

SOUTH AFRICA'S LUMPENPROLETARIAN ARMY:
'UMKOSI WA NTABA' - 'THE REGIMENT OF THE HILLS', 1890-1920

by

Charles van Onselen

Introduction

Since the mid-1960s, and particularly since the publication of Fanon's Wretched of the Earth, sociologists and political scientists with an interest in the Third World have been debating the revolutionary potential of those heterogeneous groups that are marginal to society and which are collectively termed the "lumpenproletariat". (1) In an adjacent discipline, but with a predominantly different geographical focus, scholars like Cobb, Stedman Jones, Rudé and Hobsbawm have skilfully been exploring marginality in European history. (2) Despite the fact that many of these scholars share a common intellectual tradition and interest, there has been little cross-fertilization between these distinct fields of research. This is hardly surprising since Third World social structures and European historical case studies cannot be expected to articulate particularly well. What is and what was required are Third World case studies. (3)

Within the context of this broadly defined problem, the social historian of South Africa seems to have a special responsibility, and the opportunity for particularly stimulating research. South Africa was the first country in Africa - and the only one with 19th century roots - to undergo a fully fledged industrial revolution. Within 75 years of the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, capital transformed the face of the sub-continent and generated successive social formations which left an increasingly well entrenched white ruling class. Those same transforming processes prised black South Africans off their land, separated them from their families, reduced them to workers, and then ruthlessly reallocated them to the towns. There, on the bureaucratic leash of the pass laws, they were soon exposed to two sociologically similar institutions which served the rapidly industrializing economic system particularly well - the prisons and the mine compounds. (4) In a matter of decades, and sometimes perhaps within the space of even a single generation, Africans could successively be pastoralists, peasants, proletarians or prisoners. No blacks could have found this downward socio-economic spiral comfortable, and in those cases where the time-span was telescoped, the experience must have been singularly traumatic. If ever there was scope for the study of "marginality", then surely it is here?

This essay, then, will generally be concerned with those marginalized black groups who, at the turn of the century, made their way to the heart of industrialized

South Africa - the Witwatersrand. More specifically, it will focus on an association of men who, at different times between 1890 and 1920, called themselves "The Regiment of the Hills" (Umkosi wa Ntaba), "The Regiment of Gaolbirds" (Umkosi wa Seneneem), "The People of the Stone", Nongoloza, or "Ninevites". Through this study it is hoped to gain greater insight into the emergence of the black lumpenproletariat, understand one of its more identifiable formations, assess its potentialities and limitations, and to speculate on a form of African resistance hitherto unexplored in South African historiography.

The Regiment of the Hills, 1890-1899

In 1867, a Zulu woman named Nompopo presented her husband with a new son. The boy, one of six children born to the couple, evidently caused something of a stir on his arrival since his parents christened him Mzoozepe - meaning "where did you find him?". Shortly after this event, the father, Numisimani, must have felt that his grazing lands had become inadequate since he moved his wife and children on to land owned by a Mr Tom Porter, "near to where the River Tugela takes its course from the Drakensberg". Numisimani, however, continued to spend most of his time at a kraal near "Msumkulu" (Mzinkulu?) where he was an induna whilst his dispersed family worked on the Porter farm in return for the use of land.

In 1883, the 16 year old Mzoozepe undertook his first six-month spell as a migrant labourer when he entered employment as a "garden boy" with a Mr Tom J. of Harrismith. During the following three years he again undertook a spell of labour in Harrismith; this time acquiring new skills as a groom in the employ of a certain "Mr M.". It was thus in about 1886, when he was 19 years old, that Mzoozepe once more entered service with Mr Tom J. as a groom. It was also at this juncture that events occurred which helped to shape the future course of Mzoozepe's life, and the story is best told in his own words:

