become personally responsible for a whole string of legislation that not only aimed at manipulating urban space in order to create separate residential areas designated for occupation by specific racial groups, but also which gradually destroyed any existing rights which Africans might have had in urban areas.... The Newclare squatter movement therefore presented Verwoerd with a perfect chance to intervene actively in the Western Areas of Johannesburg in 1952, and thereby to make a preliminary attempt to implement his more grandiose apartheid schemes.⁵⁹

Commenting on the problem that the conflict in general and the squatters in particular presented, Verwoerd made his intentions plain. 'There is only one solution,' he declared, 'and that is that both South and North Newclare must disappear and their residents must be settled in better and properly municipal-controlled Native residential areas.'⁶⁰ Verwoerd had no interest in resolving the conflict or repatriating the squatters, either of which would have meant taking action against Hlalele's Russians. A *de facto* alliance with the police, coupled with the complicity of the Minister of Native Affairs who turned a blind eye to their transgressions, enabled the Marashea to annex Newclare South.

Undoubtedly, the Russians benefited from a serendipitous set of circumstances – they were fighting a force that the police regarded as threatening, and the Newclare troubles suited Verwoerd's political ambitions. That said, Hlalele and his followers

⁵⁹ Van Tonder, 'Gangs, Councillors and the Apartheid State', p. 102.

⁶⁰ *Star*, 10 September 1952.

displayed keen political acumen, and supplied the police and Verwoerd with much needed ammunition. The violent tendencies of the Russians did not go unnoticed in either press or local government reports and, in order to support the Russians, their backers needed to demonise the Guards and the Hlubi. This was achieved with the assistance of Hlalele and various other Russians who assured white South Africa that the Basotho of Newclare supported the government and fought only in self-defence against communist agitators.

Once the Guards had been disbanded and the squatters removed to Moroka in 1953, the situation changed entirely. Neither the police nor any government department stood to benefit from the Russians' presence. Instead, a protracted war between Hlalele's Matsieng and a rival Masupha faction united the authorities in the view that the Marashea now constituted an undesirable element in the township. Increasing numbers of Russians were arrested, imprisoned and deported to Lesotho upon the completion of their sentences. Indeed this was Hlalele's fate.⁶¹ No longer a useful ally, the Russians were subjected to intensive police pressure as the decade wore on. Having allowed the Marashea to become ascendant, the authorities then battled for years to break the gangs' hold on Newclare, but only succeeded with the advent of the Removals Scheme.

⁶¹ *Bantu World*, 12 September 1953; Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 185. The expert legal counsel employed by the Russians (along with bribery) ensured that a high percentage of those charged still gained acquittals.

The Matsieng-Masupha Feud, 1953-57

Masupha members living in *Siteketekekeng* joined in the fight against the Guards and the Hlubi and co-existed peacefully with the Matsieng until a dispute over leadership erupted into general conflict between the two factions in Newclare South in mid-1953. PG reports that after the Russians vanquished the Guards and the squatters, 'Hlalele wanted to rule all Basotho living in Newclare. Matsabang was the ruler of Masuphas and Molapos and he denied that saying that no he cannot be under Hlalele – that is where the division comes.'⁶² The old enemy of Matsieng, Mamalinyane Dhlamini, joined in the battle on the side of Masupha until 1957 when he killed a prominent Masupha named Bifa in a quarrel and was in turn slain by the dead man's colleagues.⁶³

According to a Matsieng veteran, the Masupha-Matsieng feud in Newclare marked the beginning of the widespread use of firearms in the battles between Russian factions. 'That fight was caused by Leshoailane from Ha-Masupha. They wanted to rule us and we fought with them and that was when the guns began. The people from Leribe were very strong because they were many and they used guns.'⁶⁴ Shortly after the fight began, the Masupha got the upper hand and many Matsieng people fled the area, while the victors 'ran through the township, blowing whistles, brandishing battle axes, sticks and

⁶² Interview, PG. ST remembers that it was a shooting related to a leadership dispute that sparked the conflict while MS reports that it was squabbles over women that split the two groups. Interviews, ST and MS.

⁶³ Interview, HM; Interview, MK; CAD, NTS 4573 file 51/313(1), Chief Superintendent of Townships, Johannesburg to Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 8 November 1957.

⁶⁴ Interview, TT.

other weapons.⁶⁵ The Matsieng did not accept their defeat and the conflict continued even after Hlalele was jailed in 1953. Later that year, Hlalele's supporters informed the Native Commissioner in Johannesburg that they were determined to return to their former homes, while the Masupha were equally adamant that they 'were not prepared to have [the Matsieng] back in Newclare South under any circumstances.'⁶⁶ By mid-1954, the Matsieng had rallied their forces and reoccupied a section of *Siteketekeng*, a development that intensified the conflict.⁶⁷

Battles between the two factions raged for five years, often involving hundreds of participants. Many of the combatants were not Newclare residents. Since their initial defeat, the Matsieng constituted a minority in Newclare South and relied heavily on miners from nearby compounds to augment their forces. In one fight involving some eight hundred Marashea in 1956, the majority of the wounded were Matsieng supporters from Rand Leases compound.⁶⁸ 'Every Saturday I knew I had to go to Newclare to fight,' recalls a former Matsieng from Rand Leases.⁶⁹ Mineworkers also supported Masupha. A miner who worked in Springs remembers travelling to Newclare on three

⁶⁵ *Bantu World*, 26 September 1953.

⁶⁶ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 18 December 1953.

⁶⁷ Interviews, MC, PP and TT; see also CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 7 May 1954.

⁶⁸ CAD, SAP 367 file 15/60/44 vol. 2, Deputy Commissioner SAP, Witwatersrand to the Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 9 September 1956. The report states that the police were forced to use machine guns to stop the fighting.

⁶⁹ Interview, KP.

different occasions to fight Matsieng.⁷⁰ Marashea from throughout the Rand, and even from the Free State, joined in the fighting with Matsieng from Benoni and Matsekha from Springs and Daveyton figuring particularly prominently.

Table 1: Matsieng – Masupha Clashes in Newclare, 1953-1957⁷¹

Date	Number of Police Involved	Number of Russians Involved	Dead	Wounded	Arrested
25.8.53	50	200	1	1	13
4.5.54	36	150		9	11
19.5.54	62	100		9	24
30.5.54	39	100			8
13.6.54	17	40		6	8
4.7.54	61	200	1	11	26
22.9.54	90	400		4	
6.10.54	42	500	2	14	
20.10.54	24	200		3	
21.10.54	69	500		1	8
25.10.54	47	700		5	
30.10.54	22	200	1	5	
5.6.55	53	400	1	14	31
12.6.55	30	1000		5	30
18.9.55	26	200			62
27.11.55	5	70		5	3
3.12.55	18	300		2	2
7.12.55	32	400		4	
9.12.55	16	300	1	4	
9.9.56	43	800	1	26	
7.12.56	11	200	1	5	
25.12.56	16	100		13	
30.12.56	3	300			2
30.12.56	23	500		4	

⁷⁰ Interview, SC.

⁷¹ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Undated police chart. While these figures provide an idea of the scale and severity of Russian conflicts they are merely a record of fights the police knew about and bothered to make official note of. They are not comprehensive even for internecine Russian disputes and do not include battles between Marashea and other ethnically organised gangs. On the other hand, police figures of the number of Russians involved can only be rough estimates and may well be exaggerated.

17. 1. 57	3	30		3	1
20. 1. 57	18	500		5	
23. 1. 57	18	200			
23. 1. 57	12	1000		19	
27. 1. 57	19	1000	1	39	3
3. 2. 57	31	500	1	30	
10. 2. 57	153	20*	1	87	26
Totals – number of fights: 31	1 089**	11 110***	12	345	250

*It seems likely that this figure should be 200 given the number of arrested and wounded.

**Corrected from 1,079.

***If the number of Russians involved on 10. 2. 57 was 200 then this figure becomes 11,290.

At an open air meeting in 1954, Captain de Villiers of the SAP pleaded with a large crowd to end the fighting and 'strongly warned the Basutos that if they continued to fight they would be severely dealt with by the law. They would even be sent back to their homes in Basutoland.'⁷² However, it took little to spark renewed brawls and a few months later one of the biggest fights to date was reportedly initiated 'when a Masupha woman went over to a Matsieng man.'⁷³ In that same year the papers began referring to the fighting as the 'Newclare War' and in 1957 a police captain described Newclare South as 'one of the hottest trouble spots. It is really a vicious place.'⁷⁴ By the mid-1950s guns were increasingly the weapons of choice and the cause of the majority of serious casualties. In a 1956 conflict involving 1000 Russians, the police recorded the use of a variety of firearms ranging from revolvers to shotguns.⁷⁵

⁷² *Bantu World*, 17 July 1954.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2 October 1954.

⁷⁴ *Bantu World*, 23 October 1954; *Star*, 21 January 1957.

⁷⁵ CAD, SAP 367 file 15/60/44 vol. 2, District Commander Newlands Station to the Deputy Commissioner SAP, Johannesburg, 22 and 24 January 1957.

The relationship between the police and the Newclare Marashea had undergone a significant deterioration by 1957. Not the least of the reasons for this was the casualties the police sustained when they attempted to separate or arrest Russian combatants. There are numerous references in police files to Russian attacks on patrolling officers in just such circumstances and former Russians confirm these clashes.⁷⁶ Animosity seems to have peaked in early 1957. The commander of the Newlands police station called the Masupha and Matsieng leaders into his office in an attempt to put a stop to the feud. 'I warned them that the continuation of the fighting would carry heavy penalties for the natives involved, and when I told them that in the end many of them would be shot by the police both groups said this would be the only solution.' Shortly thereafter an officer was stabbed to death during a clash between a police patrol and a group of Masupha in Newclare South. The response was predictably ferocious: 'The follow up actions of the police resulted in 70 natives including [Masupha leader] Ephraim ending up in the hospital with injuries.'⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Rantoa sheds some light on Russian attitudes towards the police. When asked why he engaged in a clash with the police, Rantoa responded: 'We fought because we were protecting *melamu*. It was a way that they also – it was their standing in front of us – it was a way to make them afraid of us – they should not treat us with contempt.' Guy and Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea', p. 453. See also interviews with NN and TT.

⁷⁷ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Affidavit of Gideon Daniel Pienaar, District Commander, Newlands Police District, 27 May 1957. For other accounts of Russian-police clashes in Newclare see CAD, SAP 367 file 15/60/44 vol. 2. Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Witwatersrand to the Commissioner, SAP, Pretoria, 11 September 1956; and CAD, NTS 4573 file 51/313(1), Chief Commissioner Native Affairs, Johannesburg to the Minister of Native Affairs, Pretoria, Summary of the Riots in Newclare, Johannesburg in which Basutos were involved, 23 September 1957.

Russian violence had exasperated the police and township authorities that were now making every effort to break up the gangs. The aforementioned District Commander at Newlands, when invited to address a 1957 meeting of the Western Areas Resettlement Board, informed members about the conditions in Newclare South and asked that a start be made as soon as possible for the removal of residents to Meadowlands. Consequently, the Department of Native Affairs explored the possibility of changing existing legislation in order to expedite the deportation of those identified as Russians. In the words of the Chief Commissioner: 'I don't see any reason why Basutos should have a right to stay in the city and make the lives of the officials, the police and other natives impossible.'⁷⁸ Later that same year, the Chief Commissioner of Native Affairs, after summarising the history of Russian violence in Newclare South, recommended 'that there should be machinery to push these aggressive Basotho out of the city.'⁷⁹ The Minister of Native Affairs also became an advocate of deportation, quoting amended regulations that expedited the process.

In view of the continuous rioting at Newclare caused by Basuto factions and the difficulties experienced by the police in dealing with the culprits, I have drawn the attention of the Chief Native Commissioner, Witwatersrand, to these provisions and he in turn will discuss the matter with the police in order, if possible, to obtain the removal of the leaders of the two factions to Basutoland.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Chief Commissioner Native Affairs, Witwatersrand to the Secretary of Native Affairs, Pretoria, 23 February 1957.

⁷⁹ CAD, NTS 4573 file 51/313(1), Chief Commissioner Native Affairs, Johannesburg to the Minister of Native Affairs, Pretoria, 15 May 1957.

⁸⁰ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Memo., Native Affairs Department, March 1957.

The police consequently concentrated on identifying Russian leaders in Newclare South and concluded in their sworn statements implicating individuals that 'it is in the interest of the State natives that he is sent back to Basutoland.'⁸¹ However, despite increased police pressure and numerous deportations, the authorities only won their battle with the Newclare Russians when the township was finally cleared of Africans by 1958.

Russian Rule

What remains to be assessed is the legacy of eight years of Russian supremacy in Newclare South. Bonner claims that the Russians' activity on the Reef throughout the 1950s caused 'a hardening of ethnic boundaries and a reworking of ethnic identities on all sides.'⁸² Perhaps nowhere was this more evident than in Newclare where the Marashea succeeded in evicting many non-Basotho. Alongside the Matsieng-Masupha feud, the Newclare Russians continued to engage in large-scale conflict with other ethnic gangs. Both Matsieng and Matsekha members active in the 1950s remember occasions when internecine disputes would be put aside and Basotho would unite to do battle with Zulu, Xhosa or Mpondo adversaries.⁸³ These affairs may well have contributed to the strength of the Russian gangs as they presented themselves as the defenders of the Basotho

⁸¹ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Affidavits of Sergeant James Swanepoel, 15 May 1957; Constable Samuel van Jaarsveld, 16 May 1957; Sergeant Johannes Makasela, 17 May 1957.

⁸² Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 185.

⁸³ Multiple interviews. See also, CAD, NTS 4573 file 51/313(1), Chief Commissioner Native Affairs, Johannesburg to the Minister of Native Affairs, Pretoria, Summary of the Riots in Newclare, Johannesburg in which Basutos were involved, 23 September 1957.

community. Hlalele repeatedly asserted that his men mobilised to protect all Basotho from the indiscriminate assaults of the Civil Guards. It is difficult to judge how Basotho residents on the Rand, and in Newclare in particular, responded to Hlalele's ethnic appeals. However, according to the Director of Native Labour, other ethnic groups made no distinction between the Marashea and Basotho as a whole: 'The words "Basutos" and "Russians" in so far as their meaning is understood by the other tribes at Newclare are synonymous as is their opinion all the Moshoeshoes (Basutos) living at Siteke-Tekeng are associated with the activities of the so-called Russians.'⁸⁴

Because the Marashea gangs were almost exclusively Basotho, the entire group was often castigated as Russians, or at least Russian supporters, and a degree of fear and resentment was directed at all Basotho. No doubt Hlalele's claims that Basotho were targeted for assault by the Civilian Guards, the Hlubi and other groups were to some extent accurate, although he never publicly acknowledged the reasons behind these assaults. During the clashes with the Guards and the Hlubi, a police officer stated that 'anyone wearing a blanket at night was a "dead duck" if found north of the railway line.'⁸⁵ The plight of two men caught in this very situation was reported by the *Bantu World*:

Two Basuto mineworkers had a narrow escape at Newclare North on Sunday morning when the police rescued them from a mob believed to be members of the Reno Square squatters camp. Neither man knew the Basuto side of the area and so when they alighted from the train, they entered the Northern side

⁸⁴ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, The Director of Native Labour to the Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 4 June 1952.

⁸⁵ *Star*, 14 June 1952.

of Newclare. They were held up and thrashed by a mob suspecting them to be 'Russian' spies.⁸⁶

This state of affairs forced some Basotho to make difficult choices. As one resident explained: 'You see, at that time it did not matter whether you belonged to a group. As long as you were a Mosotho you would be a victim. For security and protection you had to join the group.'⁸⁷ At the height of the battles with the Guards and the Hlubi, it was reported that Civilian Guard groups throughout the Western Areas were forcing Basotho to leave their homes, and while there may well have been an element of anti-Guard propaganda in this account, there is too much evidence of widespread animosity directed at Basotho to dismiss it out of hand.⁸⁸ Hapless Basotho were attacked by urban residents who directed their fury with the Marashea against all Sesotho-speakers, while at the same time, the gangs demanded fealty from Basotho who lived in areas under Russian control and punished those who refused to support them or whom they suspected of acting as spies.⁸⁹ It is likely that many residents of Newclare supported the Marashea primarily out of a sense of self preservation.

While the Russians invoked dread, in the absence of any formal political authority in Newclare South, they were also the foremost group dispensing patronage, protection

⁸⁶ *Bantu World*, 19 July 1952.

⁸⁷ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 186.

⁸⁸ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Major Prinsloo, SAP to the Commissioner, SAP, Pretoria, 28 July 1952.

⁸⁹ CAD, NTS 4573 file 51/313(1), Summary of the Riots in Newclare; CAD, WRAD 352/2, Native Commissioner to the Director of Native Labour, 8 April 1952; CAD, NTS

and justice. The gangs did not rely wholly on coercion to consolidate their support base, especially when it came to fellow Basotho. For example, both oral and documentary evidence indicates that housing in Newclare South was allocated by the Russians almost exclusively on an ethnic basis. TT remembers that this was a source of tension with Dhlamini's people and the Civil Guards: 'The Indians gave us accommodation in their quarters and we helped other Basotho so that when a vacancy became available we would invite only Basotho and not other tribes and the fight started there.'⁹⁰ Once the Hlubi were forced out of Newclare South, their vacated houses were given to Basotho, including those from Benoni who had assisted in the conflict.⁹¹

Moreover, living under Russian rule would have appealed to many migrant Basotho. Newclare was a haven for such people, the majority of whom lacked any marketable skills and often the legal right to reside in South Africa. Relatively free from government scrutiny in *Siteketekeng*, these migrants were able to engage in income-generating activities that allowed them to scratch out a living. A 1950 survey of the Western Areas found that 'In Newclare a considerable number of Basuto women were living either by themselves or with a group of unrelated men, and apart from brewing had no legal means of support.'⁹² Miners flocked to the locations on the weekends for Russian

7674 file 90/332, Agent for the High Commission Territories to the Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 18 March 1952; *Drum*, December 1955, pp. 31-32.

⁹⁰ Interview, TT.

⁹¹ CAD, NTS 7674 file 90/332, Director of Native Labour to Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 14 June 1952.

⁹² *Report on a Sample Survey*, 19.

meetings and dances and were a key source of income for these women who sold beer and worked as prostitutes under Russian protection.

