

POWERLESSNESS AND POLITICS: 'QUIESCENCE' AND PROTEST IN PRETORIA-WITWATERSRAND-VAAL TOWNSHIPS, c1973-1985

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Introduction

After a long period of neglect (briefly punctuated in the aftermath of 1976), recent and contemporary township politics is now the subject of a burgeoning literature. [1] Among the considerable published and unpublished works are a number of processual accounts of township politics. [2] These have located township protests and conflicts in terms of more continuous processes of mobilization and radicalization.

The comparison of these processual studies emphasises both the general and the specific features in each case-study, raising new issues and posing new questions. Variation between townships emphasises the importance of "historical alternativty" [3], in the sense of the possibility of processes in any township unfolding differently (as they did in other townships, perhaps). Common themes stand out more boldly than they do in individual accounts. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, many of these themes are the orthodox concerns of social scientists. This paper considers one of these: the nature of apparent quiescence and rebellion on the part of the powerless. [4]

Processual studies have widely recognized that, in order to understand the nature of protest or rebellion, it is first necessary to explore the origins of processes of mobilization and radicalization in the period before the protests occurred. Furthermore, these accounts have indicated the pervasive extent of apparent quiescence in townships. [5] This study tries to show that the nature of protest and rebellion in South African townships is illuminated by a thematic exploration of the phenomenon of apparent quiescence.

The paper begins with a brief overview of the ways in which quiescence has generally been studied in the South African context. It outlines a theory of quiescence developed by John Gaventa, and applies it to townships. Gaventa argues that people's choice of action or inaction is shaped by the power relations they are involved in. Powerlessness to transform those relations and a vulnerability to further immiserization can combine to make inaction, or even reactionary behaviour, a rational choice. I argue that "quiescence" in African (officially "Black") townships did not involve general reaction, or inaction only, but widely involved multiple forms of non-confrontational struggle. "Rebellion" was often the unintended outcome of what was intended to be one or other of these forms of non-confrontational struggle.

Protest, Rebellion and "Quiescence" in Township Studies

1976-77, 1980, and 1984-87 stand out in recent township history as periods of rebellion. But, almost two decades ago, Meer warned against characterizing a period (even the 1950s) solely on the basis of rebellion:

[The] picture of a mass ready for the final plunge to liberate itself is deceptive. It is observed by abstracting the motifs of rebellion scattered through a tapestry, which otherwise speaks of remarkable peace and quiet. [6]

Her warning has rarely been heeded in studies of the period c1973-85, which have prioritized the "explanation" of major and confrontational protests or rebellions. Research into apparent non-protest has generally been neglected. Yet, even in this period, confrontational protests have been sporadic rather than generalized.

Before 1976 and during 1977-84, there were very few confrontational protests in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) townships. In the latter period there was a resurgence of nationalist, civic and trade-union organization, and of recurrent guerrilla insurgency. The region was, none the less, largely unaffected by school boycotts in 1980, and there were few mass public protests over rent or bus-fare increases. Even during 1976-77 and 1984-85 there were no sustained confrontations in several townships. In many PWV townships during 1976-77 there were few mass protests (with the important exception of school boycotts). Most of the incidents recorded by the Cillie Commission were arson attempts, involving very few people, often undertaken at night, and often unsuccessful. [7] During the first half of 1984, there were mass public protests in relatively few townships. Several major townships - Soweto, Kagiso, Mamelodi - remained broadly quiescent during the whole of 1984, and even through much of 1985. It was only in 1985-86 that conflict became general and sustained.

The persistence of apparent quiescence (and its neglect in research) has sometimes been noted. Adam and Moodley wrote (in 1986) that "the historical overall picture is one of compliance with unjust laws, obedience to a customary hierarchy, and acquiescence with, though not consent to, grossly unequal life chances", and quoted this *Washington Post* editorial from late 1984:

The startling fact about South Africa is not that an occasional riot or police action brings White repression and Black unrest into the news but that there is, relatively speaking, so little evident protest. [8]

Such studies have, however, been ahistorical, without empirical content or reference to other empirical research, and their "explanations" of apparent quiescence are so all-encompassing that they lapse into indeterminacy. They are, essentially, accounts of why townships might have been quiescent, and not why they were.

Most studies have neither recognized nor addressed the persistence of apparent quiescence. For example, Lodge [9] and Brewer [10] each see the period 1978-84 as one of generalized rebellion: either as a continuation, albeit at a less intense level, of the 1976-77 confrontations (Lodge), or as a run-up to those of 1984-87 (Brewer). Murray [11], who focusses on popular rebellion during 1984-86, does not discuss the persistence of non-confrontation well into 1985 in such major townships as Soweto.