Before I had finished the first month of this employment one of the horses got lost. On informing my master of this he accused me of being negligent and blamed me for it and told me to go and look for it. I told him that as I was working in the garden on that day he could not hold me responsible for the loss, as all the horses were out grazing alone. He then threatened to place me in gaol if I did not go out and look for the horse that was missing, so I searched but did not find it. He then told me to go back to my kraal and work for Mr Tom P. again, and added that Tom Porter would then bring to him the value of the horse that was lost. This amount would represent my wages for about two years.... On returning I asked my brother whether it was the law, and whether he thought it fair that I should work and have my wages kept back to pay for the horse which I did not lose. He told me that I must work or they would put me in gaol and added that he did not want to see me there. I told him that I could not work for what I did not lose ... (5)

Unimpressed with his brother's conservative advice and aggrieved by what he felt to be an obvious injustice (6), Mzoozepe decided to escape from his "employers". When Tom Porter sent him and another black servant to Johannesburg with transport goods later in that year, he took the opportunity to desert and to give himself a new name - Jan Note.

The transformation of Mzoozepi to Jan Note was neither instant nor painless. For twelve months Mzoozepi was employed as a "houseboy" in the Johannesburg suburb of Jeppe, and throughout this period he continued to fulfil his familial obligations by sending cash remittances to his mother via migrant friends who were making the journey back to Natal. The problem of Tom J.'s missing horse, however, pursued him relentlessly, and more especially when his elder brother came to work in the same city in about 1887. In yet another attempt to rid himself of his persecutors, Mzoozepi handed his brother £3 which was to be paid to Tom J. in final settlement of the latter's loss. This the brother willingly accepted, but he also insisted that Mzoozepi accompany him home so that he could be present when the money was handed over. This Mzoozepi refused to do. Cynical about the Europeans' sense of justice and fearful of his brother and Tom J.'s wrath, Mzoozepi decided to make use of the anonymity of the city once more and to move to a new suburb and employment. (7)

The young Note, of course, was not the only one to perceive Johannesburg as a city of freedom and opportunity in the late 1880s. Black and white immigrants from throughout Southern Africa and Europe had come to the Witwatersrand in their thousands in the belief that, if they could not make their fortunes, then they would at least gain steady employment in the mushrooming town. For many, the more modest objective was easily achieved. For others, however, the problem was that the early mining economy and Johannesburg not only boomed - periodically it slumped. As one of the local newspapers editorialized in 1895: "In South Africa it is invariably a case of feast or famine, of boom or bankruptcy. The happy medium is seldom hit." (8) The effect of this relentless influx of cheaper immigrant labour, when compounded by marked economic slumps, was constantly to "marginalise" the most vulnerable lower echelons of the working class. (9) Yesterday's immigrant and today's worker were tomorrow's unemployed. It was at least partly for these reasons that redundant miners, unemployed clerks, failed businessmen, ex-colonial troopers, and a large number of deserters from the British armed services (10) transformed themselves into pimps, card-sharps, canteen pianists, bottle collectors, billiard markers, fences, skittle alley attendants, petty thieves, burglars, safe robbers, illicit liquor sellers or highway robbers. (11) When Jan Note moved from Jeppe to Turffontein and "got a job as a kitchen boy and groom to four single men who were living in a house at the foot of a hill near a small railway station" (12), he unconsciously entered the milieu of the lumpenproletariat, and a suburb known to be the haunt of white criminals. (13)

Tyson and McDonald, two of the employers at Turffontein, gave their new black servant explicit instructions and in return offered to remunerate him comparatively generously. He was not to allow any of his black friends near the house, he was to attend to the horses most carefully and, just in case the groom failed to understand the message, they showed him a revolver and threatened to shoot him should he disobey. Jan Note did not disobey, but he did note that his new employers kept rather strange hours:

After breakfast the four men would go out at about 8 or 9 a.m. on their horses and would return at midday for dinner and remain at home until it was dusk. They would then go out again and not return until about midnight. They always seemed to bring back some money with them and I used to see them counting it at night. (14)