The Russians interviewed for this study claim that local residents appreciated their presence because they forced tsotsis out of these areas and punished common criminals. With marauding youth gangs victimising many neighbourhoods on the Rand, the benefits of Russian protection should not be underestimated. The rudimentary Russian code also dictated that ordinary residents should not be robbed, old people were to be respected and only tsotsis and members of rival ethnic groups or Russian factions were legitimate targets for assault. It is implausible that gang members uniformly obeyed these rules but their very existence served to limit offences against fellow residents. The Russians utilised a carrot and stick strategy to command the allegiance of the people of Newclare South - they offered a range of benefits to a significant section of the local populace and terrorised the remaining residents into submission. In this manner, the Basotho gangs consolidated their control and turned *Siteketekeng* into the 'Russian Zone.'

Newclare South was the headquarters of the Matsieng faction for a number of years and the Masupha also established a strong presence in the area. Despite years of internecine conflict and police repression, *Siteketekeng* remained a Marashea stronghold throughout the 1950s. It is not difficult to conceive that the gangs' success in this regard helped to cement the Russians' presence on the Reef and encouraged the proliferation of affiliated gangs in areas like Benoni and Germiston as well as throughout the townships of what was to become Soweto. A Matsieng leader who joined in 1959 reports that 'Our

headquarters were at Booyens which controlled other locations like Phiri, Naledi and Molapo, but it began at Newclare.⁹³ Many Newclare Basotho moved to the Sotho-designated zones of Soweto – Mapetla, Moletsane, Molapo, Naledi and Tladi – and it seems more than coincidental that Russian assaults resulting in headlines such as ‘Sotho Site-And-Service Residents Live in Fear’ began to appear at the same time, or that Marashea clashes became a feature of life in these areas.⁹⁴ Although the government succeeded in removing the Russians, along with all other Africans, from Newclare, the gangs established far-reaching networks during their decade-long reign. Thus, the removals in no way threatened the survival of the Russians. Instead, as a Matsieng leader testifies: ‘We scattered all over Johannesburg and others escaped to the Orange Free State where there are many Marashea now.’⁹⁵

Conclusion

The Newclare conflicts reveal two contradictory elements of power politics in the apartheid-era townships. First, the importance for black groups of a well-placed patron, especially if a popular support base was lacking.⁹⁶ For the Russians’ purpose, no entity was better placed to influence their activities than the SAP. Largely exempt from police

⁹³ Interview, PL.

⁹⁴ *World*, 5 January 1957 and 31 May 1958.

⁹⁵ Interview, PL.

⁹⁶ Although the Russians controlled Newclare South, enjoyed a degree of popular support amongst Basotho migrants, and could call on reinforcements from the mines and other townships, they were ethnically, geographically and to an extent, politically isolated on the Rand.

persecution during their battles with the Guards and the Hlubi, indeed at times actively assisted by them, the Newclare Russians acted with impunity. Second, at least from the residents' perspective, the limits of the government's authority in day-to-day life in the township could not have been more apparent. The Russian gangs were the real powerbrokers in Newclare South. Access to housing, as well as the approval needed to operate informal and illegal business ventures all required Russian sanction, granted only with the payment of 'protection' fees. Non-payment meant eviction from the area and quite possibly physical retribution. The Marashea also levied taxes for burial expenses and reportedly press-ganged recruits.⁹⁷ The SAP provided virtually no protection against these or any other Russian practices and there can be no doubt that it was the Marashea, not the government, which wielded power in its most immediate sense in Newclare South. With no alternative, residents paid taxes to the gangs and depended on them to police and administer justice in the townships. In addition, many Basotho women forged economic links with the Marashea. Visiting miners were sure to pay their bills and behave in a more or less orderly fashion when they patronised shebeens under Russian protection.

⁹⁷ *Bantu World*, 16 June 1951; *Sunday Express*, 23 September 1951; *Drum*, December 1955, 31-2; Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 166; Guy and Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea', p. 455. A Mosotho resident of *Siteketeke* told me that whenever the Marashea in Newclare were involved in a large-scale fight they would come and rouse non-members like himself to supplement their forces. Reporting on a Russian-Civil Guard clash in which twelve people were killed, the *Bantu World* quoted a witness who claimed that '[A]ll male residents in the Russian sector, irrespective of who they were, were awakened and commandeered to join the Russian gang.' *Bantu World*, 15 March 1951.

The removal of the Marashea from Newclare, along with all other Africans, illustrates the limitations of Russian power. The gangs could not match the armed might of the state and were ousted from their stronghold. However, prior to the removals, government agencies did not exercise effective control over Newclare. Instead it was the Russian gangs that held the balance of power. When the government concentrated its forces it could impose its will on any segment of the African population, but it lacked the resources to consistently monitor and control African residential areas. The Russians, and various other African groups, took advantage of these openings to establish their authority.

The Newclare era was an exceptional episode in Marashea history because of the scale and duration of the conflicts, but especially because the gangs were so much in the public eye. Marashea battles attracted significant media attention and leaders, such as Hialele, were featured in several interviews. Furthermore, the gangs interacted extensively with a host of official figures. These records have been preserved and the availability of such evidence, combined with oral testimony, demonstrates the practical application of several survival strategies, particularly the gangs' success in negotiating the political terrain. Although the publicity served the Marashea well for a time, in the end it contributed to the state's determination to dismantle the gangs. The Marashea had become a public embarrassment to a National Party that could not control its 'natives.' Never again would the Marashea operate so openly.

CHAPTER 7
MARASHEA ON THE MINES

Amongst the small fraternity of scholars who have studied the Marashea there is a perception that the gangs were an urban phenomenon that reached its peak in the 1950-1960s on the Rand and largely died out thereafter, due to increased police pressure and tightening influx controls. Bonner argues that 'the more rigorous application of the pass laws began to take its toll on confidence and strength so that by the mid-1960s the Russians' heyday had come and gone.' Coplan acknowledges that the Marashea has continued to the present day but maintains that 'Harsh enforcement of apartheid and influx control regulations in the mid 1960s reduced formal Russianism.'¹ To be fair, Bonner's research focussed solely on the Marashea on the Rand in the 1950s and Coplan only mentions the Russians in passing. Nonetheless, these assumptions cannot go unchallenged. The 1950s and 1960s were a turning point in Marashea history, but not one that marked a decline. Rather, this period was a watershed in the expansion and re-orientation of the Marashea. The opening of the Free State mines, the 1963 legislation that restricted Basotho workers to the agricultural and mining sectors and the exhaustion of the Johannesburg area mines, instigated the migration to the Free State and far West Rand and the forging of intimate links between compound and outside populations. The Russian gangs employed a range of strategies that facilitated their survival in South

¹ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 185; Coplan, *Cannibals*, p. 189.

Africa, but this chapter concentrates on the single factor I believe has been most important to the society's survival and expansion over the past fifty years – its association with the mines. This association has determined its geographic distribution and economic orientation, and provided a niche that has enabled the gangs to survive and even prosper as a migrant network. This chapter illustrates how and why the mines have been crucial to the continued existence of the Russian gangs and examines the Marashea's impact on mining communities.

The History of Mining Gangs

In the early years of this century, the authorities were already battling with criminal gangs on the mines and such organisations have been a feature of compound life ever since. The Ninevites, an infamous Johannesburg prison gang headed by Nongoloza, also known as Jan Note, had important links with mining gangs:

Nongoloza was supported by another important “chief” – Sam Nyambezi (alias Joseph) who, along with his followers, used the Crown Deep Mine Compound as a base from which to raid and plunder the black townships to the south-west of the city. East of Johannesburg Note's most trusted follower was one Jan Ntembu who by 1912 was located at the Premier Mine near Pretoria.... He could also rely on the support of at least ten other “fighting generals” in the mine compounds all along the line of the reef.²

It seems that gangs of various forms were ubiquitous on the mines in these years, although little is known about their activities within the compounds. Concern with the

² van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, pp. 181-82.

Ninevites spurred inquiries into mining gangs and an informant revealed to the Chief Commissioner of Police in Pretoria ‘that at the York Gold Mine where he worked there were two criminal societies [and] at that time nearly everyone in the compound belonged to one of the societies including the police boys.’³

The first identifiable criminal groups operating in the mines after the Ninevites were the Mpondo Isitshozi gangs that emerged in the 1920s. The Isitshozi assaulted and robbed fellow mineworkers and made determined efforts to control homosexuality in the compounds through violent means. They were greatly feared as ‘the people who killed people on the mines.’⁴ The Ninevites and the Isitshozi were unable to sustain a presence on the mines. The Ninevites became exclusively based in the prisons while the Isitshozi moved out of the compounds and were eventually absorbed by more urbanised multi-ethnic criminal organisations. The mines, however, have remained Russian strongholds.

Marashea on the Rand: The Early Years

Bonner took note of the movement of Basotho workers from the mines to secondary industry during the 1940s. This, combined with the fact that the majority of his informants followed this trajectory, led him to conclude that:

The preponderance of Russian leaders were working in secondary industry (much of it heavy), with the balance self-employed, mainly in tailoring.

³ CAD, JUS 144 file 3/778/12, Chief Commissioner of Police, Pretoria to the Secretary of Justice, 3 January 1913.

⁴ Breckenridge, ‘Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting’, p. 63.

Their membership, while being regularly replenished and reinforced from the mines, was likewise employed for the most part in secondary industry.⁵

Given this portrait, one might expect (although Bonner makes no such claim) that the Russians, like the Isitshozi gangs before them, would have gradually lost their ties with the mines and dissolved into the criminal underworld to become indistinguishable from the numerous urbanised gangster organisations on the Rand. A larger temporal and geographical focus on the Marashea demonstrates that nothing could be further from the truth. Bonner's period, when large numbers of Russians worked in secondary industry, was an aberration. And, while there is no doubt that many Marashea moved out of the compounds during this period, my research indicates that even in the 1950s mineworkers comprised the bulk of most Russian groups on the Rand.⁶

⁵ Between 1946 and 1948 the number of Basotho mineworkers on the Rand dropped considerably from 55,136 to 26,672 while the numbers of Basotho working in secondary industry had increased significantly by 1946 to 23,578 and continued to escalate thereafter. Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', pp. 176, 173.

⁶ Most respondents who were active on the Rand during the 1950s estimate that the majority of their members were employed as mineworkers. Arrest reports that list the addresses and occupations of Russians, as well as observations made by various police officers and township officials, indicate the same. See CAD, WRAD 352/1, Natives arrested in connection with faction fight in Phiri on afternoon of 18th May, 1958; CAD, NTS 7921 file 520/400 (12), Native Commissioner Johannesburg to the Director of Native Labour, Lawlessness Amongst Natives in Urban Areas and Urban Native Townships, 20 February 1951; CAD, NTS 7722 file 145/333, Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg to the Agent for the High Commission Territories, Johannesburg, Lawlessness and Unrest in the Pimville Location, 5 June 1950; CAD, SAP 367 file 15/660/44 vol. 2, Deputy Commissioner SAP, Witwatersrand to the Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 9 September 1956; CAD NTS 7674 file 90/332, Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 13 June 1952. See also *World*, 25 October 1958 and the *Golden City Post*, 5 October 1960.

Alarmed by the weekend rampages of visiting mineworkers, township representatives urged the authorities to place tighter restrictions on miners' movements. Following a series of weekend robberies in 1965 in which Russians were implicated, a member of Phiri's (Soweto) Joint Advisory Board informed the press that 'It seems to me these men are not local, but come from compounds in the East Rand.... It is clear that after drinking all their money ... they tend to go out and hunt for innocent prey in the streets.'⁷ The African press highlighted the activities of marauding Russians on numerous occasions, and the report of an attack on Naledi (Soweto) announcing that 'Blanketed "Russians" from the mines hit the township at dawn' was typical of such coverage.⁸ Township officials in areas regularly visited by Russian mineworkers complained vociferously – 'Basutos employed in the gold mining industry habitually visit Pimville at weekends and terrorise the respectable and law abiding residents of the location. This it may be mentioned is a typical pattern of behaviour of the Basutos employed on the Reef.'⁹ The involvement of Basotho mineworkers in the 1950s Newclare violence was deemed sufficiently serious for the Director of Native Labour for the Witwatersrand to request that compound managers prevent Basotho employees from visiting the

⁷ *World*, 18 January 1965.

⁸ *Golden City Post*, 2 October 1960. See also *World*, 18 August 1956, 25 October 1958, 18 January 1965.

⁹ CAD, NTS 7722 file 145/333, Director of Native Labour to the Agent for the High Commission Territories, 5 June 1950.

township.¹⁰ While many Russians, including the leaders, resided in the townships, it was widely perceived that the gangs drew their strength from the compounds.

It seems as if the large majority of Marashea groups on the Rand in the 1950s were comprised of both township dwellers and men who lived on the mines. However, there is evidence of conflict between Russian mineworkers and township Russians, based on this occupational and spatial division, rather than strictly adhering to the Matsieng-Matsekha divide. In fact, one report traces the formal establishment of the Marashea to conflict between mineworkers and residents of Benoni location. According to this account, Basotho living in Benoni formed the original Russian gang in 1947 to prevent Basotho miners from visiting resident women.¹¹ The testimony of a Molapo member active in Johannesburg during the 1950s indicates that in some groups little love was lost between location residents and mineworkers. PG, who worked in the Johannesburg General Post Office and lived in Moroka, explains that the relationship between Russian mineworkers and township Russians ‘was not friendly because those people living in the mines, they were after the women. Now they have to be fucked up by [township Russians].’ Presumably because of this antipathy, there were ‘not more than ten’ mineworkers in PG’s group which, he reports, numbered in the hundreds.¹² Prior to a 1960 battle between resident Russians and invading mineworkers, the Russians from the

¹⁰ TEBA, NRC files, A. 9, Pad 1, Director of Native Labour, Witwatersrand to The General Manager, Native Recruiting Corporation, Ltd., 14 June 1952.

¹¹ CAD, NTS 6490 file 125/313 S vol. 2, Deputy Commissioner, SAP to the Office of the District Commandant, 26 September 1949.

¹² Interview, PG.

mines visited Naledi and left a note that declared 'Their home-boy Basothos of the township were women'¹³ and vowed to return the following day. Forewarned, the local Marashea repelled the attack, killing at least two of the invaders. It is likely that such conflicts erupted on the Rand prior to the mid-1960s because township Russians could more readily find employment and were not as financially dependent on their mining compatriots. It is also possible that it was relatively easy for mineworkers, who had access to numerous locations throughout the Rand, to find women who were not resident in Russian-controlled areas and, thus, had little need for formal links with township Marashea. Even in this environment, internecine conflict was characterised by clashes between Matsieng and Matsekha groups that incorporated both township dwellers and mineworkers.

Expansion

After 1963, when the Aliens Control Act restricted Basotho migrants to agricultural and mining labour, the number of Marashea employed in urban areas other than as mineworkers decreased accordingly. As Dunbar Moodie noted, '[T]he earlier pattern of proletarianized Sotho working one or two shifts on the mines and then moving into secondary industry was hampered if not stopped altogether by the 1963 legislation.'¹⁴ By contrast the number of Basotho working on the mines expanded dramatically, especially following the opening of the Free State mines in the 1950s. By the mid-1970s

¹³ *Golden City Post*, 2 October 1960.

over 100,000 Basotho men worked on South African mines and 'Lesotho nationals became heavily concentrated on Free State mines because of their proximity to Lesotho.'¹⁵ In this same period, mineworkers experienced significant wage increases.¹⁶ Basotho women and women from the various homelands migrated to the Free State to service these mineworkers and the Russians established informal settlements near the mines to take advantage of these conditions.

With urban employment more difficult to obtain, the divide between Russians who worked on the mines and their unemployed compatriots became increasingly evident. These distinctions were not absolute in that some mineworkers augmented their earnings through illegal weekend activities; also men drifted between these categories, working for a period and then 'loafing,' depending on family circumstances, personal preference and the availability of employment. However, mineworkers' wages remained the one stable financial source available to the Marashea, and the gangs, which had always had members working on the mines, became more mine oriented after the 1950s. The shift from migrant to immigrant status was not responsible for the Russians' development, for this process was never completed. Instead, the relationships between mineworkers and loafers have sustained the gangs through the years.

¹⁴ Moodie, *Going for Gold*, p. 198.

¹⁵ J.K. McNamara, 'Inter-Group Violence Among Black Employees on South African Gold Mines: 1974 to 1986' *Industrial Relations Journal of South Africa*, 9, 4, (1989), p.29.

¹⁶ The real average wage of black mineworkers nearly tripled between 1974 and 1987. Jonny Steinberg with Gay Seidman, *Gold Mining's Labour Markets: Legacies of the Past, Challenges to the Present*, (1995), p. 19.

Perhaps nothing illustrates the gangs' dependence on the mines more than the movement of the Marashea into mining areas. Russian gangs have maintained a presence in Soweto and the East Rand but, as Basotho migrated in increasing numbers to the far West Rand and Free State mines in the 1950s and 1960s, the locus of Russian strength shifted. The shift was to shack settlements and locations in such places as Carletonville, Welkom, Virginia and Klerksdorp. The Marashea also became active on the platinum mines near Rustenberg and on the gold mines in the eastern Transvaal. Marashea in the Free State and other mining areas established *mekhukhu* (informal shack settlements) on farm properties adjacent to mines. In so doing, Marashea gangs strategically placed themselves close to their target market. Many mineworkers on isolated mines preferred to take advantage of nearby Marashea settlements that supplied dances, concerts, liquor, dagga and women rather than incur the expense and travelling time to get to urban townships. When mines were close to larger towns like Welkom, Marashea groups also established themselves in the neighbouring townships.

The move to the mines began while the Johannesburg Russians were at the height of their power in the 1950s. Asked when Marashea began in the Free State, ST responded: 'I do not know the year, but they started when the mines were established in the Free State. Many of the people working in Gauteng went to the Free State mines.'¹⁷ Many Marashea joined the society in Johannesburg in the 1940s and 1950s and then moved with their groups to the Free State, or migrated from the Rand independently and

¹⁷ Interview, ST.

joined newly formed groups in the Free State. These movements were noted in the press. For example, a 1956 court case revealed that Scotch Sepula, 'the alleged leader of a notorious gang of Basutos on the Free State goldfields known as the Russians.' was sentenced to eight months imprisonment on a charge of public violence stemming from a fight with a rival Russian gang. It was recorded that he had a 1952 conviction on a similar charge in Springs.¹⁸ A long-serving mine employee from Virginia with intimate knowledge of the Marashea witnessed the beginnings of the society in the Free State:

You see when the Free State mines started you already had a lot of activity of Marashea in Gauteng. And then as you had new mines the so-called bosses of the Marashea established themselves on those mines as soon as a handful of Basotho were around. Because as early as the 1950s the Marashea were already active here when I was a young man.¹⁹

Part of this movement may have been a response to state and police pressure on the Johannesburg gangs, along with the Western Areas Removal Scheme carried out in the late 1950s, which ousted the Marashea gangs from Newclare, their foremost stronghold in Gauteng. However, the primary factor was almost certainly the opportunities created by the opening of the Free State mines that employed tens of thousands of Basotho.