There seem to be three reasons for this neglect of what seems to be popular quiescence. Firstly, when viewed "from above", protest in the period 1978-84 seemed both general and chronic. But protest was rarely disaggregated. Studies focussed on nationalist organization, guerrilla activity, industrial action, and (in a few important cases, mostly outside of the PWV) mass protests - which contrasted with the pre-1976 period - but assumed a parallel resurgence of popular protest, which they failed to explore. [12] Secondly, most of these authors worked within a broadly Marxist analytical framework which viewed resistance and state "reforms" as products of a fundamental or "organic" crisis. Resistance arose, fairly unproblematically, out of the crisis (and in turn exacerbated it); resistance was therefore expected to continue as long as the crisis remained unresolved. [13] Whilst slower economic growth and some increase in popular protest were contemporary, the link was considerably less clear and uniform than was often implicitly argued. Thirdly, authors' celebration of political protest led to an exaggerated impression of its extent. [14]

The discussion of popular protest in these studies is problematic: empirically, because they ignore the pervasive extent of apparent quiescence; and analytically, because they do not

provide a unitary interpretation of both the occurrence and absence of popular protest. When "quiescence" cannot be ignored, as for the 1960s, it is almost routinely attributed to overt repression: leaders and organizations were suppressed, and informers "promoted a climate of fear and distrust, effectively paralysing any political initiative" [15], so that "for the average African it became wise to regard politics as a taboo subject even in casual conversation". [16] Overt repression alone is an insufficient explanation, not least because it provides no basis for understanding how the transition to protest or rebellion occurs, i.e. how and why repression ceases to be an operative constraint.

These studies see "quiescence" as residual, rebellion as the "normal" or readily explicable state of affairs. Recent processual accounts of township politics have, however, emphasized the need to encompass the analysis of protest and non-protest within a unitary framework. They have not, however, explicitly discussed such a framework, although several of these studies have provided very useful evidence and pointers. John Gaventa has approached quiescence from a very different perspective, seeing it as the more chronic phenomenon with rebellion being the less explicable residual. Gaventa's theory is helpful in moving towards a unitary interpretation of popular political action.

Gaventa's Theory of Quiescence

Gaventa's theory of quiescence is based on his study of a non-South African context, a valley in the American Appalachian mountains. [17] Gaventa analyses quiescence in terms of the nature of powerlessness, and thus in terms of the power relations that the powerless are caught in. These power relations shape the possible benefits and costs accruing to alternative forms of political action. Quiescence was a rational choice for the people in Gaventa's case-study, given their appraisal of (a) the poor prospects for successful rebellion combined with (b) the high costs of failure because of their vulnerability to retaliation.

The valley's residents had acute economic and political grievances against the local political elites, who were based in electoral and trade union institutions. Yet they did not challenge either elite by raising their grievances. Instead, they voted for conservative candidates in local elections, and actively opposed a reformist movement in their trade union (despite the similarity between their own grievances and the reformers' demands). Thus "the conflict which emerges into the local political arena is rarely substantive compared with what could emerge" and the general result was "a routine of non-conflict within and around local politics".

The powerless were quiescent, Gaventa argues, precisely because of their powerlessness. The elite controlled access to a wide range of material resources. The powerless were vulnerable to further immiserization, and so dependent on the political elite's continued benevolence. That benevolence would disappear if the power relation itself was challenged. Therefore, "while the benefits of the status quo are high for the powerful, the costs of challenge are potentially higher for the powerless". The powerless in Gaventa's valley were involved in power relations which they could not avoid, but the perceived prospects for successfully challenging those relations were poor whilst the costs of an unsuccessful challenge were high. Reactionary loyalties or just political inaction comprised rational behaviour.

It "is not the actual exercise of coercion but the constant possibility that it might be exercised that supports the routines of non-challenge". Furthermore, it is not the exercise of physical coercion as much as the refusal of access to material resources that constitutes the operative threat. Other research into working-class quiescence has pointed to the same general theme: protest risks exclusion from the political system and thus the denial of any benefits, whilst "participation" in even an inegalitarian and unresponsive system offers very limited, but at least some, benefit. [18]

Gaventa further argued that "power is accumulative by nature". The power of the political elite (most clearly in the union) enabled it to manipulate information and so accentuate the powerlessness of the powerless.

"Quiescence" and Struggle in South African Townships

Powerlessness characterizes the position of the residents of South African townships, as it does in the case of Gaventa's Appalachian Valley. Indeed, in some ways, the powerlessness of the former is even greater. They are politically disenfranchised at a national level, are the products of a discriminatory educational system, and are subject to the greater coercive power of the South African state.

The workings of the power relations that township residents are involved in are, in outline, similar to those in Gaventa's valley. Residents are vulnerable not only to the state's use of overt repression through brute force but also to the state's control (at least potentially) over access to a wide range of very important material resources: urban residential rights, housing, pensions, and (directly or indirectly) employment and income. Repression permeates the operation of the whole political system, and the powers of the police to break up a meeting, to detain individuals, and to secure convictions in trials, may all be less important than the powers of administrators to threaten potential protesters with the loss of their jobs or impairment of their income, or the loss of houses or passes. [19]

Township residents are vulnerable to retaliation, and their choices of political action need to be understood in terms of their reluctance to risk worsening their position as well as their concern to improve it. Whilst their position was bad, residents certainly had more to lose than just their proverbial chains. Adam and Moodley make a similar point:

To earn a living, to make ends meet, to avoid risks, to survive in a hostile environment absorb so much energy and impose such stringent rules of conduct that alternatives are hard to contemplate. The routine of the daily drudgery guarantees compliance almost by itself, independent of supportive ideologies. [20]

Power relations in the townships, as in Gaventa's valley, inculcated inaction as a political response among many people. [21] The concern to protect access to even low levels of material resources was a powerful impetus. A small proportion of township residents were pulled into reactionary, state-supportive action. These included, especially in 1985-87, township-based vigilante groups. [22] Most township residents avoided confrontation, and often opted for limited benefits, when these were available, rather than lobby for more but thereby risk all.