It presumably took the young man very little time to realize that he was in fact being employed by a gang of European criminals but, at a wage of £6 per month, he would have been equally quick to appreciate the virtue of silence. (15)

It was probably during 1888, after a few months of "loyal" service, that Tyson first invited Note to join the gang on one of their expeditions. Still cast in the role of the black servant, Note joined the gang on successive expeditions during the following months and served a criminal apprenticeship by observation. At first

hand he saw how Tyson and his men held up passenger coaches and robbed the white travellers, or how they ambushed the company carts that conveyed the workers' wages to the more isolated gold mines. (16) He also learned how the less ambitious "abathelisa" (tax collector) trick could extract relatively small but constant sums of cash from black workers. In this latter variation Tyson's gang simply did what countless other official state robbers (border guards, police, customs officials and railway conductors) did to migrant workers throughout southern Africa. They would approach a party of African travellers pretending to be policemen, demand to see some or other form of documentation such as a pass or vaccination certificate, handcuff the blacks while the "inspection" was carried out, and then remove any cash found on the workers prior to releasing them. (17)

Whilst learning these basics of the criminal craft Note was presumably willing to tolerate his role as "servant". Crime and the colour bar, however, were not readily compatible. Given the size of the gang's takings and his modest wage, his well developed sense of justice and his independent spirit, it did not take long for Note to become discontented with his lot as white man's "boy". In the knowledge that there were greater earnings to be made if he operated with criminals of his own colour, he decided to break away from Tyson's gang and to seek out the Witwatersrand's black lumpenproletariat.

Working his way along the ethnic crevices of black society with which he was most familiar, Note soon discovered that most Zulu gebengu (criminals/robbers) did not live within Johannesburg at all. Hounded and harassed by police and the pass laws in the city, many of the gebengu had taken refuge in the Klipriversberg hills immediately to the south of Johannesburg. (18) There, living in the kloofs and caves of a place they called Shabalawawa, some 200 men, women, and children had placed themselves under the leadership of a man who hailed from Qwabe in Zululand, and who called himself Nohlopa. (19) In this loosely organized community of izigelekege (brigands) it did not take long for a man of Note's talent to bring himself to the notice of Nohlopa, and within a very short space of time he had attained the position of induna (headman) - in effect second-in-command.

It was probably at some time during 1889 that the community at Shabalawawa first started to experience a series of occasional and ideological tremors. First, the gebengu were startled to learn that their leader, Nohlopa, had been arrested for breaking into a tailor's shop in Kerk Street, Johannesburg. A second surprise, however, also lay in store for them. While in prison serving his sentence, Nohlopa learned to read and write, and spent a considerable amount of his time studying the Bible. On his release he returned to the community and, after discussions with Note, announced to the gebengu that he no longer wished to be associated with the gang and that he intended to spend his time preaching to his black brothers on the Rand. This decision left the izigelekege under Note's leadership for the first time.

Shortly after these events Jan Note started to do a little reading of his own. Using that same splendidly ambiguous text that had so influenced Nohlopa - the Bible - he derived inspiration which drove him in a radically different direction. (20) It was the Old Testament book of Nahum which particularly impressed Note, and in it he read "about the great state Nineveh which rebelled against the Lord and I selected that name for my gang as rebels against the Government's law". (21) To this generalized ideological vision Note added vital para-military conceptions, sending the really powerful shock waves through Shabalawawa which transformed it from a loosely organized community of gebengu into Umkosi wa Ntaba - The Regiment of the Hills. As Note himself put it later:

The system I introduced was as follows: I myself was the Inkoos [sic] Nkulu or king. Then I had an Induna Inkulu styled lord and corresponding to the Governor-General.