Russian gangs in the Free State began appearing in newspaper accounts and police reports in the mid-1950s. In the course of a 1975 inquiry into mine violence a man who worked as a boilermaker on Welkom Gold Mine from 1951-1958 submitted that 'During those years, the Basotho workers, in groups of 20 to 50, terrorised the nearby

¹⁸ *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 June 1956.

¹⁹ Interview, NT, Virginia, 29 October 1998. NT is a mine employee, but not Lerashea.

Bantu during the weekends and sometimes on evenings. These groups called themselves Ma russians.²⁰ The District Commander of the South African Police (SAP) for Welkom noted in a 1957 report that 'The gangs known as "Russians" are kept under constant surveillance. There is no doubt that the so-called gang still exists not only in Virginia but throughout the mine fields.'²¹ Newspaper headlines such as 'Welkom is plagued by Russian Menace' and 'Russian Menace Spreads to Quiet Village in Free State' confirm that the Marashea were firmly established in the Free State in a period when the Johannesburg gangs were attracting much greater attention.²² The Marashea have maintained a presence in the Free State ever since. In 1992, the Goldstone Commission's investigation into mine violence made note of the prevalence of the Marashea: 'In Thabong [Welkom] township there flourished a criminal gang of Sotho known as Russians. This phenomenon in mining area townships with Sotho mineworkers is fairly widespread.'²³ Visits to Marashea *mekhukhu* in the Free State and around Carletonville in 1998 and 1999 confirm that every mine that employs substantial numbers of Basotho has miners who belong to the society, along with a Russian presence in a nearby informal settlement, township or both.

²⁰ CAD, K325, Vol. 1, 1975 Commission on Mine Violence, F.J. Ferreira to the Minister of Mining, 10 March 1975.

²¹ FSA, PNV 1/2 FS 1302/vol. 1/26, District Commander, Welkom to the Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Bloemfontein, 16 January 1957. Numerous other accounts of Marashea activities appear in these files (also PNV 1/3), primarily reports on Marashea-related violence either between rival factions or with other ethnic groups.

²² *World*, 29 March and 16 August 1958.

²³ Goldstone Commission, 'Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Violence During November 1991 at the President Steyn Gold Mine, Welkom', 1992, p.19.

Symbiosis

In the 1950s and early 1960s many of the Russians who lived in the townships and squatter camps were employed in waged positions outside the mines, but since the passage of the Aliens Control Act in 1963 the vast majority have been unemployed except for piece jobs. The *malofa* and mineworker factions have had a symbiotic relationship: the unemployed relied on the miners for financial support while the miners depended on the 'full-time' Russians for access to and control over women. Additionally, group membership provided a measure of security from attacks by tsotsis and other Marashea. When fights occurred, mineworkers and *malofa* united against their enemies. Both groups operated under the same rules and had one leader, who was invariably located on the outside. The current leader of Matsieng in the Free State, who quit working on the mines in 1976 after he became *morena*, explains why this is so:

Morena of Marashea cannot be from the mine, he must rather stay in the squatter camp or location because he has to be available at all times. If he is in the mine compound he will not be able to solve all the problems that come everyday, he will not be able to get reports and visit all the places where Marashea stay. He must be unemployed to enable him to be available for consultation.²⁴

To the extent that there was an imbalance in the relationship, the aggressive recruiting of mineworkers indicates that unemployed Russians relied more heavily on mine employees than vice versa. A 1960s Matsieng commander outlines their recruiting tactics:

²⁴ Interview, BM.

A person can leave Lesotho not intending to join Marashea but when he reaches the mine we used women to attract him and that would cause us to have many Marashea.

If we wanted to attract new members we would tell the women to go to the mines and the miners would propose to them. The women would agree to their proposals and they would invite the men to the location giving them good directions. They would then make good food and make the men feel at home and after seeing that they are welcome they would see that the place is good and then the men would join and every weekend they would be there for the meetings. The women were under our control and we would tell them how to treat a man so he would not leave and he would pay the contribution to the group.

We would send the women to the mines because we wanted our population to grow. That would help us to raise funds because miners had money. The miners would come with money and buy at our stokvels and if you as a member interfered with a new member from the mines you would be punished for threatening a customer who brought money to the group. We were not working and our funds were only coming from stokvels and playing dice and that was not enough.²⁵

Marashea who worked on the mines also actively recruited fellow mineworkers. TS, a mineworker at West Driefontein in the Carletonville area in the 1970s explains:

For instance you are my friend and you are Lerashea and I am not. You encourage me to join telling me that it is nice to join Marashea and women are available. There are dances and drinking of *joala* and *moriana* which will make you to be promoted in the mine is there. So it was easy for people to join. We even used Marashea who had good positions on the mines as examples to the others.²⁶

In the early 1950s, Hlalele's Matsieng group in Newclare drew much of its support from Rand Leases Mine. The report of a concerned official describes the relationship between mineworkers and the outside gangs:

²⁵ Interview, PL. For Russian recruiting of miners see, CAD, SAP 602 file 115/15/60, Commanding Officer, Kroonstad to the Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 7 March 1961.

[I]t is certain that the Induna and at least three of the Basuto Police-boys at Rand Leases are Hlalele's "Underdogs" and are responsible for intimidating the Basuto mine natives of Rand Leases and forcing them into paying subscriptions to the organisation. Members once accepted, are free to visit locations for the purpose of visiting women and going to liquor dens. In many cases where a mine native is known to have a wife or woman in the locations he is immediately forced into paying "protection" money for the woman.²⁷

An active member of a Free State group explains that the relationship is essentially the same almost fifty years later: 'Mineworkers are the customers of Marashea - they buy beer from us. When their wives or concubines visit them from Lesotho, QwaQwa, the Transkei, Ciskei and other places they keep them at our squatter camps under our protection. They even rent rooms from us.'²⁸

The value that the Russians placed on their employed members is illustrated by the following account told by a Matsekha veteran active in the 1950s-1970s in Welkom and Rustenberg:

The rule was that when we were going to the *mekhukhu* from the mines bringing money to our wives, we were supposed to be welcomed and no other Marashea were supposed to insult us and if anyone said anything bad he was punished. The Marashea from the *mekhukhu* were required to treat us well. The one who provoked you was supposed to pay R50 as a fine. The money was given to the *morena* and if the Lerashea beat you he was required to lie down and you got revenge in front of the group by beating him and you were given R20 when you left that place.²⁹

²⁶ Interview, TS.

²⁷ TEBA, NRC files, A.9, Pad 1, Inspector, Native recruiting Corporation LTD. to the Chief Inspector, 13 November 1951.

²⁸ Interview, KK.

²⁹ Interview, NN.

Russian mineworkers paid membership dues on a regular basis and spent a portion of their wages in the settlements and locations where they were required to attend meetings. Mineworkers not affiliated with the Marashea were also valued customers although they were free to frequent the *mekhukhu* or not as they saw fit. The mines furnished a large portion of collective Russian income. The proximity of Marashea-dominated squatter camps to the mines, and the range of services provided by the Russians, ensured that a significant portion of some mineworkers' wages went into Russian pockets. WL, a Matsieng commander active during the 1960s-1980s in the Welkom area, summarises this situation:

The miners are our market. We sell beer and dagga and they are the ones who buy these things. Some put their women under our protection and they pay protection fees. They also rent our houses for these women. Marashea get most of their money from the miners.³⁰

Prominent Matsieng *morena* Mokhemele was well known to the authorities. He presided over a settlement near the South Vaal Hostel where it was observed that 'He keeps a shebeen and is a known supplier of dagga, liquor and prostitutes.'³¹ A 1972 report on a series of fights at Vaal Reefs, in which Russians were said to have played a leading role, emphasised the extent to which gangs had infiltrated the compounds and their reasons for doing so:

It must be stressed that to have the support of hundreds of mine Bantu employees is very lucrative indeed when considering the increased earning

³⁰ Interview, WL.

³¹ CAD, K325 File 7, Vol. 5, An Inquiry into the Disturbances on Anglo-American Gold Mines, January 1975, p. 54.

power of Bantu mine workers over the last five years, and it is therefore inevitable that rival leaders and their gangs, come into being. This then was the assumed situation at No. 3 compound where two rival bosses and their gangs operated, not so much from within the compound but from the outside, although each group had their respective followers, supporters and lieutenants within the compound.³²

The Marashea depended on mineworkers for more than financial support. On many occasions the mines provided sustenance and sanctuary. Unemployed Russians were able to live on the mines under the protection of their fellows without being discovered by mine management. A former Liaison Division Manager with TEBA explains how this occurred:

Some of these guys who just came in looked after the property of the Basotho and some of the Basotho were head clerks, they were people in authority. It was really easy for them to manipulate the system for somebody to be fed and housed and allocated a bed in the hostels because the hostel manager, with ten or twenty thousand people, he would never know who the hell was in the hostel.³³

A number of reports indicate that this was common practice at many mines. Inspector de Kock reports that in the 1970s and 1980s 'Most of them lived out of the compound, it wasn't as controlled as these days. They went into the hostels and ate there, came out and that's how they made their living.'³⁴ A 1980 investigation of Marashea gangs in and around Welkom concluded that 'There is evidence going back several years that such groups can infiltrate mines and obtain accommodation and food illegally for sustained

³² CAD, KKD 2/1/8 file N1/9/2(7), Report on Disturbance Involving Tribal factions at No. 3 Compound, Vaal Reef West Division from 25th-27th December, 1972.

³³ Interview, R. de Boiz, Johannesburg, 16 June 1998.

periods without the management of the mine being aware of the state of affairs.³⁵ Another dispatch claimed that Tseule Tsilo had lived for several months in the Western Deep Levels compound.³⁶ Marashea fleeing from the law sought sanctuary in the compounds, and those who lost battles with ANC comrades in the townships during the 1980s also reportedly took refuge on the mines.³⁷

Russians in the Compounds

Historically the Marashea has avoided conflict with mine management. Virtually all criminal pursuits and fighting took place outside the mining compounds when the mineworkers were off duty. Weekends in the townships and squatter camps provided the time and stage for the majority of Russian activities. The mines were a haven and source of income and recruits and the gangs did what they could to keep a low profile. A security officer employed at Harmony Mine since the 1980s did not consider the Marashea to be of any real concern because 'They were not involved in criminal activity in the hostels. They didn't actually interfere with the mining operation.'³⁸ Matsieng and Matsekha operated on the same mine and fought each other outside the mine on weekends, yet there was almost never conflict between the Russian factions inside the

³⁴ Interview, de Kock

³⁵ TEBA Liaison Division (TEBALD), Lesotho "Russian" Gangs, March 1980. See also, *A Human Resources Audit of Elandsrand Gold Mine Following the April 1979 Disturbances*, Chamber of Mines of South Africa Research Organisation, Project No. GH2CO6, Internal Report No. 5, (June 1979).

³⁶ TEBALD, Notes on Visit to Elandsrand Mine, 11 January 1979.

³⁷ Interview, ML.

compound. Numerous interviews confirm that KP's experience was typical of Marashea relations on the mines:

It was peaceful inside the mine, everything happened on the weekends. Some of the Molapo were even the cooks at our mine but we were not afraid they would poison us because everything happened outside the mines. There was a man named Simon from Masupha who was in charge of the cooks and he served us very well – the problems came only on weekends.³⁹

Management was, of course, aware of the Russians but as a long-time mine employee explains, 'Mine management knows they exist but there is nothing they can do about them, what happens off the mine premises is a municipality issue.'⁴⁰ A former Masupha member who worked on various mines in Gauteng and the Free State during the 1950s and 1960s confirms that there was little management could do to prevent Marashea activities outside the mines: 'The compound in the mines can't stop anybody from going outside the premises of the mine.... Anybody could go out and do tsotsis' work and we also went out like that. We also went out for fighting. Nobody knew that we were going to fight.'⁴¹ Reportedly, management sometimes made use of the Russians' talents. One former mineworker remembers that the hostel manager hired Russians to force men, reluctant to leave their beds on Monday mornings after a weekend of indulging, to get up and work their shifts.⁴²

³⁸ Interview, Harmony Mine, 29 October 1998.

³⁹ Interview, KP.

⁴⁰ Interview, HF, Lesotho, 8 May 1998. HF was not Lerashea.

⁴¹ Interview, SC.

⁴² Conversation, RA, Lesotho, May 1998. RA was not Lerashea.

Various mining authorities monitored the Russian gangs and periodically expressed concern over their potential for disrupting work. Reports of faction fights occasionally noted that the dispute originated outside the mine as a result of Marashea attacks on other workers,⁴³ but despite sporadic friction, neither archival records nor oral testimony reveal any sustained attempt by management to purge the mines of Russian gangs.⁴⁴ My research has uncovered only two episodes in which the Marashea earned the widespread enmity of mining authorities.

The first situation arose when Basotho mineworkers protested against the imposition of deferred pay in 1975.⁴⁵ They reacted violently to the Lesotho government's

⁴³ CAD, SAP 480 file 15/16/50, Deputy Commissioner SAP, O.F.S. Division to the Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 29 May 1953; CAD, BAO 2881 file 36/5/980, District Commander, Welkom to the Division Commander, Kroonstad, 25 February 1962; CAD, KKD 2/1/7 file 1/9/2, District Commandant Klerksdorp to the Deputy Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 9 July 1960; CAD, SAP 664 file 15/21/62, Division Commissioner, Western Transvaal Division to the Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 18 June 1962; CAD, KKD 2/1/8 file N1/9/2(7); **TEBALD**, Disturbances Involving Basotho Mine Labour Effective from 26 December 1978, 25 March 1981; Interview, R. de Boiz.

⁴⁴ Although some informants reported that they kept their identity as Marashea hidden from management for fear they would be fired. Also, there are scattered references to Marashea having their contracts terminated following episodes of violence. During the Newclare conflicts it was noted that 'Compound managers have taken to discharging as undesirable characters all Natives who are known to be associated with either of these gangs [Russians and Japanese].' **TEBA**, NRC Files, A.9 Pad 1, Memorandum to the General Manager – Native Criminal Organisations, 14 November 1951. And, in 1980, 'the management of Welkom Gold Mine declared those employees (8) identified as members of "Russian" gangs as undesirable to the industry.' **TEBALD**, Lesotho 'Russian' Gangs, March 1980.

⁴⁵ McNamara, 'Black Worker Conflicts', pp. 108-121; CAD, K325 volume 1, file 2, the Manager, Western Holdings Limited to the General Manager, Chamber of Mines, 1 April 1975; CAD, K325 volume 2, file 7, Comments on Strike and Disturbances by Basotho Employees at Vaal Reefs South Hostel from January 5th to 6th, 1975, by E. Schmid, Manager South Division, 15 January 1975.

decision that 60 per cent of mineworkers' wages be deposited in the Bank of Lesotho and only be accessible to the miners on their return to Lesotho. Basotho on a number of mines rioted, attempted to enforce stay-aways and fought with other workers, especially Xhosa. Some mine management and TEBA officials claimed the Marashea played a central role in these disturbances. These officials speculated that the Russian gangs were agitating on behalf of the exiled Basotho Congress Party (BCP), which wanted Basotho workers to be expelled from the mines back to Lesotho where they would form the vanguard of a revolution against Leabua Jonathan's ruling Basotho National Party (BNP).⁴⁶ It is more likely that the Marashea gangs were acting to protect their economic interests as the imposition of deferred pay substantially reduced mineworkers' ability to financially support the gangs. Also, the majority of Basotho miners supported these protests. Marashea gangs probably backed their customers to maintain their client base.

A 1979 strike on Elandsrand Gold Mine (Carletonville) witnessed the second, albeit more isolated, conflict between mine management and Marashea. In this instance, Basotho mineworkers dissatisfied with bonus payments and living conditions led a riot which resulted in an estimated R1,000,000 damage. Management blamed Marashea for inciting the strike and bringing in members from as far away as Soweto to enforce it. When suspected Russians were arrested by mine security, they were handed over to the

⁴⁶ CAD, K325, vol. 2, file 7, Comments on Strike and Disturbances by Basotho Employees at Vaal Reefs South Hostel, from January 5th to 10th, 1975, 15 January 1975; For a discussion of the deferred pay disputes see McNamara, 'Black Worker Conflicts', pp. 108-121.

Bureau of State Security (BOSS). Once again, it was speculated that their involvement was politically motivated.⁴⁷

Marashea conflicts with the NUM in the 1980s and 1990s will be discussed at length in the following chapter. A Matsekha commander paints a rosy picture of current management-Russian relations: 'These days we have a good relationship. If we want to hire a mine hall to stage our dances they allow us. We have a musical band which holds concerts in the mine hall. We also hold other activities in the mine hall – the mine management has no problem with us.'⁴⁸

As might be expected some miners resented and feared the Russians. Notwithstanding their financial dependence on mineworkers, relations between the gangs and mineworkers were not always harmonious. Marashea acquired a reputation for robbing mineworkers and despite the instructions of some leaders to refrain from such practices, police reports and the testimony of mineworkers and Russians confirms that this reputation is, in some cases at least, deserved. A Matsieng veteran states quite simply that 'There are many Marashea on the mines because miners have money and the Marashea can rob them easily.'⁴⁹ Mine security at Harmony Mine in Virginia report that robbery, assault and the occasional murder of mineworkers caused the Marashea to be

⁴⁷ Elandsrand Gold Mining Company Note for the Record – Security Arrangements When the Riot Proceeded on 8 April 1979, 16 April 1979. This was the conclusion of the manager of the mine and apparently some TEBA officials despite the fact that an internal report noted that workers had 'widely held grievances' and were 'genuinely dissatisfied.' *A Human Resources Audit of Elandsrand Gold Mine*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Interview, KK.