Power relations in South African townships were, however, rather more complex than in Gaventa's case-study. Power relations in the latter were particularly monolithic: both electoral and union politics were strictly hierarchical (or pyramidal), with power concentrated "at the top". There was, for example, little opportunity for the powerless to play off candidates in elections against each other. The powerless were bound into unconditional subservience, whose loyalty to the elite was necessarily absolute.

Power relations in South African townships were less monolithic, at least in practice. This allowed residents to choose between more options than just rebellion or unconditional subservience. In the townships there have been two poorly linked sets of power relations, and the articulation between these has allowed space for non-conflictual forms of protest.

These two sets of power relations comprise those (1) between township and the state and (2) within the township. The state has not, historically, managed to establish general and effective township administration. [23] One way in which the state sought to overcome this

problem was through fostering, first, elements of indirect rule in township administration, and more recently by extending this to elements of representation in local government. [24] Both of these have involved the participation of (black) township residents, in particular as the members of township boards or councils. Such local government reforms did extend the scope of township administration, but without fully subordinating that administration to the state. Furthermore, as reforms transferred responsibilities (although not so much power) to councillors, so the state itself became partially dependent on councillors themselves for township administration. Relations between state and councillors were therefore never strictly hierarchical, and the partial autonomy of townships from the state continued, although now in a form institutionalized "within" the state.

As a result of the partial autonomy of the township from the state, the workings of power relationships at the township level involved a degree of struggle absent in Gaventa's case study. In the latter, discontented people did not raise their demands in any way because there was no way for them to do so without being disloyal and so running a significant risk of retribution. In South African townships, however, there are a range of ways in which grievances can be acted on, explicitly or implicitly, without that risk. Struggles concerned both the relationship between the state and the township and within the township, especially between councillors and residents. Whilst townships might have seemed "quiescent" when viewed from above, political conflict becomes visible when examined from below. Townships appeared to be quiescent because of residents' concern to protest only through non-confrontational channels, i.e. in ways that did not precipitate confrontation with the central state.

Struggle took three main forms. Firstly, township residents sought to redress their grievances without involving the state, i.e. by solving problems within the township without recourse to the state. Secondly, residents might engage in "hidden forms" of resistance, up to the limits of the state's ability to retaliate. Thirdly, township residents utilized channels for political action that were acceptable to the state, involving lobbying or negotiation. Each of these will be considered in turn.

(1) Evasion of the State

Evasion of the state involved undertaking a range of activities outside of the state's structures. This meant denying, either explicitly or implicitly, that the state had sole jurisdiction or responsibility to undertake these activities. The terms of the relationship between state and township were being contested.

Such evasion of the state courted the state's hostility. Evasion of the state therefore required the state's acceptance or ignorance of such action, or at least its unwillingness to try to suppress it. In practice, the state was also concerned with the efficacy of administration and conflict-limitation, and seems to have condoned a range of evasions, if they were presided over by township conservatives, especially township councillors. Councillors might either not inform the state of what was going on or, alternatively, were to some extent immune from suppression. When evasion of the state was presided over by township "radicals", as in the case of "people's power" in 1985-87, then the state was rapidly repressive.

Township courts and extra-state policing provide a good illustration of the evasion of the state. [25] There have been extra-state dispute settlement and policing in townships for a long time. Wilsworth, in her study of Grahamstown townships conducted in 1974-76, described at length mechanisms within the township for conflict resolution. Wilsworth distinguishes several levels of dispute settlement within the townships, culminating in extra-state township courts. "If at all possible", she wrote, "the police as well as various other official channels are kept out of conflict." [26]

Township courts were generally run by people with some official position, but who retained some autonomy from the state. In Grahamstown, courts were run by the Chief or his intermediaries (*amaphakathi*). Township residents regarded the members of the Urban Bantu Council in Grahamstown as, in effect, part of the state, i.e. they lacked autonomy. According to one: "I wouldn't like to go to the UBC because that always works up to the constables, it always goes out." [27] In PWV townships, by contrast, the authority of chiefs was not widely respected, and township courts tended to be run by councillors or members of their ward committees. Hund and Kotu-Rammopo describe the existence in Mamelodi in the early 1980s of several different, and competing, township courts or *makgotla*. [28]

Courts were primarily concerned with civil and family disputes, especially concerning disrespectful or delinquent youths. These concerns involved the maintenance of "community", and in particular of a specific, social order that the court thought (rightly or wrongly) bound the "community" together. Most court cases seem to have involved residents' failures to fulfil historical "obligations" (or expectations), to their neighbours, their parents, or their wives or husbands. Serious criminal cases were generally taken to the police.