Then I had another lord who was looked upon as father of us all and styled Nonsala. Then I had my government who were known by numbers, number one to four. I also had my fighting general on the model of the boer vecht generaal. The administration of justice was confined to a judge for serious cases and a landdrost for petty cases. The medical side was entrusted to a chief doctor or Inyanga. Further I had colonels, captains, sergeant-majors and sergeants in charge of the rank and file, the Amosoja or Shosi (soldiers). (22)

"This reorganisation", the "king" pertinently pointed out, "took place in the hills of Johannesburg several years before the 1899 war was dreamed of."

Just how extensive, active, or successful the reorganized izigelekege were is extremely difficult to assess. What is generally known is that the decade leading up to the South African War was a particularly successful one for highway robbers. (23) This is more especially true of the early 1890s, prior to the arrival of the railways in Johannesburg, when there were large African labour flows which gebengu could capitalize on. In 1890, for example, it was estimated that about 3,000 black workers made their way on foot to the Witwatersrand each month (24), and in 1892 the mining magnate Herman Eckstein estimated that there were about 1,000 Africans on the move between Johannesburg and Kimberley at any one time. (25) Migrant labour on this scale, much of it funnelling southwards from the gold mines, much have made the Klipriviersberg a particularly happy hunting ground for highway robbers. (26) It is most unlikely that the Regiment of the Hills did not claim its share of the workers' wages that passed through the countryside. Within the city itself there are also some tell-tale signs which point roughly in the direction of the Regiment. Early in 1890, for example, the Standard and Diggers's News complained about the activities of a well organized gang of "Zulu" burglars in the town. (27) Court cases arising from the abathelisa trick - especially those involving "policemen" with their own "ranks" - are even more suggestive. (28) More concrete still is Jan Note's own testimony that the gang penetrated the prisons of the South African Republic where it gained recruits and taught new prisoners the organizational structure of the Regiment. (29)

Most of this evidence, however, is scattered, fragmentary and circumstantial. On balance we are perhaps best advised to see the years 1890-1899 as simply constituting the formative period of the Ninevite organization. The Regiment of the Hills developed in one of those "types of human society which lie between the evolutionary phase of tribal and kinship organization, and modern capitalist and industrial society". (30) If Note was in any way "typical", then it is possible that the ranks of the gebengu were largely filled with migrants and landless labourers. (31) Its origins lay in the countryside, and the early community of men, women and children at Shabalawawa operated within a largely rural milieu - on the very margins of the Witwatersrand where a state with limited coercive capacity could not continually harass its members. Like the Mafia, then, it was "essentially a rural phenomenon to begin with". (32) But, to the extent that it was reorganized by Note, and operated within the city and prisons, the organization was already being transformed before the War. (33) In order to appreciate the subsequent transformation of the Ninevites into an essentially urban organization we now need to consider the influence of other events and processes. First, the impact of the South African War (1899-1902) and the social upheaval which it occasioned, should be explored. Secondly, the evolution of the organization should be seen within the context of an economic system that was urbanizing and industrializing even more rapidly than before 1899. Thirdly, we should be alert to increased coercive capacity of the state and mining capitalist after the War. In particular, we should note the extent to which the sociological parameters of the Ninevite organization were shaped by those exclusively male institutions - the prisons and the mine compounds.

"People of the Stone and the Nongoloza": 1899-1906

One of the initial effects of the war was to disperse a large part of the labouring population of the Witwatersrand. In the earliest months of the conflict thousands of migrant workers poured into Johannesburg seeking travelling passes and some means of organized transport to their rural homes. It seems reasonable to assume that the general air of tension and anxiety also permeated into the ranks of the izigelekege in the Klipriviersberg. Note's men led a particular form of parasitic existence which relied on the regular robbery of small bands of migrant workers making their way through the countryside. The long term viability of this mode of operation, however, was threatened by rapid large scale movements and by a war which would probably terminate the flow of migrant labour altogether. For these, and other reasons, it is likely that the inhabitants of Shabalawawa joined the black throng making its way to the city.