⁴⁹ Interview, KL.

greatly feared by some mine employees during the 1980s before they were driven out of the mine and the surrounding areas during a conflict with supporters of the NUM.⁵⁰ Moreover, a Russian was recently buried in the Mafeteng district of Lesotho after he and a companion were killed by a group of mineworkers they tried to rob.⁵¹

Marashea gangs occasionally became involved in conflicts with other groups on the mines that resented their activities. Investigations into various fights list the causes as Russians robbing and attacking mineworkers and animosity caused by the high prices Marashea charged for prostitutes.⁵² In a 1988 survey of hundreds of mine workers following a spate of violence on the mines near Evander, the most common response to the question, 'What do mine workers say about these men/What have you heard about these men?' was to identify the Russians as professional killers.⁵³ Mineworkers stress that despite hatred of the Russian gangs – 'They only victimise innocent people who are not

⁵⁰ Interview, Harmony Mine, Virginia, 29 October 1998.

⁵¹ Conversation, PL. It was stressed, however, that no revenge was taken against the mineworkers because the dead Lerashea had acted on his own behalf, not as a representative of his group.

⁵² CAD, SAP 664 file 15/21/62, Division Commissioner Potchefstroom to the Commissioner, SAP, 18 June 1962; CAD, KKD 2/1/7 file 1/9/2, District Commandant Klerksdorp to the Deputy Commissioner, SAP, 9 July 1960; J.K. McNamara, 'Black Worker Conflicts on South African Gold Mines, 1973-1982', Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, (1985), pp. 234-5; FSA, PNV 1/2, FS 1302/vol.1/39, Report on a Faction Fight: President Steyn Gold Mine, 25 February 1962.

⁵³ At the four mines where polling took place 100% of the men polled had heard of the Russians. 77%, 63%, 59% and 57% identified them as professional killers at Kinross, Winklehaak, Leslie and Bracken mines respectively. Interestingly, only a small minority (ranging from 12-25%) stated that miners feared the Russians. *Survey Report of a Study of the Labour Situation on Certain Gold Mines Prepared for General Mining Corporation*, Intercontinental Marketing Services Africa, (March 1988), Tables 56 and 57.

armed, they rob and rape⁵⁴ – there was nothing individuals could do to resist Russian activities.

Other than supplying liquor, dagga and prostitutes, and providing protection for mineworkers' women, the Russians offered a limited range of services to mineworkers.

One possible benefit was their role as security guards:

Target workers⁵⁵... bought tremendous amounts of goods that they stored in their rooms to take home. Now, if that is stolen or destroyed, six or seven months is wasted. The Russians were essentially protectors of property. These were the guys who made sure the premises were secure and that nobody interfered with the property of the Basotho.⁵⁶

Perhaps the single most effective way for the Russians to secure the support of Basotho mineworkers was by assisting them during faction fights between different ethnic groups. In the event of such conflicts the Marashea interviewed for this study stated without exception that internal feuding was put aside in the interests of Basotho solidarity. 'If there was trouble with other tribes – sometimes the fights started at the mine kitchen when one tribe cheated another in the line for food – Molapo and Matsieng would come together to attack that tribe,' explains TB, a Matsieng member who worked at Libanon Mine (Westonaria) in the 1960s.⁵⁷ WL vividly describes one such fight between Basotho and Mpondo:

⁵⁴ Interview, MW, Lesotho, 25 April 1998. MW was not Lerashea.

⁵⁵ Target workers went to the mines for one or two contracts for the purpose of attaining sufficient funds to buy specific goods, not necessarily to take up careers as miners.

⁵⁶ Interview, R. de Boiz.

⁵⁷ Interview, TB.

I remember there was a conflict between Basotho and Mapondo on the mine, Geduld #2 Shaft [near Welkom]. Somebody came to us and told us that the Mapondo had surrounded Basotho in the hostel. We told those who worked on the mine to go and help their colleagues – we only supplied them with weapons. The whistle blower blew the whistle and we gathered together to be informed of the situation at the mine hostel. We told the members working on the mine that we could only help them if they could drive the Mapondo off the mine premises. Then they left for the mine. When they entered the mine gate, they found that the Mapondo were at the gate blocking everyone from entering the mine hostel. The police [mine security] were behind the Mapondo and the Basotho were on the other side, so the police were between the two groups inside the premises. Most of the Basotho outside left the gate and went to the other side of the mine where they jumped over the fence so they could join their brothers.

Meanwhile the Mapondo did not realise that the Marashea at the gate had left. They told the police that the Marashea at the gate were trying to enter so the police rushed to the gate. The Mapondo thought that the Basotho inside would not attack as they were the ones who started the fight and [the Basotho] were not actually ready to fight. But the Marashea had joined the Basotho in their position. When the Basotho realised that the police had left and their brothers had joined them they took courage and attacked the Mapondo. The Mapondo ran to the gate and passed by the police. They scattered all over and many of them ran in the direction of the squatter camp where we were staying. They thought that all the Marashea had left to go to the mine – but we were waiting for them. The mine police said they were not responsible for what happened outside the premises. The Basotho were chasing the Mapondo and we had a chance to meet them. We killed many but some got away and gathered at the police station in town. They refused to return to the mine and they were all transported home by buses from the police station.

By that time the mine fence had been pushed down so we could go into the hostels. Those Mapondo had bought so many cattle which they were to transport by train to their homes. We slaughtered all of them and ate them. That mine remained without Mapondo for many years.⁵⁸

In this instance, the Russians, both mineworkers and squatter camp residents, acted on behalf of their fellow Basotho and all enjoyed the fruits of victory.

Marashea have long been renowned as deadly fighters and their battle experience in the locations and squatter camps made them a valuable asset in times of large-scale conflict on the mines. There are numerous reports of Russians playing a leading role in mine violence over the years, but the Goldstone Commission's investigation into the violence at President Steyn Mine near Welkom provides the best documentation of such an occurrence. In 1991 the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) called for a nation-wide stay-away scheduled for 4-5 November to protest against the introduction of the Value Added Tax (VAT). The management at President Steyn informed the NUM that workers who participated in a stay-away would receive no pay and would be subject to disciplinary action. Despite appeals by the NUM, management refused to waver from this decision. The NUM indicated to management that the stay-away was a COSATU issue and it had no jurisdiction to negotiate alternatives. The NUM standpoint was that workers who wanted to work would be free to do so without intimidation. At mass meetings in which NUM officials met with unionised mineworkers the majority were in favour of supporting the stay-away. A large number of Basotho workers had previously terminated their membership with the NUM, citing increased membership fees and disagreement with certain of its political activities.

On 3 November, when a group of Basotho attempted to go to work, fighting broke out as other workers, predominantly Xhosa, stopped them from doing so. This led to a series of clashes involving thousands of armed mineworkers that lasted throughout

⁵⁸ Interview, WL.

the night and resulted in 15 deaths and 55 injuries. Almost all the casualties were Xhosa or Basotho, with Xhosa in the majority. On 8 November, violence broke out at No. 4 shaft hostel. Xhosa workers isolated a number of Basotho in B Block where 'They [were] savagely killed, having been beaten, stabbed, their throats cut and their heads smashed to a pulp.' Over the next three days, 263 workers were injured and 25 more were killed. Once again Basotho and Xhosa dominated the casualty list although this time the majority were Basotho. Included in the dead was a former Steyn employee and alleged Marashea leader, Stephen Nkhopea. Further fighting at No. 2 shaft hostel on 10 November resulted in another 38 deaths and 59 injuries with Xhosa winning casualty honours. All was then quiet until the night of 24 November when two taxi-loads of Russians were transported from Thabong township to the outskirts of the mine near No. 4 shaft. The next day the bodies of eight Xhosa workers were discovered near their rooms. The Goldstone Commission found that:

This episode was clearly a planned assassination, and unlike in the previous fights the Xhosa and Sotho workers had not separated into groups. The Russians had entered the hostel by stealth and killed 8 Xhosa workers and injured 26 workers.... This incident was apparently organised as an act of revenge for the large number of Sotho killed during the period of 8 to 11 November 1991.... The evidence shows collaboration between the Sotho at No. 4 shaft hostel and the Russians to take revenge.... The killing of Nkhopea was probably an added reason for Russian involvement. The Russians, with the assistance of Sotho workers, infiltrated No. 4 shaft hostel ... and ruthlessly attacked Xhosa workers, killing and injuring many.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Goldstone Commission Report, pp. 13,16, 19.

The leader of a Matsieng faction near Welkom recounts the part he and his comrades played in this incident:

There was a fight at Steyn ... and Basotho were defeated by Xhosa. We invited four Marashea from the Leribe group, four Matsieng Marashea from Klerksdorp, four Matsieng Marashea from Virginia and four Marashea from Power [informal settlement] where I was *morena* and we organised ourselves and entered the mine to help Basotho fight Xhosa.⁶⁰

The connection between full-time Marashea and their compatriots on the mines could not be more apparent. Not only did the Russians avenge the death of one of their own; they rallied to the cause of Basotho mineworkers involved in a deadly conflict on the mine. Numerous investigations into violence on the mines led a TEBA investigator to conclude that Marashea were often at the forefront of the fighting on behalf of Basotho:

We had meetings after severe fights when a number of people were killed. We'd have Russian people in there also as part of the debriefing and when they spoke you would actually find the others listening to them and they would never be pooh-poohed. They seemed to have the inside information about attacks – who did what, when and how – so that invariably one would get the impression that during the fight, even before the fight, there was some sort of game plan being followed, especially if they were the aggressors.⁶¹

To secure a popular following the Russians actively sought the support of fellow Basotho. A Russian who worked in the factories on the Rand during the 1950s explained that 'Whenever there was a faction fight on the mines Marashea took part on the side of

⁶⁰ Interview, RC.

⁶¹ Interview, R. de Boiz.

Basotho because they are our brothers – we are birds of a feather.’⁶² A veteran who joined Marashea as a mineworker in Johannesburg, but spent the bulk of his term unemployed in Virginia and Odendaalsrus, professed a more mercenary motive: ‘In many instances we are unable to enter the mine compound because of the security, but if we are able to enter, we help Basotho as they are our brothers and customers who buy our beer and dagga in the squatter camps where we stay.’⁶³ Inspector de Kock confirms that the Marashea routinely assisted Basotho during such conflicts.⁶⁴ Whatever the motivation, it seems as if Russian gangs capitalised on ethnic violence amongst mineworkers to solidify Basotho support. The Marashea’s murderous reputation almost certainly contributed to resentment of Basotho workers on the mines and a hardening of ethnic boundaries within the compounds.

Conclusion

Criminally inclined gangs have a long history in the mining compounds of South Africa. The predominantly Basotho Russian gangs have managed to survive and flourish from the 1940s to the present day primarily because of the network of connections they established between the compounds and the nearby locations and informal settlements. The mining portion of each gang supplied much needed funds while the gangsters located outside the mine controlled resident women essential for attracting new recruits and

⁶² Interview, KL.

⁶³ Interview, MB.

⁶⁴ Interview, de Kock.

customers. Mineworkers furnished a ready market for the goods and services the Marashea offered – liquor, dagga, women and long-distance taxis – and Russians gained access to the mines for free food and accommodation. By setting up shack settlements close to mine property, the Russians ensured their products were more accessible to mineworkers who could often walk to Marashea shebeens instead of paying for transport to the townships. Because of the nature of their activities, Russian gangs frequently engaged in violent disputes with rival factions and other groups. On these occasions, mineworkers and unemployed members united to maximise group strength.

By keeping a low profile in the mines and restricting the bulk of their illegal activities to informal settlements and nearby townships, the Russians have generally avoided antagonising mine management. The gangs have received the most notice from mining officials due to their role in faction fights, but these were generally viewed as ethnic disputes in which the Russians got involved as Basotho, not as a separate criminal society. Violence directed against the NUM almost certainly did not invite the disapprobation of mining officials and, since the NUM has consolidated its position on the mines, the gangs have avoided conflict with the union. The Marashea's role in mine violence, which has almost always broken down along ethnic lines, probably served to bolster its support amongst Basotho mineworkers. This combination of strategies has ensured its survival in the mining areas of South Africa.

An attempt to assess the impact the Russian gangs have had on their environment leads to the following tentative conclusions. It is likely that their presence on the mines,

much like the Isitshozi before them, contributed to ethnic chauvinism as they were perceived as an ethnically discrete group whose members sometimes victimised mineworkers. Such sentiments were no doubt heightened as a result of Russian participation in faction fights.

While it has become more difficult for Basotho women to migrate legally to South Africa since 1963, large numbers have continued to undertake the journey to escape desperate circumstances in Lesotho.⁶⁵ Farm areas near the mines have long been the destination of homeland women whose options were severely constrained by influx regulations. Since the relaxation and eventual abolition of influx control in the 1980s, former homeland residents have poured into informal settlements throughout South Africa. Association with the Marashea has provided these migrant women with a measure of security and the possibility of finding a niche in the informal economy, but has also significantly curtailed their freedom.

The Russians' long term presence in mining areas also casts light on the complex nature of relationships between outside communities and compound residents. Russian mineworkers and their compatriots in the locations and squatter camps 'are one thing, they fall under the same leader.'⁶⁶ The relationships between the two sections of each Russian gang have linked the compounds and locations and squatter camps that much more closely. Mineworkers have found their recreation in Marashea settlements on the

⁶⁵ In a case study conducted in the late 1980s, 42% of prostitutes interviewed in a large mining town were illegal migrants from Lesotho. Steinberg with Seidman, *Gold Mining's Labour Markets*, p. 33.

weekends and have participated in township battles, while unemployed Russians have depended on mineworkers for financial support and often assisted their fellow members during periods of conflict on the mines. Illegal activities such as smuggling and taxi wars have intensified these connections. The Marashea gangs have bound segments of the outside and compound communities together in a network of social, economic and criminal interactions. In conclusion, the mining industry, with its single-sex hostel system of accommodation, has sustained an association of migrant gangs with a penchant for violence over the past fifty years, a development that has contributed to ethnic chauvinism, the regulation of migrant women and the interconnectedness of compound and township communities.

⁶⁶ Interview, MR.

CHAPTER 8

STRUGGLES WITHIN THE STRUGGLE: 'POLITICAL VIOLENCE', RESISTANCE AND COLLABORATION

In their influential article on resistance and collaboration, Allen and Barbara Isaacman posed the following question: 'why and under what conditions did Africans sell their services to the repressive regimes?'¹ To answer their question the Isaacmans listed several factors that motivated Africans to ally with colonial forces. Although they recognised that it was often in the best interests of different groups and strata to assist Europeans, their question implies a negative judgement. They do not ask why Africans co-operated with colonial forces, but why they sold their services. The idea of selling out assumes that colonial subjects were all uniformly working towards the universal ideal of emancipation. This approach portrays collaborators as an aberration and detracts from the recognition of social difference and heterogeneity the Isaacmans wished to bring to the fore. It also begs the question: who were these collaborators selling out if they were protecting their own group interests? Perhaps we should rather ask: In what ways, under what conditions and for what reasons did African groups advance their agendas and protect their interests by forming alliances with and manipulating colonial states and their agents?

Furthermore, although the Isaacmans argued for an inclusive approach to resistance studies that gives equal weight to the phenomena of resistance and

collaboration, the twenty years since their article was published have not witnessed such a development. Studies of resistance against colonial invasion and oppression rarely scrutinise the motives of those who fought alongside or otherwise co-operated with colonial forces. These elements are often ignored or dismissed as profiteers and quislings, while the various resistance movements have attracted much scholarly attention. This is true of such varied settings as the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, and Zimbabwe's liberation struggle.² Much the same bias dominates the historiography and popular perceptions of the struggle against white domination in South Africa - blacks whose interests brought them into conflict with the forces of liberation have been branded as sell-outs, puppets and enemies of the people. Surely, a more complete understanding of colonial, and post-colonial, conflicts in Africa demands a closer examination of the motives and methods of the 'loyalist' or 'vigilante' forces. Some scholars have called for a more nuanced approach to resistance studies. 'If we are to recognize that resisters are doing more than simply opposing domination, more than simply producing a virtually

¹ Allen and Barbara Isaacman, 'Resistance and Collaboration in Southern and Central Africa, c. 1850-1920', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, X, 1, (1977), p. 56.

² Both Mau Mau and the war of liberation in Zimbabwe have generated a number of scholarly studies, none to my knowledge that focus specifically on Kikuyu 'loyalists' or the Zimbabweans who joined the Rhodesian army and Muzorewa's Auxiliaries. In his exploration of the moral economy of Mau Mau, Lonsdale discusses 'loyalists' but stops short of a full examination of their various concerns and perspectives. In their edited collection, Bhebe and Ranger lament the absence of contributions on the Auxiliaries. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (1992); Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger (eds.), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (1995). Works that deal specifically with the perspectives of groups labelled as collaborators include David Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1840-1900* (1986) and Anthea Jeffrey, *The Natal Story: 16 Years of Conflict* (1997).

mechanical re-action, then we must go the whole way.... They have their *own* politics.³ This approach must also be extended to the elements labelled as collaborators if we are to move beyond the simplistic view of these groups as mere sell-outs to the grand cause of liberation.

South Africa, the last country on the continent to be emancipated from settler rule, provides a good testing ground for these issues to be debated and explored. Like the rest of Africa, colonial conquest in South Africa was expedited by the co-operation of various African armies with European invaders – the Swazi helped the British conquer the Pedi, the Mfengu allied with colonial forces against the Xhosa and many Zulu fought on the side of the British in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Once initial African resistance was overcome, the state relied to a great degree on Africans and Coloureds, through the imposition of indirect rule and especially in the various security forces, to keep control over the black population. Successive governments enacted a series of repressive laws designed to maintain white supremacy. After the election of the National Party government in 1948, the system of apartheid became official policy and increasingly draconian legislation was passed. African groups, the ANC being the most prominent, protested against these developments. In the 1940s and 1950s, as nationalist political movements – particularly the ANC – began to mobilise more effectively, the state assisted black groups that opposed nationalist campaigns. The apartheid state countered the militant opposition of the 1980s by encouraging and sponsoring various criminal gangs.

³ Ortner, 'Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal', p. 177.

vigilante groups and political movements to wage war against the ANC and its allies. Some of these organisations readily accepted this sponsorship and assistance to further their own agendas.

Some might label the Marashea gangs as resisters because of their long history of conflict with the police and criminal practices that defied government laws. Others categorise the gangs as collaborators because of their alliances with police and mine management against ANC and NUM supporters. Neither of these depictions is accurate. The Marashea had no explicit political ideology – either to resist or support the South African government. The Marashea's decisions to fight or assist the police, and support, oppose or ignore the ANC and its affiliates, were based on each group's best interests in terms of survival and economic gain. In this way the gangs negotiated the hazardous terrain of apartheid South Africa.