Not all courts were popular. Some *makgotla* operated primarily on the basis of severe coercion: some people at least did not participate in court through choice. Many, however, involved a significant degree of direct popular support and participation. [29] These courts enjoyed popular support because the social order that they sought to construct or maintain was a popular order, and because the procedure of courts was regarded as acceptable. Order was functional to daily life, and "community" regulation by township courts enabled pressing problems to be solved easily and without recourse to the state, which had its own social agenda.

Until 1985, township courts were tacitly approved of by the state (to varying extents by different parts of the state). Local government legislation even provided for township courts. [30] State tolerance (or ignorance) extended to some of the more popular *makgotla* run by conservative opposition councillors, who attracted popular support when they promoted popular causes. Township "radicals" were, it seems, rarely active in regular dispute settlement. [31]

Another form of evasion of the state was the non-implementation of state policy by individuals or institutions in official positions. In Soweto, in the mid-1970s, T W Kambule, principal at Orlando High School, "solved" the issue of Afrikaans medium teaching by simply ignoring departmental regulations and not applying for exemption. Kambule was put under considerable pressure by officials of the Department of Bantu Education, but he called their bluff and got away with it. [32]

The state's extensive control of resources often served as a disincentive to evasion. Protests which involved losing out on state-controlled resources were difficult to sustain. For example, school boycotts have frequently run into problems from students (or their parents) who feel that some education (or qualification) is better than none. This was the case in the 1980 school boycotts in the Western Cape, and was a source of division among students in some townships, at least during 1985-87. [33]

The state's control over resources allowed it to ensure a higher degree of subordination in conflicts over key grievances in the early 1980s, making them less amenable to "resolution" through evasion. The legal constraints on township councils imposed on them the need to increase rents if there was to be any urban development. When councils refused to sanction the appropriate rent increases, the state responded in one of three ways. The first was to overrule the councils. For example, in 1981 the Daveyton Community Council was prevented from halving rents, whilst in 1982 the chairmen of the Ikageng and Orkney community councils in the western Transvaal were dismissed for refusing to approve a doubling of the rents. [34] The second option by the state was more common: no rent

increase, no development. For example, the Duduza Community Council was cut off from state development funds after it rejected a rent increase in 1982-83. [35] The Mamelodi and Atteridgeville Councils opposed rent increases in 1981, but were pressurized into agreeing to major rent increases in 1982. Both of these first two options led to increased popular discontent with councils as institutions, as they emphasized their powerlessness (in this respect). The third option to the state was to subsidize development. This was against state policy, and it seems that it was only in the atypical case of Soweto that this occurred. [36]

(2) Hidden Resistance

Secondly, residents might engage in "hidden forms" of resistance, such as petty sabotage, arson, non-cooperation at a routine administrative level, and so on. This is clearly an overlap between hidden forms and evasion of the state, as in the case of squatting, for example. Unfortunately, there are, to my knowledge, no studies that look at hidden forms of resistance in the contemporary township context. [37]

One form of everyday resistance was popular evasion of the state's housing policies through backyard squatting. Whilst the state was, during this period, intolerant of open squatting outside of proclaimed townships, it was faced with more difficult political decisions by the proliferation of backyard shacks. In Katelehong, there were twice as many backyard shacks as houses in 1983. In practice, the state's repeated attempts to eliminate backyard shacks achieved, at best, short-lived results.

(3) "Acceptable" Protest

Thirdly, township residents utilized channels for political action that they thought were acceptable to the state, and were hence not confrontational. There is an overlap here with many forms of evasion of the state, which continue because the state tolerates evasion when it is done by conservatives (or when suppression is not deemed worthwhile, as in Kambule's case above).

This "protest" took the form of lobbying and negotiation. From 1971, "school boards and committees in urban areas became the foci of protest against aspects of state educational policy". From 1974 school boards strongly and combatively opposed the imposition of Afrikaans medium teaching. Teachers' associations also protested strongly. [38]

More generally, township councillors were intermediaries between township residents and state. From the mid-1970s, township councils incurred rising unpopularity, particularly for increasing rents and evicting rent defaulters and squatters, whilst not providing sufficient new housing, development or services. On most councils, however, there were individual councillors who opposed council policy over these issues, adopting a radical or populist line. Some of these councillors had good links with the nationalist movement, and many were popular in the townships. Council membership often offered possibilities for material gain, but it is clear that many of these dissident councillors believed that their membership of councils could provide benefits to their constituents. The best example of this is probably Harrison Dube in Lamontville, who was assassinated in April 1983. Examples in the PWV included Shadrack Sinaba in Daveyton, H Pitje in Mamelodi, and Kebana Moloji in Duduza. [39]