This sudden influx of impoverished black workers, together with the presence of professional criminals at a time when the resources of the state were even more strained than usual, helped in the proliferation of crime. The government thus had at least a partial interest in ensuring that the "surplus" black population was evacuated to its rural hinterland as soon as possible. On a single day in October over 3,000 workers departed by rail for Mozambique whilst hundreds of others walked to the borders of the republic. "The office of J. S. Marwick, the Natal Native Agent in Johannesburg, was surrounded by thousands of African workers, aware that no arrangements had been made for their return home, and anxious lest their earnings be confiscated before they left the Republic." (34) The predominantly Zulu crowd that congregated outside Marwick's office would have constituted the most natural meeting place for Note's izigelekege and, when the Agent got permission to march these migrants to the Transvaal-Natal border, it is likely that several gebengu inserted themselves into the refugee column. After the war, the Natal African newspaper Ipepa lo Hlanga claimed that Marwick's party contained "many persons of disrepute", including "a self-organized gang of native desperadoes". (35) It would seem, therefore, that at least some of the criminal elements on the Witwatersrand complex were spread to other parts of southern Africa during the early months of the war.

But if the early part of the war saw the dispersal of Africans, then there was also more than ample opportunity for blacks to regroup as the subsequent conflict unfolded. Perhaps inevitably, much of this regrouping was involuntary and the war threw together, on a fairly indiscriminating basis, existing lumpenproletarian elements and those undergoing crisis-induced marginalization. Several thousand rural people found themselves herded into the concentration camps set up by the invading British administration. Many of those in need of a living, not excluding petty criminals, were employed in a variety of occupations by the British army. Indeed, it is significant that many of those who subsequently joined the ranks of the Ninevites gained their first experience of crime and the urban areas while serving with the British troops. (36) Those who found their way to prison stood the risk of being conscripted for service with military units in Natal. But as far as the Witwatersrand itself was concerned perhaps the most significant meeting place of all developed at the Ferreira Deep Mine compound. There, the army established a reception centre for "vagrants" who were compelled to earn the five shillings necessary for a pass by "stone-breaking".

Their nature and function ensured that the concentration camps, prisons and compounds exercised a high degree of control over the black inmates. But this degree of coercion over the African population was not solely or simply a war-time exigency; in many instances these institutions represented the vanguard of those oppressive instruments that continued to function under the post-war administration. As one student of the war has noted:

The Milner regime extended the pass department, created a system of courts to deal with breaches of masters and servants legislation, introduced a scheme to register the finger-prints of all mining employees to help identify workers who deserted, and established regulations to prohibit mining companies recruiting workers in labour districts. The possibility of African workers exchanging employers to find the most congenial working conditions was therefore considerably reduced ... (37)

In 1903 the mining companies contributed to this coercion when they tightened up the functioning of their compounds and, in 1905, the state further embellished the system when it opened the Cinderella Prison on the East Rand, which supplied local mines with prison labour. (38)

This web of legislation and its supporting institutions of compounds, courts and prisons did not only reduce the mobility of black labourers - it also had other less intentional consequences. The constant infractions of the pass laws in a state with increased law-enforcement capacity produced a very distinctive labouring population: one characterized by its high degree of nominal "criminal" experience. Ceaseless prosecutions not only produced a working class with considerable experience of two sociologically similar institutions (the prison and the compound), it also forced the labourers and the lumpenproletarians to rub shoulders to a greater extent than they might otherwise have done. The pass laws and a more efficient police system produced a drag-net which drew all Africans, law-abiding and law-evading alike, into the Witwatersrand complex and kept them there. Seen from this perspective, it was perhaps predictable that when Note's organization re-emerged after the war it would be more urban based than previously, and that its natural home would be the prison/compound complex.