The Marashea and Political Conflict

The Marashea has been operating in South Africa since the 1940s and its relationships with the state (especially the police), mining officials, and ANC supporters provide the focus for this chapter. As a result of their alliances with police, and conflicts with the forces of liberation, various sources have painted the Marashea gangs as collaborators. As Bonner observed of the 1950s: 'For those most active in the ANC and kindred organisations they were not only viewed as socially disruptive but also as a

politically reactionary force that operated largely at the behest of the police.⁴ The police were comfortable with the Russians' political outlook. The gangsters were seen as conservative, 'tribal', uneducated Africans untainted by communist propaganda and revolutionary ideals. Most importantly, the Marashea never campaigned against the government. Police investigations repeatedly judged that the gangs posed no political threat:

I have the honour to inform you that the gangs known as Japanese and Russians are not political groups. (1950)

There is no reason to believe that [the Marashea] have any grievances against whites or are undermining the state. (1956)

The alleged 'Russians' are in fact law abiding Basutos who strongly opposed the "Stay At Home Campaign." (1960).⁵

This assessment, combined with the history of Marashea-ANC animosity stemming from the Russian-Civil Guard conflicts of the 1950s, made the Marashea a logical choice as police clients when the 'young lions' of the ANC took to the streets to protest against the government in the 1980s. As a result, the Russians' image as sell-outs was reinforced during the last years of apartheid. The alliances that different gangs struck with the police served them well during episodes of conflict with ANC supporters. They were allowed to pursue criminal activities, were often paid for information and sometimes

⁴ Bonner, 'The Russians on the Reef', p. 180.

⁵ CAD, SAP 386 file 15/2/46, Duty Report of the Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Pretoria, 14 November 1950; CAD, SAP 517 file 15/4/54, District Commander, Welkom to the Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 26 October 1956; CAD, WRO 352/1, Assistant District

were assisted in their battles with comrades. SAP Inspector de Kock commanded a political unrest unit in the Free State during the 1980s and worked closely with a particular faction of the Marashea. This arrangement made his job much easier. 'They knew everything about the ANC. I knew things before they happened.' The Inspector reported that his association with the Russians ended in 1992 when he was pulled off the unrest unit and put under house arrest for his alleged collaboration with Marashea in the murders of 8 ANC activists (de Kock was not convicted).⁶ Thus, it is not difficult to understand why the Marashea has been considered a reactionary force collaborating with the repressive regime. Guy and Thabane go so far as to claim that 'the Russians have been unable to discriminate effectively between their friends and their enemies.'⁷

The portrayal of the Marashea as collaborators is a misrepresentation and Guy and Thabane's assertion reveals a complete misunderstanding of the Marashea's quest for survival in South Africa. The Marashea was not a revolutionary movement. Its purpose was not to challenge or overthrow the existing political order, but to survive and advance its members' economic interests. To achieve this the gangs strove to neutralise the police and protect their spheres of influence from encroachment. The Marashea did not, for the most part, oppose the political objectives of the ANC or the NUM, rather they objected to the methods used to achieve these goals. Many Russian veterans interviewed during the course of this study spoke admiringly of the ANC and its role in ending apartheid but

Officer, Jabavu to the Manager, Non-European Affairs Department, Johannesburg, 30 June 1960.

⁶ Interview, de Kock.

at the same time stressed the apolitical nature of the Marashea. 'Marashea were not involved in political matters. Comrades were fighting for liberation from oppression and we were concerned with business matters in South Africa.'⁸ Marashea-ANC disputes were not ideological. Conflicts occurred when ANC actions threatened specific Russian gangs and possibly when Marashea were hired to undermine ANC-backed campaigns. For example, it was alleged that Russians were hired to break the rent boycott in Soweto during the late 1980s. The Soweto Council reportedly 'discussed a plan to enlist Sotho-blanketed "Russians" and other vigilantes to help smash the street committees, whom they believe are sustaining the rent crisis.'⁹

The Marashea began as a defensive association for migrant Basotho and members depended on the integrity of the group for survival. When ANC supporters threatened that integrity, the Russian gangs often responded with violence. Hostilities tended to be rooted in local, immediate concerns, and resistance to ANC initiatives at the local level should not be conflated with either a rejection of the ideals of the ANC or support for the apartheid state. The ANC did not have the organisational or administrative capacity to effectively control its supporters, or those claiming to be acting on its behalf. The actions of some self-styled comrades were brutal and caused much dissension within the townships. Furthermore, the endemic violence and collapse of law and order structures that characterised life in many townships and squatter camps in the 1980s and 1990s

⁷ Guy and Thabane, 'Basotho Workers', p. 245.

⁸ Interview, KI.

encouraged the proliferation of groups that justified blatantly predatory behaviour in the name of the struggle:

The youth organisations vary from politically disciplined community defence and security organisations to outright criminal gangs; from comrades to ex-comrades turned criminals and hence called *comtsotsis*.... Irrespective of the ideological aspirations which gave birth to them, since the youth and civic structures face similar obstacles in meeting their communities' needs, they remain vulnerable for conversion into warlordism, corruption, criminality and extortion.¹⁰

It is not my intention to portray Marashea as victims. They were pragmatists and opportunists. They did not allow other African groups to dictate to them and jealously guarded their interests. The Marashea has a long history of mercenary activity, especially in taxi wars, and it is entirely possible that some groups were hired to disrupt ANC campaigns and assassinate activists. These actions should not, however, be conflated with fundamental political differences between the Marashea and the ANC.

Marashea veterans insist they did not oppose the ANC per se but fought with *tsotsis* who called themselves comrades. Russian groups have a long history of antagonism with *tsotsis* and prided themselves on chasing them from the locations – this was to change in the 1980s. LG, who was Lerashea in the Johannesburg area from 1963-97, noted this change: 'Tsotsis were under our control, we beat them but they became stronger after the beginning of politics in South Africa. They were afraid of us because

⁹ *New Nation*, 12-18 February 1987. The *Weekly Mail* (February 20-26 1987) also carried stories discussing the alleged collaboration between Marashea and the Soweto Council.

¹⁰ Morris and Hindson, 'South Africa: Political Violence, Reform and Reconstruction', p. 51.

we killed them but now Marashea are afraid of tsotsis, they are called the comrades, and they fight as a group.’¹¹ Some Russian gangs fought with ANC supporters who were trying to put their stamp of authority on the townships, but, on occasion, Russian gangs supported NUM and ANC actions.

The Marashea gangs did not publicly challenge the authority and legitimacy of the state; their resistance was more contingent. They fought with the police to avoid arrest and subverted the law for financial gain. Members of the Marashea had no love for the government, the police or the whites for whom they laboured in the mines and factories. Tsilo is a hero partially because he shot three white police officers. SC observed that ‘White people were happy when we were fighting as they did not take the deaths of black people seriously.’¹² Veterans relish memories of how they outfoxed ‘the Boers.’ These triumphs were celebrated but tempered by realism. Tsilo shot police as a last resort. He preferred to bribe officials for this allowed his gang to operate with a minimum of interference from the law. As we have seen, Tsilo’s feats are representative of the grand strategies of the Marashea. It would have been counterproductive for the gangs to openly challenge the state. One of the keys to their survival was avoiding antagonising mine management and the apartheid regime.

To dismiss the Marashea as government puppets is to obscure rather than illuminate their role and the complex nature of their conflicts with ANC and NUM supporters. A close examination of the reasons behind Marashea conflicts with ANC

¹¹ Interview, LG.

affiliates in the 1950s and the protracted fighting between some Russian groups and ANC and NUM supporters in the 1980s and 1990s provides a more inclusive, balanced analysis of the struggle in South Africa. Such an approach can hopefully be extended to re-examine the conflicts that have shaped so much of the continent.

Civilian Guards in the 1950s

Several ingredients fed into the Newclare hostilities. The Civil Guards were determined to police the Russian dominated sections of Newclare and disarm the Marashea. The Russians relied on their weapons to protect themselves from tsotsis, rival Russian factions, ethnic gangs and the police. It was inconceivable that they would surrender them to the Guards. Furthermore, the Russians felt that the Guards had been infiltrated by tsotsis who took advantage of their new-found legitimacy to victimise their Basotho enemies. Finally, the Russians' status as migrants and foreign nationals was responsible for their antagonism to many of the ANC's campaigns. Most Marashea left their families at home in Lesotho and came to Johannesburg to find work. Thus, they were less likely than South Africans to participate in pass burning and other campaigns for which they might be deported. Bonner explains:

The ANC's main political campaigns, like the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the Bantu Education Campaign of 1955, and the various anti-pass campaigns of the 1950s seem to have little immediate pay-off or relevance to the Russians and were accordingly dismissed. To make matters worse such campaigns were often as not supported and enforced by the second-

¹² Interview, SC.

generation African urban population which the Russians viewed with so much suspicion.¹³

The Russians' objections to the ANC and the Civilian Guards were not related to the ANC's grand political vision, but rather to the hazards that ANC campaigns represented and the intimidation that was used to enforce them. The Newclare Marashea acted to conserve the power and autonomy that both the Guards' attempts at disarmament and many of the ANC's programs threatened.

Hlalele and his compatriots capitalised on the communist paranoia of the state and the police to gain support in their conflicts, which in reality had nothing to do with an aversion to communism or support for the government. The Russians' decision to enlist the support of the police was a cynical strategy designed to maximise their chances of winning the conflict with the Guards and the Hlubi. Their success in this regard allowed the Marashea gangs to defeat their enemies and maintain control over Newclare South for several years.

The police were happy to give the Russians free rein and even to assist them when they were acting against the opponents of the state. However, this alliance only lasted as long as it served the interests of both parties. It should not be forgotten that Russian groups clashed repeatedly with the police on the Rand in the 1950s, both before and after the dispute with the Guard/Hlubi faction, killing and injuring a number of police officers. The Newclare conflicts were the most spectacular instance of fighting between Guard and Russian groups, but there were several such episodes on the Rand in the 1950s. Police

¹³ Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', p. 181.

antagonism to the ANC-aligned guards seems to have been consistent and the Russian groups undoubtedly took advantage of this development.¹⁴

The Evaton Bus Boycott, 1955-56

The most powerful Russian faction residing in the Evaton area south of Johannesburg in the 1950s was a Matsekha group led by **Ralekeke Rantuba**. The Evaton People's Transport Council (EPTC) decided to boycott the busses of the Evaton Passenger Service (EPS) in July 1955 to protest fare increases, and when its supporters attempted to enforce the boycott, **Ralekeke's** group and the boycotters came into conflict. Sporadic fighting continued for almost a year, leading to numerous deaths, property destruction and the internal displacement of thousands of people. The EPTC was led by ANC activists, and once again the Russians were painted as political reactionaries doing the dirty work of the state. An editorial in the *New Age* queried: 'How is it that the

¹⁴ Other than Newclare, the clashes that attracted most attention took place in the East Rand townships in the mid-1950s. Police stressed the Guards' ties to the ANC, described them as a menace to white authority and held them responsible for 'a reign of terror' in the townships. CAD, SAP 539 file 15/2/56, Assistant Commissioner, SAP, Witwatersrand Section to the Commissioner, SAP, Pretoria and the Officer in Charge, Security Branch, Johannesburg, 7 January 1956; CAD, MGT 2/3/1/355 file 42/7/2, Report of the Manager Non-European Affairs: Unrest Incidents in Natalspruit over Christmas and New Year Weekends, 10 January 1956; CAD, NTS 7690 file 352/332, Native Commissioner, Germiston to Chief Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 29 March 1956; *World*, 7 January, 31 March, 16 June 1956. Russian-Guard tension apparently surfaced wherever the two co-existed. SC, who was a mineworker near Springs in the 1950s, decided to visit his cousin in Kwa-Thema over the Christmas period in 1956. 'By 4 o'clock my cousin told us to leave because he was afraid that the Civic Guard would learn we were there and if they found us inside would burn the house down

“Russians” always put in an appearance when the people are engaged in a political struggle?”¹⁵ Furthermore, the EPTC and its supporters continually complained that the police assisted Russian attempts to end the boycott.¹⁶ What is important for our purposes is to discern why Ralekeke’s followers opposed the boycott and if they did so at the behest of the police.

There are a number of possible reasons for Marashea opposition to the boycott. Tom Lodge suggests that the Basotho community’s social and economic position in Evaton encouraged a rift once the boycott began. The EPTC was led by well-educated, relatively prosperous men active in nationalist politics. The Basotho were led by a man, widely perceived as a gangster, who had been convicted of killing a rival a few years previously. The Basotho resided in Small Farms, the poorest district of Evaton, and possibly were disinclined to support a boycott initiated by the more privileged. Finally, Lodge draws attention to the fact that Evaton residents resented the status of migrant Basotho who were free to seek work in nearby Vereeniging, while those born in Evaton were prevented from doing so by the Native Consolidation Act.¹⁷ According to this version a pre-existing divide based on social, economic and spatial distance between the

because I was well known as Lerashea.’ As it turned out, SC was caught by the Guard after he left the house. He was badly beaten and had to be hospitalised. Interview, SC.

¹⁵ Carter-Karis Collection, University of the Witwatersrand, Reel 14, 2:Z13/3/7, *New Age*, 9 August 1956.

¹⁶ See for example, CAD, SAP 518, file 15/29/54 Secretary and Chairman, Evaton Boycott Committee to the Secretary of the Minister of Justice, Pretoria, 19 January 1956. Also, Ruth First, in *New Age*, accused the Evaton police of allowing, and even encouraging, the Russians to attack boycotters. Carter-Karis Collection, University of the Witwatersrand, Reel 14, 2:Z13/3/7, 9 August 1956.

Basotho and the rest of the Evaton population became further polarised once the boycott began.

Another possibility is that internecine Russian violence dictated Marashea's participation in the conflict, at least to some extent. A Mosotho by the name of Khabutlane, described by the police as a self-appointed headman, as well as a boycott supporter, was killed along with two of his 'bodyguards' in December 1955. Police reports trace his death to a longstanding dispute with Ralekeke:

During 1949 a number of Basutos from Leribe, Basutoland went to work in the factories at Vereeniging and settled in the southern section of Evaton Location. Ralekeke installed himself as chief of this group and took a number of the unhappy residents and fighters and went to live in the northern section. Since then there was often friction between Ralekeke and Khabutlane and their followers. When the boycott began Khabutlane joined the boycott movement and Ralekeke refused to support any movement that Khabutlane was involved in. This worsened the friction between the two groups and caused aggression from the "Evaton People's Transport Council" towards Ralekeke.¹⁸

Smash Moweng, a leading member of the boycott movement, who was allegedly involved in much of the fighting, was reported to be 'a member of the so called Russians under the leadership of the late Gabutlane [Khabutlane] who broke away from those under the leadership of Ralekeke.'¹⁹ Guy and Thabane's research also indicates that there was a definite Russian factional aspect to much of the fighting in Evaton. '[I]n the 1950s, the Matsieng faction travelled to Evaton in an attempt to oust Ralekeke's Ha Molapo from

¹⁷ Lodge, *Black Politics*, pp. 176-77.

¹⁸ CAD, SAP 518, file 15/29/54, Deputy Commissioner Witwatersrand Division to Commissioner SAP, Pretoria, 20 March 1956.

their position as recipients of the favours of the bus company, which was using them to break the Evaton bus boycott.²⁰ Thus, it seems that Russians fought on both sides of this conflict, some aligned with the boycotters and others against. Marashea testimony indicates that the bus conflict was considered another episode in an ongoing fight between Matsieng and Matsekha factions, albeit one that involved outside elements.²¹

Ralekeke claimed that he was not consulted about the boycott and therefore did not support it. Basotho from Small Farms kept riding the busses and were assaulted by boycotters. That is when the fighting began, according to Ralekeke.²² One veteran claims that the Russians opposed the boycott at least in part because many of them were working in Johannesburg and relied on the busses to get to their jobs.²³ Ralekeke called on reinforcements from throughout the Reef and different Matsekha groups came to his assistance.²⁴ At some point after hostilities commenced, the EPS hired Russians to escort the busses, protect the passengers, and attack the boycotters: 'We helped the bus owner, he gave us a piece job to go up and down guarding those busses. They were ranking in groups. People put stones in front of the busses and burned them with people inside.'²⁵

¹⁹ CAD, SAP 518, file 15/29/54, Affidavit of Sergeant Groenewald, 20 August 1956.

²⁰ Guy and Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea', p. 438.

²¹ Interviews, SG, Orange Farm, 15 January 1999 and PM.

²² *World*, 25 August 1956; Carter-Karis Collection, University of the Witwatersrand, Reel 21B, 2:YE1, Memorandum of Crown Evidence Part 1, Precis of Evidence, Evaton Bus Boycott, pp. 12-15.

²³ Interview, SG.

²⁴ Interviews, BK, Soweto, 27 January 1999 and KM.

²⁵ Interview, SG. The transport manager of the EPS admitted hiring Ralekeke and his men over a one year period to escort the busses. Carter-Karis Collection, University of

The violence on both sides was brutal. Maliehe Khoeli, a prominent Matsekha leader in Johannesburg, travelled with his men to Evaton to assist Ralekeke. He claimed that the strikers paid tsotsis to enforce the boycott and that 'We hit all those who supported the boycott from children to grandparents. We crossed Small Farm to fight those tsotsis and one day we killed a certain priest.'²⁶

Unlike the fighting in Newclare, there is no evidence to support the charges of police collusion in Evaton. Police reports indicate sympathy neither for Ralekeke's Russians nor the boycotters and advocated the removal of members of both factions as a step towards ending the violence in Evaton.²⁷ Indeed, Ralekeke was deported shortly after the boycott ended in 1956. Newclare veterans speak openly of how the police allowed them to attack the Guards and the Hlubi, but the oral testimony of Russians who fought in Evaton support police claims of neutrality: 'The police were stopping the fights, but the people who caused the strikes were many and the police could not control them.'²⁸ Although ANC activists were prominent in the boycott movement, there is

the Witwatersrand, Reel 21B, 2:YE1, Memorandum of Crown Evidence Part 1, *Precis of Evidence, Evaton Bus Boycott*, pp. 11-12.

²⁶ Interview, Maliehe Khoeli, 27 April 1986. (Bonner transcript).

²⁷ CAD, SAP 518 file 15/29/54, Deputy Commissioner SAP, Witwatersrand Division to the Commissioner of the SAP, Pretoria, 20 March 1956; Commissioner, SAP to the Secretary of Native Affairs, Memorandum: Removal of Natives from Evaton, 15 September 1956; Affidavit of Head Constable Charles Kukard, 21 August 1956; Affidavit of Detective Sergeant Gordon Polson, 23 August, 1956; Colonel Grobler, Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Witwatersrand Division to Commissioner, SAP, Pretoria, 5 July 1956.