Other councillors besides the dissident populists were at least sometimes responsive to their constituents. Many councillors were elected on the basis of patronage structures. Residents provided votes (and possibly fees), whilst councillors performed the roles of arbiters of justice and dispensers of certain forms of patronage. Councillors would both participate in the evasion of the state, through, for example, township courts, and in lobbying the state over routine issues (such as the procurement of permits, the contesting of specific eviction orders,

and the maintenance of council-owned housing). They would also be expected to lobby over policy issues. Some whole councils lobbied over and voiced criticisms of state policy. East Rand councils were especially prominent in demands for external funding for township development. [40]

There were tight limits to the influence that councils could have on the state. On minor issues, including sometimes local state staffing, councils could achieve successes. Some councillors themselves claimed they played a key role in significant state policy shifts [41], but it is likely that the councils' influence was merely a reflection of much broader pressures on the state, such as the passive resistance of squatting or the active resistance of overt rebellion.

By the mid-1980s it was becoming increasingly clear to township residents and many dissident councillors that the councils had little direct influence over the most pressing grievances of residents. At the same time, the nature of councillor-constituent relations was changing. Patronage became an increasingly commercial and less of a moral relationship. Many councillors were not only seen to be feathering their own nests very amply but also demanded rising bribes from their "clients".

When school boards (in the mid-1970s) and township councillors (in the early 1980s) became either unable or unwilling to respond adequately to popular grievances, dissident councillors and residents responded by trying to lobby the council or the central state through acceptable but extra-council channels. This led to a proliferation of minor public demonstrations or other protests, and provided the impetus for the establishment of many civic organizations. Harrison Dube, for example, played a key role in the establishment of the Joint Rent Action Committee (JORAC) in Durban townships when he and residents grew disillusioned with the Community Council. [42] In the PWV, rent increases between 1980 and 1984 led to the formation of a number of usually issue-specific and often short-lived bodies. For example, in Daveyton the announcement of a rent increase in May 1984 led to the formation of a Daveyton Action Committee which, together with the dissident councillor Sinaba and supported by the UDF-affiliated East Rand People's Organisation (ERAPO), lobbied the Department of Cooperation and Development for a cancellation of the increase. [43]

The concerns of these civic protests and organizations were, initially, to re-establish channels for the redress of popular grievances that were acceptable to the state. In some cases, these would pull councillors into line. In Daveyton, for example, public demonstrations over the demolition of backyard shacks, together with lobbying by the dissident councillor Sinaba, persuaded the council to call a halt to backyard shack demolitions. In Duduza, the newly formed Civil Association persuaded the Council to reject a rent increase in late 1982/83. In the local authority elections in late 1983, several councils were taken over by populist civic organizations that had been critical of council policy in the past. In Mamelodi, the populist Vukani Vulahmelo People's Party (VVPP) won office on a 28 per cent poll.

Popular support for civil organizations depended on their success in taking up popular grievances. Civil organizations, like the VVPP, which took control of councils were unable to maintain popularity as they, like their predecessors, found they had responsibility (for implementing unpopular policies) without power (to challenge the effective constraints on key popular grievances). Civil organizations which operated outside of the councils could retain popular support as public watch-dog bodies, supervising - and criticizing - the councils without taking responsibility for their policies. But the nature of watch-dog activity involved operating sporadically, whilst the nature of popular grievances precluded major successes (rent increases could be successfully opposed, but state-subsidized development could not be secured by civil organizations). During periods of inactivity, civil organizations' popularity fell. [44]

The activities of civil organizations were generally not confrontational, but were rather geared to embarrassing the council or lobbying the state. Few civic organizations were primarily concerned with national or nationalist activities. The Duduza Civil Association, for example, saw its role as to "act as a bridge between the residents and the Community Council". It was established as an explicit alternative to the Council in the sense that it resulted from the perception that the Council had been failing in its responsibilities to residents, but it sought to work in conjunction with and not to supplant the Council. [45]

The principle of lobbying of and negotiations with the state was widely accepted. [46] The mechanisms for doing so changed, with the decline in perceived efficacy of the councils and the formation of alternative civil organizations, but the broad strategy remained unchanged. Confrontation was to be avoided.

The basis for this strategy of lobbying the state through acceptable structures was the two inter-related sets of power relations, i.e. the relations between state and township and relations within the township. Struggles over the representation of residents (by councils, dissident councillors, or extra-council civic organizations) articulated with struggles over the administration of townships. Neither state nor residents could determine both sets of power relations. The state could, if it really wanted to, enforce particular policies over the heads of protesters - such as with the issues of Afrikaans (in 1974-76) and rent increases (especially in the early 1980s). But there was an indirect cost to the state, as the credibility of school boards or councils was thereby damaged. Major policy shifts were less the result of direct discussions than of indirect pressure, from township conflict or fiscal concerns.

Rebellion as an Unintended Outcome

Apparent quiescence in townships in the PWV since c1973 masked the existence of particular forms of non-confrontational political action, including by and through civic organizations. This pattern of political action reflected township residents' appraisal of the possible benefits and costs accruing to this and alternative patterns of action, and this appraisal was fundamentally structured by their general powerlessness.