²⁸ Interview, SG.

nothing to indicate that Russian opposition was rooted in antagonism towards the ANC, nor that the Marashea were doing the bidding of the police.

Battles on the Mines

In the mid-1980s, Marashea groups were faced with the introduction of a powerful new movement on the mines as the NUM struggled to establish itself and to force mine management to grant recognition. Different groups of Russians engaged in a series of bloody clashes with NUM supporters throughout the second half of the decade and into the early 1990s. The causes of these conflicts were complex and varied but it is possible to determine some basic patterns. On one level a resident force with an established patron-client network felt threatened by the encroachment of militant unionism. Inspector de Kock rationalises NUM-Marashea conflict along these lines:

The MaRussians were feeling that [the NUM] wanted to cut them out and then they made a stand - fighting them. And the MaRussians also weren't for any strikes - they didn't stand for that because as soon as the people strike there's no money and the women they protect wouldn't get any money from the men on the mines.... So, most of the time, they didn't agree with strikes on the mines.²⁹

The trouble that plagued Harmony Mine in 1990 is a good example of this phenomenon. Mine officials report that the Russians had strong links with the Basotho

²⁹ Interview, de Kock.

indunas³⁰ appointed by mine management. Through their influence with the indunas, the Russians had access to the hostels where they directed money-lending businesses, recruited members and intimidated men who defaulted on debts acquired in the shebeens run by Marashea women. The Russians were well-represented amongst long-term mine employees who had acquired positions of responsibility, particularly team leaders, who invested in Russian shebeens.³¹ Many of these men were not in favour of unionism and resisted calls for the strikes and boycotts the NUM depended on to gain recognition. When team leaders and other mine employees refused to align themselves with the union and disregarded NUM-initiated strikes and boycotts, the situation quickly polarised and mineworkers divided into two antagonistic camps. The Marashea were no strangers to collective violence and the NUM was quick to employ intimidation to establish a presence on the mine. As a result, open warfare was not long in coming. The spark was provided by the NUM calling for mine employees to boycott the Russian shebeens set up by a concession store also owned by the Marashea because a number of its supporters had been assaulted in the shebeens. The story is picked up here by mine employee NT who witnessed the events:

³⁰ Indunas were men appointed and empowered by mine management to keep order in the hostels in return for higher wages and other benefits. Each 'tribal group' was represented by their indunas who were typically older, more conservative men.

³¹ Anecdotal evidence from mine employees indicates that Basotho occupied the majority of such positions on Harmony. Moodie attributes Basotho dominance of senior positions on Free State mines to the 1963 legislation that forbade Basotho from working in South Africa except on the mines and as farm labourers. 'Thus Sotho mine workers on the Free State mines worked longer contracts on the mines and returned more regularly building up seniority.' Moodie, *Going for Gold*, p. 198.

The hostel people, via their union, decided to boycott that [concession store]. Now boycotting that place meant that the women with their little shebeens were not getting income, and if they don't get income, the Marashea bosses don't get income. So one day when the conflict started – because it was already simmering – you had two groups, one resisting the take over by the union which was entering their domain of influence. So it was on a Saturday when the announcement was made that nobody should go to the [concession store]. Then this group when they came up from work that afternoon went to that place with sticks ready for fighting because there had been talk in the hostel that shit would break loose if anybody tried to stop them. So they went there and when they came back, the people who were left in the hostel, largely your comrades, blocked the entrance.... [T]he group that was blocked off from the hostel were largely Marashea, reinforced by other Marashea who were not employed on the mine.... For the purposes of identification, the comrades on that particular day all took off their shirts, they were bare-chested, they had little doekies, and then the other guys had blankets and kieries [sticks]. You had quite a bit of confusion inside the hostel as there were some Marashea left inside who started fighting while the other chaps were outside. Because this was happening on the mine, management called in security because it was chaos. Here are people who cannot go into the hostel, and there are people who are blocking others. Not understanding what the problem was at the time because some people were already fighting inside the hostel, the casspir [mine security vehicle] bulldozed the gate. This group went in ... and it was fighting all over the show, [both groups] had illegal guns so it was a big battle during the night and several people died.³²

The conflict spread to other shafts and some 20 people from both sides were killed in the next few days, some of whom were executed in front of large crowds of spectators. The fighting spilled over into Meloding township and surrounding informal settlements and raged until the Marashea were forced out of the area. Marashea members on the mine, and those who had become identified with Marashea during the conflict, were

³² Interview, NT. NUM representative Jerry Majatladi provided newspapers with a similar account of the conflict although he alleged that when the fighting started mine

taken to the TEBA depot in Welkom and bussed back to Lesotho. A few were relocated on other mines.³³

At the time, the NUM alleged that mine management hired the Russian gangs to break the union and mine officials acknowledge that this was a widespread perception of NUM supporters, but insist that the union was never able to substantiate these charges.³⁴ Marashea involved in the fight vehemently deny that they were hired by anyone to participate in the conflict. A member who left Virginia because of the fighting supplies his group's version of the conflict:

[T]he comrades wanted to have control over everybody. Marashea did not start fighting them, they started fighting Marashea.... They left the mine compounds to chase Marashea from the squatter camps where they lived in the farm area. The Marashea resisted this and the fight began.... [The comrades] said that Marashea were a thorn in the way of freedom but I did not understand what they meant by this.... They killed everybody who was Marashea who worked on the mines with them. Some were killed underground.³⁵

The leader of the Marashea group that moved into Virginia a couple of years after the previous group had been expelled from the area states that 'The ANC comrades were not on good terms with the Marashea because before I came to Virginia some of the Marashea were hired by mine management to fight NUM comrades.' He claims,

security intervened on the side of the Russians. *Weekly Mail*, 2-8 November 1990.

³³ This account of the Harmony conflict was gleaned from a series of interviews with security personnel, hostel managers and Industrial Relations officers.

³⁴ See the *Weekly Mail*, 2-8 November and 9-15 November 1990 for NUM accusations that mine security assisted the Marashea in the conflict.

³⁵ Interview, KK.

however, to have negotiated a peace treaty with the NUM.³⁶ Yet another cause of friction between the Marashea group in Virginia and the NUM is provided by a long-term veteran based in Welkom who heard that the *morena* 'allowed his people to rob miners which caused confusion and the NUM and the ANC people attacked him and many people were killed.'³⁷ If there is any truth in this account, the conflict may have been exacerbated by mineworkers who nursed grudges against the Marashea. It is possible that they capitalised on the Russian-NUM rift to gain revenge for previous victimisation at the hands of the gangs.

It seems that some Marashea-NUM clashes occurred when Basotho workers resisted NUM initiatives and intimidation. Moodie deals with this phenomenon but in the context of Mpondo mineworkers. Groups of Mpondo were instrumental in breaking the NUM-initiated boycott of liquor outlets at Vaal Reefs No. 1 in 1985 and 'for several days thereafter the strikebreakers roamed the compound and skomplas, allegedly in full view of management and accompanied by compound police, attacking shaft stewards.'³⁸ Moodie notes that without exception, the mineworkers he spoke with, even those implicated in attacks on NUM personnel, applauded the merits of a representative democratic presence on the mines that championed workers' interests. Problems erupted when NUM supporters assaulted and intimidated mineworkers who did not adhere to

³⁶ Interview, MB. MB was *morena* of a Matsekha group. The group alleged to have done most of the fighting was Matsieng as they were the dominant group in Virginia at that time.

³⁷ Interview, SO.

³⁸ Moodie, *Going for Gold*, pp. 178-179.

United Democratic Front (UDF) boycotts outside the mines, or who refused to join the union. The violent actions of militant NUM marshals who openly supported the ANC posed a problem for the NUM just as some out of control comrades did for the ANC:

... the militancy of the comrade element on the compound presented the local union organization with a dilemma. On the one hand, the amaqabane [comrades] disrupted compound life and gave the union a bad name, not only with management but with its more moderate members. On the other hand, they were useful as enforcers of decisions made at union meetings.³⁹

The Goldstone Commission's report on the fighting at President Steyn in 1991 concluded that the violence was sparked by 'A militant element consisting of certain NUM members [that] was determined to ensure as complete a stay-away as possible and took matters into its own hands.'⁴⁰ After Basotho who attempted to go to work were assaulted by this element, the violence escalated and Russians from the compounds and the township became involved. This may also have been the case at Vaal Reefs in 1986. Four Basotho team leaders on No. 5 shaft were killed and a NUM shaft steward was arrested in connection with the murders. The NUM called a three day stay-away to protest his arrest. Seven Mojakisane, a known Russian who worked as a gang supervisor, refused to comply. He gathered some followers who armed themselves and went underground. The strike collapsed shortly thereafter.⁴¹ The Marashea, whose support base on the mine was located amongst Basotho miners, many of whom occupied senior

³⁹ Ibid., p. 267.

⁴⁰ Goldstone Commission, p.17.

⁴¹ Moodie, *Going for Gold*, p. 203.

positions, could hardly have been expected to comply with an enforced stay-away in support of a man implicated in the murders of Basotho team leaders. Fights at the Bafokeng North Mine (Rustenburg) during 1992, which also drew in the Russians, seem to have started in a similar manner when NUM and ANC-affiliated marshals attacked Basotho who did not support the union. A number of Basotho were set alight after petrol was poured on them and general fighting followed.⁴²

Russians engaged in a series of bloody clashes with NUM members in January 1995 at Vaal Reefs Mine during the Vaal Maseru Bus Company dispute. In support of the Transport and General Workers Union call to strike against Vaal Maseru, it was decided that NUM members should boycott the bus service from September 1994. Many Basotho mineworkers depended on Vaal Maseru to commute to and from Lesotho and continued to ride the busses. Two camps emerged during the following months. After numerous instances of intimidation from both sides, fighting broke out in late January 1995 resulting in the death of eleven hostel residents and injuries to hundreds of others. Alleged Russian leader Tsepo Anetsi was at the forefront of the conflict on the side of the Basotho.⁴³ Several Marashea veterans admit to fighting with ANC supporters in the townships and squatter camps and it is possible that in some instances these conflicts spilled over onto the mines and involved the NUM.

⁴² Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Events at the Bafokeng North Mine During March 1992, pp. 27-31.

⁴³ Satchwell Commission of Enquiry into Violence at No. 8 Shaft Vaal Reefs Mine on January 28/29 1995.

There is no evidence that all Marashea groups were categorically opposed to the union; some members who worked on the mines belonged to the NUM.⁴⁴ Rather, resident gangs reacted when they perceived the NUM as a threat, and/or supported Basotho mineworkers who were in conflict with the NUM. On some occasions Russians fought alongside the union. For example, most Basotho working on Leslie Mine near Evander were NUM supporters. When fighting broke out between NUM members and Mpondo and Xhosa indunas' followers opposed to the NUM in 1987, the Marashea assisted their fellow Basotho.⁴⁵

It has long been alleged by the NUM that mine management and police hired Russian gangs to attack union supporters and to cause faction fights with the aim of fracturing worker unity. James Motlatsi, President of the NUM, authored a 1995 report on the history of mine violence that laid the blame squarely on management's shoulders:

[A]s we saw in 1986, the main source of violence was the determination of mine managers to crush the union. Faction fighting became a form of union bashing and we produced much evidence to show how mine security forces allied themselves with non-unionists, scabs and those who broke union-initiated boycotts. Sometimes they provided arms for those who opposed the union and, on occasions, paid the "Russians" to come into the compounds under the protection of security guards to do their dirty work.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ A few Marashea showed me their NUM membership cards.

⁴⁵ Report on Faction Fighting at Bracken (1 to 3 May 1987) and Leslie (10 to 20 May 1987), Gencor Manpower Division.

⁴⁶ James Motlatsi, 'The History of Violence in the Mining Industry of South Africa', paper presented to the National Executive Committee Meeting of the National Union of Mineworkers, 25 August 1995, p.10; see also 'Reaping the Whirlwind', Report on a joint study by the National Union of Mineworkers and Anglo American Gold Division on the causes of mine violence, 1986, p. 24; *Weekly Mail*, 20-26 February 1987 and 2-8 November 1990.

Personal testimony is provided by a Mosotho NUM organiser who was instrumental in establishing the union in the mid-1980s. He reports that management, in collusion with the police, approached Russian leaders and negotiated with them to pay individual Russians R500 to attack union officials and instigate faction fights:

In 1984 during the first strike of the NUM at Vaal Reefs we happened to get three people. There were many running out of the hostel, but three were caught and the shaft stewards took them to my home and we interrogated them. They were told specifically to attack NUM leaders, shaft stewards and organisers ... many were killed.

I still remember one incident whereby one guy was right from my village and he said, "I know you, I have been told to come and kill you – but I didn't know it was you – we were just told to come and kill the leaders of the union." They killed people brutally but nothing ever happened. In the presence of fully armed police you could see Marashea killing people in the hostels.

Some were even killed here in Lesotho. I remember in 1985, a leader of Vaal Reefs was killed in Mohale's Hoek in his home by Marashea. And in that gang of Marashea there were even the indunas from Vaal Reefs.⁴⁷

A former TEBA official has no doubt that some hostel managers hired thugs to disrupt the union: 'Some of these guys were out and out AWB [Afrikaner Resistance Movement], National Party types who believed the black man had to be kept in his place. Obviously they followed an agenda that was possibly different from what the mining house was propounding.' However, he states that although these union-bashers were typically referred to as 'Russians,' they often had no connection to the Marashea.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, the active Russians interviewed for this study, who were involved in conflicts

⁴⁷ Interview, P. Salae, Maseru, 5 June 1998.

with the NUM, denied their groups were hired to attack union supporters. Even retired veterans, who spoke openly on such topics as collusion with the police and assassinations, and described NUM-Marashea conflicts in detail, denied that they were paid to fight with NUM supporters. Some acknowledged that the police attempted to hire Russian gangs for this purpose, but to no avail: 'Black police came to us saying that the Boers wanted us to attack the people who made strikes at the mines but we would not agree to that.'⁴⁹ Other informants said that it was possible that some groups were hired, but none admitted their own participation.

Evidence of collusion between Marashea and mine security was provided to the Goldstone Commission by a taxi-driver who transported a group of Marashea from Thabong to President Steyn Mine. Two taxi-drivers reported that their kombis were boarded in Thabong by Russians who ordered that they be taken along backroads to Steyn No. 4 shaft. One of the drivers testified that as they passed a Steyn security vehicle a white man next to the vehicle waved them on towards the mine. However, his evidence was contradicted by the other taxi-driver and as a result Goldstone judged that mine security involvement was unsubstantiated.⁵⁰ The most damning account comes from Inspector de Kock who states that at some mines, management 'hired them to fight the people who were striking, and that's how [Marashea] would get involved.'⁵¹

⁴⁸ Interview, R. de Boiz.

⁴⁹ Interview, MM.

⁵⁰ Goldstone Commission, pp. 14-15.

⁵¹ Interview, de Kock.

Despite some compelling evidence there is, to my knowledge, no documented proof that Marashea gangs were hired to attack union supporters. However, it requires no great stretch of the imagination to envision members of management and security approving of such conflict and assisting the Russians in various ways – especially when they were acting as strike-breakers. As OB observed, ‘Marashea did not want their money to be deducted [for union dues] and Marashea helped the mine management to fight NUM.’⁵² On mines where management was particularly antagonistic to the NUM, it is difficult to believe that at least some mining officials did not instigate and encourage violence against the NUM.⁵³ This does not necessarily mean that money changed hands, although in such circumstances, as long as most Basotho on the mine were opposed to the NUM, Marashea would probably have happily accepted payment to attack union supporters.

That said, the violent reputation of the Marashea made them convenient scapegoats for NUM officials eager to disavow any responsibility for mine conflicts. This was the conclusion reached by the Bregman Report, an enquiry into fighting at Vaal Reefs in 1986. Russian elements were involved in breaking a NUM-initiated strike after some Basotho were killed but the report found that these men acted on their own accord, not at the behest of management. As for NUM allegations that the Marashea were mercenaries: ‘There was no evidence of this. If anything, on the evidence tendered at the

⁵² Interview, OB.

enquiry, these were rumours emanating from and spread by the shaft stewards.⁵⁴ The NUM also blamed the violence at Bafokeng North Mine on tension between Tswana dagga-sellers and Russians who undercut the Tswana by offering their product at a reduced price. The NUM presented this explanation despite the evidence of a number of witnesses who claimed the fighting began as a result of union marshals intimidating and assaulting those (specifically Basotho) who refused to support the NUM.⁵⁵

What needs to be remembered is the importance of Basotho mineworkers to the Russian gangs. Had the majority of Basotho been in favour of the NUM, it is unlikely that the Russians would have opposed the union. Indeed, they sometimes fought in support of the NUM under these circumstances. McNamara has pointed out that in the first phase of unionisation (1982-1985), Basotho were the chief source of union membership. 'The Lesotho citizens appeared to be particularly keen to join the union to safeguard their future job security, being well aware of the shift in labour recruitment to South African workers after the 1974 clashes and the 1975 deferred pay dispute.'⁵⁶ Conditions changed in 1986 when the new government in Lesotho, following South African instructions, urged its citizens to desist from active participation in the NUM. At the same time, the South African government announced its intention to repatriate

⁵³ See Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman, *South Africa's Labor Empire*, (1991), chapter 8 for a discussion of the different mining groups' attitudes towards, and treatment of, the NUM.

⁵⁴ Bregman Report, Volume 4, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Violence at Vaal Reefs Mine, No. 1 Shaft Hostel During 1986, p. 533.

⁵⁵ Report of the Commission (Bafokeng North), pp. 27-32, 37.

⁵⁶ McNamara, 'Inter-group Violence', p. 35.

foreign workers and the gold mines experienced a record wave of strikes.⁵⁷ Discouraged by their government and worried they would be retrenched for engaging in strike action, many Basotho withdrew their support from the NUM and clashed with NUM supporters.