On two major occasions, 1976-77 and 1984-87, this pattern of political action changed dramatically. Studies generally imply that existing patterns of political action were suddenly and abruptly replaced by new forms. This seems implausible, and recent accounts point to an alternative emphasis: the transition was gradual, with confrontation often an unintended outcome. [47]

The transition from "quiescence" to "rebellion" resulted from the nature of "quiescence", i.e. of the existing pattern of non-conflictual political action for the redress of grievances. It arose out of the inability of those forms of action adequately to address new grievances. "Rebellion" constituted, initially, an attempt to rectify the previous mechanisms for redressing grievances, i.e. to preserve the efficacy of non-confrontational protest. It was defensive rather than revolutionary in intent.

Acceptable protest required mediation (such as through school boards or councils). The relationship between mediators and residents had the inherent potential to be unstable, as the former sought popular endorsement at the same time as being answerable to the state. It was the intensification of struggle over the relationship of mediators with the powerless that finally led to the end of apparent quiescence.

The studies of 1976 provide only pointers towards an exploration within this framework. The proliferation of student protests in the first half of 1976, culminating in the mass public demonstration of 16 June, and the emergence of parents' organization, followed the failure of school-level structures (school committees or boards, teachers or principals) to redress the grievances of Afrikaans-medium teaching. As Hyslop writes: "The story of the period

leading up to June 1976 is in part one of the refusal of the Bantu Education Department to listen to its own school boards". [48] In their meetings with departmental officials, school boards had run up against complete intransigence over this issue. The students' demonstration was provocative, but also constituted the most restrained but possibly effective option that student leaders could have chosen.

Similarly, in 1984 protest action over rent increases generally took the least confrontational form possible. In Daveyton, the role of the populist councillor Sinaba was one factor which enabled township activists (including ERAPO) to protest against the rent increase without immediately confrontational consequences. Public meetings were held in the stadium (organized by Sinaba) and a delegation was elected to take a petition over the heads of the council.

Mass public demonstrations and stay-aways, as in Tumahole in July 1984 and the Vaal Triangle on 3 September, occurred when the existing repertoire of political action was exhausted. The intention of most participants was not, however, to confront. In the Vaal, two factors combined to precipitate mass public demonstration. Firstly, the council was completely discredited. Even the official inquiry into the Vaal Uprising reported that "No resident I spoke to had a good word for the Lekoa Municipality". [49] There were no popular dissident councillors (with the exception of Zamdela). Secondly, extra-council civic activists had no experience of negotiation over popular grievances, and do not seem to have considered appeals to the government over the heads of the local administration. The participants in the 3 September demonstrations, therefore, included former members of council-linked parties who had left them over their acquiescence in unpopular council policies or activities. [50]

Township politics underwent rapid change once the state suppressed protests, and confrontation proliferated. Confrontation itself reshaped patterns of protest dramatically. As Shanin puts it:

For its participants a revolution is a moment of truth. It is so not only metaphorically, in the sense of supreme confrontation with political enemies, but also most directly, in the sense of looking at one's own assumptions, images and beliefs in the merciless light of experience. [51]

New grievances crystallized, and were acted upon. New interests and new sets of participants emerged. The importance of the role of intermediaries continued, however, as attacks on councillors and policemen in many townships indicated.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the occurrence of apparent quiescence and rebellion cannot simply be read off the existence of grievances, organizations or ideologies. An important factor is the character of existing forms of political action. Furthermore, the boundaries between apparent quiescence and rebellion can be very unclear, as the transition from one to the other is gradual and the intentions of the participants can remain very limited.

Apparent quiescence was pervasive in the period 1973-1985, with township residents engaging in a range of non-confrontational forms of political action. Power relations worked in such a way as both to underlie, or intensify, popular grievances and at the same time to inhibit popular political responses by imposing the probability of high material costs arising from rebellion. During 1976 and 1984-85 the existing channels for non-confrontational political action broke down, and, in attempts to re-establish these or other non-confrontational channels, people engaged in protests which led to the generally unintended outcome of confrontation with the state.

Township politics should not be viewed in terms of sharply contrasting periods of "quiescence" and "rebellion", but rather in terms of more gradual transitions with shifting patterns of political action. Both the radicalism of many participants in non-confrontational, even state-related, forms of political action and the conservatism of many participants in "rebellious" protests need to be recognized.