Whatever their relationship in the past, it seems now that the union is solidly established, NUM-Russian relations have greatly improved. KK, who left Virginia in the wake of the conflicts with the NUM, and is currently a member of a group situated near Klerksdorp, testified that 'We are now good friends with NUM members. The NUM protects workers who are our customers. When we have a problem with the workers we report them to the NUM officials at the mine. They also report to us if some of us have wronged their members.'⁵⁸

The Marashea and the Comrades

I can find no evidence of Russian conflict with ANC-aligned forces from the beginning of the 1960s until the 1980s when different Marashea groups clashed with ANC supporters on the Rand and throughout the gold mining areas. This peaceful era can probably be explained by the quiescence of the ANC after it was banned in 1960. Only in the 1980s did its allies and affiliates reassert the presence of the ANC within South Africa through the auspices of the UDF and the NUM.

In mining areas, the line between the NUM and the ANC was difficult to distinguish for many Russians who categorised both as 'comrades': 'NUM was organised

⁵⁷ Ibid.

by the ANC and we regarded them as the ANC so we sometimes fought with them – they were our enemies.⁵⁹ There was a great deal of fighting in some of the squatter camps and townships adjacent to the mines. Marashea testimony indicates that the clashes occurred as the ANC attempted to displace the Russians as the foremost authority in the camps:

I took part in one event, that was a fight between us and the ANC youth comrades. They claimed that the area where we had our squatter camp belonged to them. Two Marashea were killed in that fight.... There were great conflicts between the Marashea and the ANC. In the 1990s there is no group that is fighting Marashea except the ANC comrades.... They fight with Marashea over territory and in many instances they think the rules of Marashea are very oppressive to the people under them.⁶⁰

Inspector de Kock confirmed that the disputes were essentially a struggle between an entrenched force and a new group seeking to assert its presence:

There was tension. The ANC didn't recognise any other groups. The protection [money] – they undermined the authority of the MaRussians and that led to fights.

Question: How did they undermine the Russians?

By talking to the youth, saying that the MaRussians haven't got the right to take money. For instance they collected money for burials. The ANC went to the people and said, "You can't give your money to them, they're not an authority."⁶¹

The term 'comtsosis' denotes comrades who turned to crime. Such elements may well have exacerbated tension between Marashea groups and ANC supporters. GB's

⁵⁸ Interview, KK.

⁵⁹ Interview, GB.

⁶⁰ Interview, KB.

⁶¹ Interview, de Kock.

description of the following conflict is consistent with the Marashea's campaigns to eliminate tsotsis:

In 1989 I left Welkom and went to Westonaria and when I arrived there was a fight between Marashea and the ANC youth. The cause of that trouble was that we stopped them from robbing Marashea and other people. They robbed miners and we were not happy with that and the fight lasted about two months. We would not allow them to disturb miners because miners were our customers at our stokvels and dances.⁶²

In both mining areas and the urban townships of Soweto there seems to have been a definite generational character to the violence. The episode that received the most attention was Marashea resistance to the comrades' Christmas against Emergency campaign. ANC-supporting youth in many areas of Soweto attempted to enforce a black out as a sign of solidarity with political detainees during the holiday period in 1986. In Phiri, the Johannesburg headquarters of the Matsieng faction of the Russians, trouble began when residents refused to heed the calls to turn off the lights. Youths allegedly attacked a house, setting it alight and the Russians responded with a vengeance:

The skirmishes carried on until the early hours of the morning. Sources said that after the assault the "Russians" went on a revenge mission, attacking and assaulting youths in the area. They said the "Russians" launched house-to-house raids, flogging and assaulting youths who were found in homes.⁶³

A reported ten people were killed before the Soweto Civic Association brokered a truce.⁶⁴

⁶² Interview, GB.

⁶³ *City Press*, 21 December 1986.

⁶⁴ University of Natal Indicator Project South Africa, *Political Conflict in South Africa: Data Trends 1984-1988*, 1988, p. 196

Compared to Inkatha-ANC violence on the Rand during the same period, problems between the ANC and the Russians were relatively rare. Those that occurred were characterised by Russian informants as generational rather than political disputes. Certainly this was a consistent theme in much of the 'political' violence that occurred in the townships on the Rand and in the rest of the country. Campbell's research in Natal uncovered that:

Part of the comrades' self definition has been to distinguish themselves sharply from what they regard as the backward older generation. "The older generation only know about ancient times and ancient things," Colin N (23 years) argued. "The youth must correct all the mistakes they have made."⁶⁵

Campbell suggests that, deeply threatened and offended by the actions of the youthful comrades, Inkatha supporters were not exclusively anti-ANC, 'but also [were determined] to put down the cheeky upstart youth who dared to think they could challenge the power of older men.'⁶⁶ Elders held respected positions within Russian groups as advisors, and while membership encompassed all ages from youth just out of initiation school to pensioners, positions of responsibility tended to be in the hands of seasoned veterans. Russians in the urban townships had a long history of animosity with the youthful *tsotsi* gangs and often took it upon themselves to discipline wayward youth in the locations. In fact, Russians were an important element in the *makholla* traditional courts that were active in the Sotho-designated zones of Soweto in the 1960s and 1970s. The *makholla* movement laid heavy emphasis on 'traditional' values, which demanded that youth

⁶⁵ Campbell, 'Learning to Kill?', p. 622.

exhibit deference towards elders. Some Marashea reportedly acted as soldiers of the *makhotla*, rounding up and flogging youthful offenders. These men were not likely to accept being dictated to by the Street Committees and People's Courts set up by ANC youth in the 1980s. These structures took it upon themselves to arbitrate disputes and dispense justice to township residents, actions that effectively undermined the authority of the Marashea. In many instances this resulted in older people being beaten by the comrades.

TS, a Matsieng commander in Phiri in the 1980s, explained how the Russians became involved in fights with the comrades:

Marashea did not fight with the ANC but what I can explain is that the young comrades were silly. It would happen that when I quarrel with my wife and beat her she would go to the Street Committee who would call the children who would beat me. We quarrelled about that.... We told them they must stop involving politics in family matters....

In 1986 a man whipped his wife and the wife ran away and reported to the Street Committee. Instead of settling the problems of that family they beat the man. We disagreed and we fought with them. They burnt the house we used for dances and Lerashea called Malefetsane was inside and he was crippled. For that we killed many of the Street Committee.... The parents and elders came to sit down and settle the problem. We told them we are not against the ANC comrades but we hate a child who runs his father's family.⁶⁷

TS is at pains to establish that the Russians had no argument with the ANC as an organisation, but refused to accept the authority of its youthful members, especially in what they considered the private sphere. Just as with the NUM, some Russians belonged to the ANC and proudly displayed their membership cards. PK claims that many

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 621.

Russians fought side by side with their communities against the Inkatha hostel dwellers: 'We stood with the ANC when they were attacked by the Zulus. We would throw them out the windows of the trains.'⁶⁸

The Russians and 'Resistance'

Without exception Marashea informants insist their groups had no interest or stake in South African politics. They might admire the ANC as individuals but the purpose of the group was to protect its members and to make money. This did not carry over into political developments in their homeland. The irony of the Russians being labelled as conservative collaborators is illustrated by their role in the politics of Lesotho. When the Basotho National Party (BNP), under Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan, annulled the 1970 elections it seemed certain to lose and declared a state of emergency, the opposition Basotho Congress Party (BCP) under Ntsu Mokhehle was forced into exile. Over the next several years BCP supporters attacked police stations and other symbols of government authority in Lesotho and many were killed in government reprisals. The South African mines became a key point of organisation and funding for the exiled BCP and its armed wing, the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA). Mineworkers contributed heavily to BCP coffers and although the BNP had spies on the mines, the compounds were beyond the reach of the BNP's military. The majority of Basotho migrants living and working in South Africa seem to have supported the BCP and Marashea were no

⁶⁷ Interview, TS.

exception. Some gangs took up the cause of liberation and many other Russians supported the BCP as individuals. Russian groups held fundraisers for the BCP and a number of Russians joined the LLA. MB remembers:

Marashea supported the BCP because many of them were ill treated by Leabua Jonathan's soldiers.... Marashea contributed money to the BCP especially after 1970 when it was in exile. The purpose was to strengthen the BCP so it could go back to Lesotho and win the elections. Some of us fled the country to join the LLA and we felt very glad when some of our members joined the LLA.⁶⁹

Mining and police records, as well as Russian testimony, all confirm that the BCP was solidly entrenched on the mines and that the Russians often were important supporters.⁷⁰

TEBA's Liaison Division believed the Russians were operating largely at the behest of the BCP:

...[A]nti-Jonathan, pro Ntsu [Mokhehle] "Russian" gangs have operated in the hills behind Western Deep Levels for the last 20 years. Their object is to sow confusion and cause trouble amongst the Basotho miners leading to the discharge of the Basotho and forcing them to return home where there is no employment. Presumably, the next step would be to foment rebellion against the Lesotho government.⁷¹

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Basotho miners on a number of mines rioted and engineered work stoppages to protest against the imposition of deferred pay. On some mines the Russians played a central role in the deferred pay disputes. At Vaal

⁶⁸ Interview, PK.

⁶⁹ Interview, MB.

⁷⁰ See **TEBALD**, *Unrest Files, Basotho Congress Party and Lesotho Liberation Army*, 11 July 1980. Interview with Inspector de Kock and multiple interviews with Russian veterans.

⁷¹ **TEBALD**, *Disturbances Involving Basotho Mine Labour Effective From 26th December 1978*, 25 March 1981.

Reefs, the notorious Russian leader Mokhemele (referred to as Kimberley by whites) is reported to have instigated much of the fighting against Xhosa workers who refused to heed the call to strike. Indeed, he was described as the 'Chief Whip' for the BCP in the area.⁷² Mokhemele had a long and fruitful association with the South African security forces. He worked closely with Inspector de Kock for many years and during the deferred pay disputes he enjoyed the protection of BOSS. He supplied BOSS with information regarding the political feuds in Lesotho that spilled over into South Africa via Basotho miners. In 1975 when the deferred pay disputes took place, Leabua Jonathan had fallen out of favour with the South African government for his criticism of apartheid. BOSS apparently encouraged the BCP in its efforts to destabilise the Jonathan regime.⁷³ To this end, BOSS operative Mr. Steyn approached mine management at South Vaal and asked them to allow Mokhemele into the hostel to organise the BCP. Mine officials complained bitterly of Mokhemele's special status as they claimed he was responsible for fomenting violence amongst mine labourers. It was also common knowledge that although Mokhemele ran a shebeen near the mine and supplied miners with liquor, dagga and prostitutes, he was immune from arrest. 'The SAP and the Security Branch maintain he is a police informer and thus under their protection. In the past they continually refused to bring him to justice and stop a major source of trouble for South

⁷² McNamara, 'Black Worker Conflicts', pp. 108-121; CAD K325, volume 2, file 7, Vaal Reefs Exploration and Mining Company Limited, Disturbances 5 January 1975, 9 January 1975.

⁷³ Marashea co-operation with BOSS to support the BCP was consistent with Russian readiness to get into bed with any force that could advance its interests.

Vaal.⁷⁴ Mokhemele was living the Russian dream. By assisting Basotho miners in their dispute he was consolidating his support and client base and at the same time he was under the protection of the security services.

PG was an active member of the Russians in Johannesburg throughout the 1950s but left to return to Lesotho to enter politics. He then served as the liaison between the BCP and many Russian gangs, recruiting for the LLA and raising funds. When the BNP imposed deferred pay on the miners, the BCP immediately began to organise protests: 'I had to go all around the mines informing them what Chief Leabua Jonathan was trying to do to them. We were against that because our financial strength was mainly on the mines because those people were contributing a lot of money.'⁷⁵ It is quite likely that the Russians' protest against deferred pay stemmed at least partially from the fact that they stood to feel the pinch if mineworkers had less disposable income. Nevertheless, the Russians were remarkably consistent in that they supported their client base – Basotho miners – in whatever disputes occurred.

Conclusion

This snapshot of the Russians' interactions with the police, mining authorities, the ANC and the NUM illustrates the situational nature of both 'collaboration' and 'resistance' and the limited value of such labels. The different Russian gangs acted in

⁷⁴ CAD, K325, file 7, volume 5, An Inquiry into the Disturbances on Anglo-American Gold Mines, January 1975, pp. 53-56.

⁷⁵ Interview, PG.

their perceived best interests whether that brought them into conflict with the police, mine management, unions, nationalist movements or the government of Lesotho. It also illustrates the heterogeneity of the Russians; at any one time, one group could be engaged in a conflict with the ANC or the NUM, while other gangs co-existed peacefully, or even fought alongside these movements. Any study of groups labelled as collaborators would do well to consider such internal divisions and cleavages. In South Africa, a wide range of parties and movements have been classified as collaborators including Inkatha supporters, various vigilante movements, black local government bodies, criminal gangs, black police and soldiers and homeland authorities. A fuller understanding of the complexities of South African societies during the struggle for liberation requires a balanced, dispassionate assessment of the roles and motivations of these groups.

CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

The Marashea's history depicts the struggles of a loosely affiliated society of criminally inclined migrant groups to survive and prosper during the apartheid era. The gangs have been flexible and pragmatic and adapted well to changing conditions in South Africa. Formed as a defensive association for migrant Basotho, internecine rivalries caused the gangs to develop into a fighting society and they became notorious for their factional battles as well as fights with other adversaries across the length and breadth of the Rand. The expansion into the Free State and other mining areas, in response to government legislation, police persecution and economic opportunities, saw the Marashea assume a more commercial nature. The contemporary Marashea are markedly different from their predecessors of the 1940s and 1950s. The ritualistic battles involving hundreds of blanket clad combatants wielding fighting sticks have given way to hit and run taxi raids by smaller groups of gun-toting Marashea. The fights of the formative years were principally about prestige and bragging rights while modern disputes are often rooted in economic rivalries. The majority of first generation Marashea were mine or factory workers who saw Borashea as a protective association for Basotho and an escape from the tedium of urban labour. These members expected no economic return but looked to the Marashea for access to women, a sense of social belonging and recreation in the form of dances and fights with rival groups. Their successors have taken a more materialist attitude and unemployed members rely on group activities for financial gain.

The early Marashea gangs employed fighting skills learned in their youth and established an urban network of affiliated groups that replicated regional alliances in Lesotho. The distinctive blankets, which served as uniforms, along with a common language, dances, songs, and other social customs, reflected the gangs' Sesotho heritage. At the same time, members developed specific practices that distinguished them from other migrant Basotho. Marashea relied heavily on traditional doctors and medicines to fortify them for battle and courtroom encounters. Such 'traditional' practices and beliefs were married with new tactics – utilising firearms,¹ enforcing large-scale protection rackets, establishing control over migrant women, cultivating a market amongst mineworkers, manipulating the judicial system, managing relations with the police and mining authorities, and exploiting the political climate. This syncretic approach has served the society well over the years.

The value of this study lies in its contributions to ongoing debates concerning the lives of the colonised and the relationships between colonised and colonisers. Secondly, the history of the Marashea underlines the limitations of the apartheid state's penetration into the daily lives of the African majority population. The evolution of the Marashea, specifically with regard to identity formation and gender relations, provides a case study of the development of a subculture located within the migrant labour system of apartheid

¹ Of course Basotho were familiar with firearms, after all, the Gun War of 1880-81 stemmed from their refusal to surrender their guns and other weapons to colonial authorities. That said, the consolidation of colonial control meant that guns were not commonly available in Lesotho in the 1940s and 1950s. Informants (with the exception

South Africa. Russian identities, both ethnic and masculine, were forged to meet the specific needs of male gang members. A pan-Basotho identity allowed the gangs to put aside internecine rivalries when the society was threatened by outside antagonists. The hegemonic masculine identity of the Marashea celebrated physical courage, fighting ability and the domination of women. Given the gangs' reliance on violence and women's economic contributions, this was a natural development. Despite the fact that women played a crucial role in sustaining the Marashea and were fully integrated members, the gendered nature of power ensured their subjugation to male interests. The examination of identity formation and gender relations within the Marashea highlights relations between and within colonised populations and provides a more inclusive picture of social relations that emerged in apartheid South Africa.

The Russians' relative autonomy counters the popular notion of apartheid as a systematic program of social engineering that ordered the lives of all black South Africans. Apartheid policies oppressed the non-white majority; however, the state never possessed the resources to effectively govern and control black residential areas. At any given time the government could concentrate its forces and impose its will in a township or group of townships, but it lacked the capability to maintain a constant presence. Different African groups and movements – political, religious, and criminal – filled this void. The Marashea was one of hundreds of African organisations that shaped the day-to-day lives of township residents. The suffering of millions of South Africans should not

of those who served in the military) insist they had no experience with firearms until they

blind us to the fact that people have room to manoeuvre even under the most oppressive regimes. The Marashea manoeuvred throughout the apartheid period to establish and maintain a presence that influenced the lives of thousands of South Africans and Basotho.

The apartheid state's weakness is further indicated by its need for black proxies to undermine political opposition. This phenomenon has been recognised as part of the government's 'total strategy' that was put in place in the mid-1970s. The state made a short-lived effort to nurture and co-opt an African middle class by improving services and economic opportunities in the townships. The government's sponsorship of vigilante elements in the decade or so preceding the 1994 elections, especially Inkatha supporters, is also common knowledge. However, the calculated use of, and alliances with, gangsters and other criminal elements by the NP's security forces have yet to receive much scholarly attention. The history of the Marashea gangs indicates that these practices date back to the NP's first years in power.

The range of strategies and tactics employed by the different gangs demonstrates that the categories of resistor and collaborator do not accurately describe the Marashea. The gangs were not guided by political loyalties or antagonisms. Their interactions with South African government forces and supporters of the liberation movements were overwhelmingly motivated by self-interest and self-preservation. So, although their actions encompassed both 'resistance' and 'collaboration', the Marashea gangs' core survival philosophy would be better classified as negotiation. The gangs negotiated the

arrived in South Africa.

conditions with which they were confronted and developed strategies that best served their needs.

Russian activities had significant repercussions for migrant women, mineworkers and residents in squatter camps and locations. They also influenced the political developments of the 1980s and 1990s as many of the gangs resisted the initiatives of ANC and NUM supporters. This examination of how the various Marashea gangs ordered life in the townships and informal settlements and engaged with the state, ANC and NUM supporters, and competing organisations provides a better understanding of the social and political relationships spawned by apartheid.

The Future of the Marashea

The contemporary Marashea faces a precarious future. Clashes with NUM and ANC supporters have ended, but the gangs still engage in activities that bring them into conflict with the police and criminal rivals. And, while bribery remains an effective way of dealing with the police, the Marashea can no longer play on political hostilities to gain the support of government security forces. When asked about the Russians' future, WL replied that 'Marashea will survive as long as there are mines in South Africa, as long as there are women on the farms surrounding the mines.'² However, the South African mining industry is in the midst of a longstanding economic crisis. The most immediate threat to the gangs is the massive retrenchment of Basotho mineworkers whose numbers

² Interview, WL.

have been declining steadily since 1987, combined with the reduction of opportunities for novices.³ The contraction of the mining industry seems to be having a differential impact on the Marashea. Some groups are declining: 'There is no more money ... so Marashea are becoming less now.... The source of money is blocked because of retrenchments.'⁴ Other gangs report that their ranks are swelling as retrenched miners join rather than face almost certain unemployment in Lesotho.⁵ Moreover, until the late 1980s, young Basotho men fresh from initiation school, with little or no formal education, typically began their working lives on South African mines. Now that option has been largely closed off and as a result 'Many of them come straight here to join us. Especially after initiation they flock to Marashea because there are no jobs in Lesotho or on the mines where people used to get jobs so easily without educational requirements.'⁶

These conditions have created a number of problems for the Marashea. Some gangs may simply disband as their membership decreases. However, current members have few alternatives if they leave the Marashea. Employment prospects in Lesotho are

³ Since 1987, when 116, 345 Basotho mineworkers were employed, Basotho have experienced a 48% decline in jobs on gold, coal, copper and platinum mines, so that in 1999 there were approximately 60,600 Basotho working on South African mines. Personal communication with Chris Hechter, Regional TEBA Manager, Lesotho/Free State, 6 May 1999. See also, G. Standing, J. Sender and J. Weeks, *Restructuring the Labour Market: The South African Challenge*, (1996). While the number of jobs lost differs from one study to another, the downward trend is consistently acknowledged.

⁴ Interview, RC.

⁵ Interviews, MK and WL. Seidman reports that retrenched Basotho who return to Lesotho face even bleaker economic prospects than those who remain in South Africa. Gay Seidman, 'Shafted: The social impact of down-scaling in the OFS goldfields', in J. Crush and W. James (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries: Mine Migrancy in a Democratic South Africa*, (1995).

abysmal. Most Marashea lack the legal right to reside or work in South Africa and even those who have obtained these rights lack marketable skills. The primary options available to Basotho migrants are piece work and seasonal agricultural labour. Neither offer any security and both pay extremely poorly. And, despite low wages, difficult working conditions and insecurity, there is a great deal of competition for these jobs. Additionally, the South African government is threatening to close the agricultural sector to citizens of Lesotho.⁷

The groups that are growing have to deal with a dwindling resource base at the same time as they are absorbing an unprecedented influx of new recruits. The ongoing process of retrenchment is eroding the financial foundation of the Marashea. Not only do miners purchase liquor and commercial sex in Marashea settlements, they are the primary customers for the entire range of products offered by Russian hawkers. The long distance taxi associations and gold and diamond smuggling operations run by the Marashea are also largely dependent on mineworkers. The mining industry still employs approximately 60,000 Basotho, but if this core of Marashea support continues to shrink, many gangs will have to make adjustments. Three immediate possibilities come to mind. Some groups may increase their involvement in blatantly criminal activities such as extortion schemes, robbery, assassinations, taxi violence and drug peddling. This reorientation would probably involve an expansion in urban centres and result in conflict

⁶ Interview, BM.

with resident criminal organisations. Second, competition between Russian factions struggling to control the remaining markets may cause a resurgence in internecine fighting. A third possibility is that township gangs in particular will expand their 'protection' services and assume more of a vigilante/hired security function. In response to rising crime rates and police ineffectiveness, vigilante movements have proliferated in recent years. Different Russian gangs have sought popular support by persecuting tsotsis in the past, and in desperate economic circumstances may try to make such activities more remunerative, perhaps by offering their services to businesses. With a solid base and fearsome reputation in a number of townships this seems like a natural niche for the Marashea to explore. All three scenarios raise the prospect of heightened levels of violence.

The final critical factor is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Marashea's primary source of income comes from mineworkers who are attracted to Russian settlements by resident women, many of whom engage in sex work and are at a particularly high risk of contracting HIV.⁸ How the ravages of AIDS affects this relationship remains to be seen. The manner in which the Russian gangs negotiate this new set of challenges will determine the future of the Marashea in South Africa.

⁷ Theresa Ulicki and Jonathan Crush, 'Poverty and Women's Migrancy: Lesotho Farmworkers in the Eastern Free State' in Crush, (ed.), *Borderline Farming: Foreign Migrants in South African Commercial Agriculture*, (2000).

⁸ For example, a recent survey conducted in the Carletonville area found that 25% of mineworkers and 69% of sex workers tested were HIV positive. Brian Williams, et al., *Managing HIV/AIDS in South Africa: Lessons from Industrial Settings*, (1999).

APPENDIX

MARASHEA INTERVIEW LIST

Format: Initials, date of birth, place of birth, duration and location of term as Lerashea, faction affiliation, occupation, highest rank within the group, (location and date of interview)

Male Informants

#1 **SC**, 1934, Lesotho, active 1953-59 at Springs, Matsieng then defected to Molapo, miner, whistle blower, (Lesotho, 22 April 1998 in English, Lesotho, 7 June 1998).

#2 **AT**, 1940s, Lesotho, active 1977-88 at Kloof and then Kinross, Matsieng at Kloof, Molapo in Kinross, miner, regular member, (Lesotho, 15 May 1998).

#3 **NN**, 1933, Lesotho, active 1952-73 at Klerksdorp, Welkom and Rustenburg, Matsekha, miner, whistle blower, (Lesotho, 13 and 20 May 1998).

#4 **ML**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1976-present at Orlando, Matsekha, miner and piece jobs, whistle blower, (Lesotho, 19 May 1998).

#5 **PL**, 1934, Lesotho, active late 1950s-60s at Booyesen, Matsieng, *morena*. (Lesotho, 23 and 24 May 1998, and Welkom, 21 May 1999).

#6 **PP**, unknown, Lesotho, active late 1940s-50s at Jabavu, Matsieng, piece work, regular member, (Lesotho, 24 May 1998).

#7 **MC**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1949-54 at Newclare and Boksburg, Matsieng, regular member, (Lesotho, 30 May 1998).

#8 **TT**, 1914, Lesotho, active late 1940s-53 at Benoni and Newclare, Matsieng, tailor, regular member, (Naledi, Soweto, 18 June 1998).

#9 **TS**, 1954, Bloemfontein but grew up in Lesotho, active 1973-80s in Carletonville and Phiri, Matsieng, miner, *morena's* assistant, (Phiri, Soweto, 18 June 1998 and 22 December 1998).

#10 **HG**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1961-70 at Kloof and at Robertson near Crown Mines, jailed from 1970-88, Matsieng, regular member (Phiri, 18 June 1998).

#11 **MM**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1970s-present at Theunissen and Virginia, Matsieng, miner, diamond dealer, regular member, (Lesotho, 20 June 1998).

#12 **MB**, unknown, Johannesburg but grew up in Lesotho, active 1969-93 at Crown Mines and then Odendaalsrus and Virginia, Matsekha, *morena*, (Lesotho, July 1998).

#13 **LT**, 1939, Lesotho, active 1959-84 at Vereeniging, Matsekha, miner and then fulltime Lerashea, regular member. (Lesotho, July 1998).

#14 **MR**, 1928, Lesotho, active 1953-56 at Jabavu, Matsieng, piece work, regular member, (Lesotho, 6 July 1998).

#15 **GK**, 1947, Lesotho, active 1977-79 at Phiri, Matsieng, miner at East Driefontein, regular member, (Lesotho, June 1998).

#16 **KB**, 1955, Lesotho, active 1993-94 at Klerksdorp, Matsekha, miner at Buffelsfontein, regular member, (Lesotho, June 1998).

#17 **KL**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1950s-61 at Benoni and Newclare, Matsekha, factory worker, regular member. (Lesotho, July 1998).

#18 **KP**, 1933, Lesotho, active 1950s in Newclare, Matsieng, miner at Rand Leases, whistle blower. (Lesotho, 9 August 1998).

#19 **BS**, 1954, Lesotho, active 1981-96, Matsekha, miner at President Steyn in Welkom, *morena's* assistant. (Lesotho, 8 August 1998).

#20 **MS**, 1918, Lesotho, active 1950s at Benoni and Newclare, Matsekha, factory worker, regular member. (Lesotho, August 1998).

#21 **BF**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1950s at Brakpan, Molapo, miner, regular member, (Lesotho, 8 August 1998).

#22 **KK**, unknown, Lesotho, active from early 1960s-present in Virginia and Klerksdorp, Matsieng, miner for a few years and then full-timer, second in command to BM, (Lesotho, 8 August 1998).

#23 **HM**, 1933, Lesotho, active 1950s-early 60s at Booysen, Matsieng, miner and then railway worker, regular member, (Lesotho, 22 August 1998).

#24 **ST**, 1918, Lesotho, active in 1950s-60s in Newclare and Orlando, Matsieng, miner and factory worker, regular member, (Lesotho, 23 August 1998).

#25 **SM**, 1920, Lesotho, active in late 1940s-50s in Springs, Matsieng, miner, regular member, (Lesotho, 29 August 1998).

#26 **RR**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1958-70 at Springs and then Bloemfontein, Matsieng, miner and worked on the railways, regular member, (Lesotho, 30 August 1998).

#27 **SF**, 1922, Lesotho, active 1950-55, Matsieng in Newclare, worked at Crown Mines, regular member, (Lesotho, 30 August 1998).

#28 **WL**, 1930s, Lesotho, active 1960s-mid-80s in Phiri, then Virginia and Odendaalsrus, Matsieng, factory worker and then miner, *morena*, (Lesotho, 8 August 1998).

#29 **MK**, 1933, Lesotho, active 1948-60s in Benoni, Klerksdorp and Carletonville, Matsieng, mines, factories and then full-timer, *morena*, (Lesotho, 8 August 1998).

#30 **TB**, 1939, Lesotho, active 1960-65 in Carletonville, Matsieng, worked at Libanon mine, assistant to Tsuele Tsilo, (Lesotho, 6 September 1998).

#31 **TG**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1955-61 in Newclare and Phiri, worked on railways, regular member, (Lesotho, 6 September 1998).

#32 **OF**, 1932, Lesotho, active 1950s in Welkom, Matsieng, miner, regular member, (Lesotho, 12 September 1998).

#33 **PG**, 1940, Lesotho, active 1955-91 in Daveyton and Vereeniging, Matsieng, coal miner, *morena*, (Lesotho, 12 September 1998).

#34 **SO**, 1953, Lesotho, active 1972-90 at Roodeport, Matsieng and then Matsekha, miner, regular member, (Lesotho, 13 September 1998).

#35 **OE**, 1957, Lesotho, active 1982-88 in Virginia, Matsieng, miner at Harmony Mine, regular member, (Lesotho, 13 September 1998).

#36 **CM**, 1936, Lesotho, active 1955-70s in Welkom, Matsieng, worked at President Steyn Mine and then was full time Lerashea, whistle-blower, (Lesotho, 20 September 1998).

#37 **SI**, 1939, Lesotho, active 1959-80 in Evaton and Soweto, Molapo, started in mines and then piece jobs, regular member, (Lesotho, 20 September 1998).

#38 **CN**, 1943, Lesotho, active 1973-present in Virginia and Klerksdorp, Matsieng, worked as a winch driver at Harmony, left mine in 76 to become fulltime Lerashea, became whistle blower then assistant to BM, (Vaal Reefs, 23 October 1998).

#39 **BM**, 1947, Lesotho, active 1968-present at Buffelsfontein and Virginia, when Matsieng and Molapo split, he went with Matsieng, mineworker but left to become fulltime Lerashea, became *morena* in 1976. (Virginia, 24 October 1998).

#40 **KF**, 1955, Lesotho, active 1976-89 at Thabong, Matsekha, fulltime Lerashea, accordion player, (Lesotho, 25 November 1998).

#41 **GB**, 1958, Lesotho, active 1978-92 at Welkom, Matsieng, miner at Geduld, and then at Rustenburg, whistle-blower, (Lesotho, 26 November 1998).

#42 **DG**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1970-90s at Buffelsfontein, Matsieng, miner, whistle blower-*morena's* assistant, (Lesotho, 26 November 1998).

#43 **DS**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1968-92 in Gauteng and then Welkom, Matsieng, miner at St. Helena, regular member (Lesotho, 25 November 1998).

#44 **PM**, 1916, Lesotho, active 1940s-70s in Soweto, Molapo, miner at Crown Mines then factory worker, regular member, (Phiri, 11 December 1998).

#45 **NT**, 1928, Brandis in the Free State, active 1951-60s in Pimville and Phiri, Molapo and then Matsieng, worked at Cleveland Engineering in Roodeport, regular member, (Naledi, 14 December 1998).

#46 **DB**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1950s-60s in Newclare and Phiri, Matsieng, miner, regular member, (Phiri, 16 December 1998).

#47 **OU**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1940s-50s in Newclare, Matsieng, miner, regular member, (Phiri, 16 December 1998).

#48 **BT**, 1930s, Lesotho, active 1950s-70s in Newclare and Phiri, Matsieng, miner and factory worker, regular member, (Phiri, 16 December 1998).

#49 **HL**, 1934, Lesotho, active 1950s-60s in Germiston and Carletonville, Matsieng, miner, regular member, (Naledi, 18 December 1998).

#50 **PG**, 1929, Lesotho, active 1950-53 at Toronga, Molapo, worked at Johannesburg General Post Office, liaison with lawyers, (Naledi, 20 December 1998 in English).

#51 **GL**, 1944, Lesotho, active 1964-86 in Kliptown, Matsekha, miner at Western Deep Levels until 1981 then worked construction, whistle blower, (Eldorado Park, 24 January 1999).

#52 **MT**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1960s-90 at Vaal Reefs, Matsieng, miner then fulltime Lerashea, *morena*, (Eldorado Park, 24 January 1999).

#53 **HS**, 1922, Matatiele (KwaZulu-Natal on Lesotho's southern border), active 1940s-50s in Primrose, Matsieng, construction worker, regular member (Eldorado Park, January 1999).

#54 **KM**, 1918, Lesotho, active 1940s-80s in Benoni and Alexandra. Matsieng, miner and factory worker, advisor to Tsotsi Raliemere, (Naledi, 27 January 1999).

#55 **BK**, 1920, Lesotho, active 1947-49 in Primrose, miner and factory worker, whistle blower, (Naledi, 27 January 1999).

#56 **TC**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1970-present at Buffelsfontein and Vaal Reefs. Matsieng, miner and then fulltime Lerashea, assistant to BM, (Vaal Reefs, 30 January 1999).

#57 **KI**, 1954, Lesotho, active 1975-85 in Thabong, Molapo, worked at President Brand Mine, literate so acted as secretary. (Lesotho, December 16, 1999).

#58 **OB**, 1933, Lesotho, active 1950-95 at Vaal Reefs, Matsieng, miner, regular member, (Lesotho, 4 February 1999).

#59 **SG**, 1928, Lesotho, active 1950s in Newclare, Molapo, miner, regular member (Orange Farm, 15 January 1999).

#60 **LG**, 1933, Lesotho, active 1963-97 in Phiri, Matsieng, fulltime Lerashea, whistle blower, (Eldorado Park, 7 February 1999).

#61 **BH**, 1920s, Lesotho, active 1951-69 in Benoni and Springs. Matsieng and then Molapo, worked in a bicycle factory in Springs, assistant to *morena*, (Kwa Thema, 9 February 1999).

#62 **WH**, unknown, Lesotho, active in 1950s-60s in Phiri. Matsieng, worked at Rand Leases, left mine to become PL's assistant. (Mapetla, 10 February 1999).

#63 **RC**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1975-98 in Virginia and Welkom. Molapo and Matsieng, fulltime Lerashea. *morena*. (Welkom, 20 May 1999).

Female Informants (identified throughout with the title 'Me')

#1 **TF**, 1952, Lesotho, active 1970s-92 in Welkom and Odendaalsrus. Molapo and Matsieng, sold *joala*, (Lesotho, 20 September 1998).

- #2 **RB**, unknown, Lesotho, active 1980s in Thabong, Matsekha, sold *joala*, (Lesotho, 25 November 1998).
- #3 **RW**, 1958, Mapetla (Soweto) but schooled in Lesotho, active 1977-86 in Phiri, Matsieng, domestic servant, (Mapetla, 18 December 1998).
- #4 **TW**, 1960, Phiri (Soweto) but grew up in Lesotho, active 1975-80s in Phiri, Matsieng, (Phiri, 18 December 1998).
- #5 **XL**, 1952, Phiri, Xhosa but married to a Mosotho, active 1971-85, Matsieng, factory worker, (Phiri, 19 December 1998).
- #6 **EW**, 1952, Orlando, active 1979-90 in Phiri, Matsieng, worked in factories, as a hawkker and sold *joala*, (Mapetla, 20 December 1998).
- #7 **SL**, 1959, Phiri, Xhosa but grew up in Lesotho, active 1970s-86 in Phiri, Matsieng, (Phiri, 20 December 1998).
- #8 **FH**, 1943, Jabavu but brought up and schooled in Lesotho, active 1968-mid-90s in Phiri, Matsieng, domestic servant. (Phiri, 21 December 1998)
- #9 **SP**, 1956, Moroka, active 1970s-90 in Phiri, Matsieng, worked in factories and as domestic servant, (Phiri, 21 December, 1998)
- #10 **MG**, 1925, Lesotho, active 1951-73 in Orlando, Matsieng, sold *joala*, (Phiri, 21 December 1998).
- #11 **MD**, 1960, Mapetla, active 1979-88 in Phiri, Matsieng, factory worker, (22 December 1998, Pimville).
- #12 **FD**, 1939, Lesotho, active 1972-present at Buffelsfontein and Vaal Reefs, sells *joala*, (Vaal Reefs, 30 January 1999).
- #13 **ID**, 1959, Lesotho, active 1985-93 in Khutsong, Kloof and Bekkersdal, Matsieng, sold *joala*, (Lesotho, 29 December 1998).
- #14 **LW**, 1969, Lesotho, kidnapped by Matsieng in Phiri in 1992, returned to Lesotho in 1993, (Lesotho, 15 January 1999).
- #15 **OW**, 1918, Lesotho, active 1940s-50s in Springs, Matsieng, sold *joala*, (Lesotho, 7 January 1999).
- #16 **KW**, 1970, Lesotho, kidnapped by Matsieng in Carletonville in 1991, escaped in 1992, sold *joala*, (Lesotho, 18 December 1998).

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