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Notes

- 1 This paper is based on the introduction to my thesis, which is provisionally entitled "Quiescence and the Origins of Confrontation in PWV Townships, 1978-84".
- 2 These include: on 1976, focussing on Soweto itself: John Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg, 1978); Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: the Soweto Revolt* (London, 1979); Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm* (London, 1980).
On the PWV: Mike Sarakinsky, *From "Freehold Township" to "Model Township": a political history of Alexandra, 1905-1983* (Johannesburg, 1984); my own, "The Anvil: political mobilisation in Tumahole, 1983-1985" in *Africa Perspective* (1988), and "Broken Promises: discontent, protest and the transition to confrontation in Duduza, 1978-1985" (unpublished paper, November 1988); Matthew Chaskalson, unpublished paper on Sharpeville since 1960; Andrew Boraine, "Mamelodi: from parks to people's power" (unpublished Honours dissertation, University of Cape Town, January 1987); Matthew Chaskalson and I have tried to summarize the processes of 1984-87 in the PWV and Orange Free State in contributions to *Political Conflict in South Africa* (Indicator Project South Africa: Durban, 1988).
On other regions: Josette Cole, *Crossroads: the politics of reform and repression, 1976-1986* (Johannesburg, 1987); Ari Sitas, "Durban, August 1985: 'Where wealth and power and blood reign worshipped gods'" in *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11, 4 (February/March 1986); Heather Hughes, "Violence in Inanda, August 1985" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13, 3 (April 1987); Nkosinathi Gwala, "Political Violence and the Struggle for Control in Pietermaritzburg", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 3 (April 1989).
Many other studies focus on particular protests, but without locating these within longer processes of mobilization.
- 3 The term is Theodor Shanin's: *Russia, 1905-07: revolution as a moment of truth* (London, 1986).
- 4 The concept of "quiescence" is problematic, for at least two reasons. Firstly, its meaning is ambiguous, as it can refer to either complete inaction or to the absence of rebellious action. Secondly, it generally contains an inherent analytical bias, as it is a residual category, denoting the absence of protest or rebellion, and it is these latter which are considered somehow more natural.

- 5 Especially Chaskalson, "Sharpeville", on the Vaal until August 1984; Sitas, *op. cit.*, and Hughes, *op. cit.*, on Durban before August 1985. Also Seekings, "Why Was Soweto Different? Urban development, township politics, and the political economy of Soweto, 1978-84" (paper presented to the African Studies Institute seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, May 1988).
- 6 Fatima Meer, "African Nationalism: some inhibiting factors", in Heribert Adam (ed), *South Africa: sociological perspectives* (Oxford, 1971), p 140.
- 7 *Report of the [Cillie] Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere* (Pretoria, RP 55/1980): see volume 2.
- 8 Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, *South Africa Without Apartheid: dismantling racial domination* (Berkeley, 1986). Also see Lawrence Schlemmer, "Build-Up to Revolution or Impasse?" in Adam (ed), *South Africa: the limits of reform politics* (Leiden, 1983), pp 62-3, 79-81; Robin Cohen, *Endgame in South Africa* (London, 1986)
- 9 Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London, 1983).
- 10 John Brewer, *After Soweto: an unfinished journey* (Oxford, 1987).
- 11 Martin Murray, *South Africa: time of agony, time of destiny* (London, 1987).
- 12 This was particularly odd in Lodge's case: contrast his treatment of the post-1973 period with his studies of popular protest in the 1950s.
- 13 This general approach was reflected in John Saul and Stephen Gelb, *The Crisis in South Africa* (New York, 1981), whose influence is evident on each of Lodge, Brewer, and Murray. An alternative interpretation of economic trends is T C Moll, "Mishap or Crisis? The apartheid economy's recent performance" (paper presented to the African Studies Institute seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, June 1988).
- 14 Adam and Moodley, *op. cit.*, p 135.
- 15 Lodge, *op. cit.*, p 321. Lodge refers to other factors, but only in passing. See pp 131, 238-39, 295-96, 322.
- 16 Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa* (Berkeley, 1978), p 253. Repression is also prioritized in Hirson, *op. cit.*, and Meer, *loc. cit.* See also the anecdotal evidence concerning informers in Joel Carlson, *No Neutral Ground* (London, 1973), p 298; Joseph Lelyveld, *Move Your Shadow* (paperback edition, London, 1987), pp 9-10. Also Chaskalson, "Sharpeville".
- 17 John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: quiescence and rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Oxford, 1980). Gaventa bases his analysis on Steven Lukes's theory of power (*Power: a radical view* [London, 1974]). Despite his protestations to the contrary, Gaventa refocusses and does not just apply Lukes' theory. While Gaventa's work preceded recent political theory concerning rational choice and methodological individualism, the similarities are clear. My quotes are from pp 144-45 and 161.
- 18 For example, see Peter Saunders, *Urban Politics: a sociological interpretation* (London, 1979), on a British case. This is, of course, the basic dilemma of participation in state structures which faces political organizations seeking fundamental transformation, whether in South Africa or elsewhere.

- 19 Overt repression may have been of little direct importance, but ultimately it was the state's near monopoly over physical coercion that underlay its allocative power, that in turn underlay the high costs to township residents attached to confrontation.
- 20 Adam and Moodley, *op. cit.*, p 142. Edward Feit makes the same point in *Urban Revolt in South Africa, 1960-64* (Northwestern University Press, 1971), p 304.
- 21 It has widely been suggested that people turn to intra-township violence, to drink, or to religion, as substitutes for redressing grievances. Some studies have suggested that psychological factors underlie inaction (see Meer, *loc. cit.*, pp 150-51; Feit, *op. cit.*, p 74; Kane-Berman, *op. cit.*, p 106; and the writings of Black Consciousness theorists in the early 1970s). Gaventa wrote that fatalism or resignation resulted from "the power situation in which the non-elite find themselves". The anticipation of defeat, and the consequent pattern of non-conflict, was "instilled through repeated experiences of defeat" (*Power and Powerlessness*, pp 145, 254). In other words, fatalism was a consciousness of power relations, not an independent variable which might constrain protest.
- 22 Vigilanteism generally had a limited social basis. See Seekings, "Vigilantes and the State", *Work in Progress* 40 (1986), and N Haysom, *Mabangalala* (Johannesburg, 1986). Popular vigilanteism in Crossroads occurred in anticipation of - and in competition for - state-provided material benefits. See Josette Cole, *op. cit.*
- 23 For example, even routine policing has never been established. Policing has been unrest-, and not crime-, oriented.
- 24 Robin Bloch, "The Community Council System in South Africa", *Africa Perspective* 21 (1982).
- 25 This section is abstracted from my "People's Courts in the PWV: an historical and sociological perspective", unpublished paper (November 1988).
- 26 Mercia Joan Wilsworth, *Strategies for Survival: transcending the culture of poverty in a black South African township* (Grahamstown, 1980), p 233.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p 246.
- 28 John Hund and Malebo Kotu-Rammopo, "Justice in a South African Township: the sociology of Makgotla" in *Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa*, Vol 16 (1983), pp 179-208.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp 184-93.
- 30 Including in the Community Councils Act of 1977.
- 31 Only during 1985, with the emergence of "people's courts", did extra-state judicial systems and radical politics converge.
- 32 M M Morapeli, *The Rock: the history of Orlando High School, 1939-1984* (M Ed research report, University of the Witwatersrand, December 1984). How long this could have continued is impossible to say.
- 33 Frank Molteno, *1980: Students Struggle for their Schools* (Cape Town, 1988); Seekings, "The Anvil". Feit emphasized this as causing the breakdown of the 1955 Bantu Education campaign: *African Opposition in South Africa* (Stanford, 1967).

- 34 South African Institute of Race Relations, *Race Relations Survey 1981*, p 262; Heather Hughes and Jeremy Grest, "The Local State" in *South African Review 1* (Johannesburg, 1983), p 124.
- 35 Seekings, "Broken Promises".
- 36 Seekings, "Why was Soweto different?"
- 37 For a historical example, in a non-township context, see Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African mine labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933* (London, 1976).
- 38 Jon Hyslop, "Aspects of the Failure of Bantu Education as a Hegemonic Strategy: school boards, school committees and educational politics, 1955-1976" (paper presented to the History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1987), pp 16-19; Brooks and Brickhill, *op. cit.*, pp 46-49.
- 39 Sam Buti in Alexandra is an example of a councillor who was unable to retain popularity when he secured control of the Alexandra council. Responsibility without power was a recipe for popular hostility, which only dissident individuals could avoid.
- 40 See, for example, the memorandum sent by the East Rand Urban Councils Association to the government in October 1984 (see *City Press*, 14 October 1984, p 7); also Urban Foundation, "The Black Town Councils: a study of their performance and reception in the urban black communities" (unpublished survey, 1985).
- 41 Richard Humphries, "Life after Death? Legitimacy and black local government" (working document, University of South Africa, Department of Development Administration and Politics, 1985).
- 42 Claudia Reintges, "Rents and Urban Political Geography: the case of Lamontville" (unpublished MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1986). Dube did not resign, however, before he was killed.
- 43 There is an account of this in Paul Hendler, *Urban Policy and Housing* (South African Institute of Race Relations topical briefing, Johannesburg, 1988), pp 6-10. The rent increase was suspended.
- 44 Civic activists themselves recognized this problem: see the frank auto-critique of the Soweto Civic Association in June 1984, discussed in Seekings, "Why was Soweto different?"
- 45 Seekings, "Broken Promises".
- 46 Schlemmer provides limited survey evidence that township residents believed that lobbying could be successful: Schlemmer, *loc. cit.*, p 77.
- 47 Gaventa curiously does not consider why quiescence ends. Indeed, his analysis that power is accumulative might suggest that quiescence is an unstoppable phenomenon. But his study contains a section on protest which fits in with the following analysis.
- 48 Hyslop, *op. cit.*, p 18; also Hyslop, "Food, Authority and Politics: Student Riots in South African Schools, 1945-1976" (paper presented to the African Studies Institute seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, September 1986).
- 49 *Report on the Investigation into Education for Blacks in the Vaal Triangle Following Upon the Occurrences of 3 September and Thereafter* (the Van der Walt Commission, Pretoria, 1985), pp 29-33.

50 See the account in Chaskalson, "Sharpeville"; also evidence in *State vs Baleka and Others* (the Delmas Treason Trial), including, for example, that of E M Xaba, pp 19, 972-80. On Tumahole, see Seekings, "The Anvil".

51 Shanin, *op. cit.*, p 184.