Purely as an informed guess, we can speculate that the post-war Ninevite movement first re-emerged amongst those "vagrant" stonebreakers at the Ferreira Deep Mine compound. What we do know with greater certainty, however, is that the characteristic Ninevite form of organization was detectable in the prisons soon after the war. In 1904, J. S. Marwick, by then Assistant Secretary for Native Affairs in the Transvaal, knew that the society was operating in the prisons under the name of "The People of the Stone". (39) From at least the same date - but particularly during years when there were more marked recessions in the mining industry, such as 1906 and 1908 - "loafers", "vagrants", petty criminals, the unemployed and pass-less were also joining the society under another name, Nongoloza. But, whereas the "People of the Stone" met in prison, those who joined Nongoloza ("Nongoloza" alias Jan Note) did so in prospect holes, disused mine shafts, abandoned or isolated buildings, and in old quarries. (40) By 1906, the Ninevite organization was already operating with two loosely knit associations - one based within and the other outside the prisons.

The "People of the Stone" and the "Nongoloza" might have been nominally different, but they shared overriding similarities which betrayed their common origin. Both associations explicitly organized themselves on the basis of the model pioneered by Jan Note and, in the loosest sense possible, both pledged their allegiance to "Nongoloza" himself. But there was also another similarity developing towards the end of this period which betrayed the common sociological parentage of an all-male institution. A high incidence of sodomistic sexual relationships amongst both groups manifested itself all the more clearly as the indentured Chinese labourers left the mine compounds of the Witwatersrand and had their places taken by a growing number of African migrant workers. (41) By 1906, when under missionary pressure the Chamber of Mines conducted an enquiry into "unnatural native vice", it was:

... a common legend throughout the mines that a Shangaan named 'Sokisi' [possibly George Schoko, a noted Ninevite

leader] had, while in prison [Cinderella?], practised unnatural vice, and that he had introduced the custom of keeping 'izinkotshane' [boy-wives] at the Brakpan Mines, from whence it spread until at the present day there is no doubt it is commonly practised throughout all the Mines on the Witwatersrand. (42)

Prima facie it seems probable that the prison/compound complex developed by the state and mining industry after the war was also most successful in excluding women from urban African life.

This much having been noted, however, it still remained a fact that the Ninevite organization existed as two largely separate sub-associations between 1899 and 1906. There is little or no evidence of a common leadership, and few indications that the "People of the Stone" and Nongoloza co-operated extensively in their matters of criminal business. The Ninevites, perhaps still dominated by the classic lumpen-proletarian elements of a post-war situation, still lacked overall organization, vision, unity, discipline and professional leadership. For these latter attributes the movement had to wait for the reappearance of one man: one man who was "held in superstitious veneration by the rank and file" (43); one man whom criminals greeted in a hushed voice with the salute that was usually reserved for Zulu royalty, "Bayete" (44); one man who could proudly claim the title "Nongoloza". Such a man existed. He was a "short thick-set Zulu", about 30 years of age, and apparently "with no appearance to command respect". (45) His name was Jan Note.

The Ninevites in the Ascendent: 1906-1912

At present we, unfortunately, know nothing about Jan Note's life or movements between 1899 and the half-decade immediately following the war. Perhaps along with other gebengu he frequented Natal-Zululand, or maybe he became part of the amalaita bands that featured prominently in Durban during this period. (46) There is also the outside possibility that he entered employment with a white farmer in the Orange Free State, and that whilst there he fell foul of the authorities in a dispute involving wages and the pass law. (48) Be this as it may, 1908 found Nongoloza in the Volksrust prison on the Natal-Transvaal border.

In the same year, in the company of two other convicts, Nongoloza broke out of the Volksrust prison and immediately broke into the court-house, where he removed a revolver and 75 cartridges. From there Note and his companions moved north-east to the small town of Wakkerstroom. Here Note, for some reason or other, attracted the attention of a white police sergeant. When the policeman and another white attempted to arrest the escaped convicts, Note promptly opened fire on them and fled. After this escapade Nongoloza and his small party headed northwards along the sparsely populated Swaziland border, apparently causing considerable consternation amongst the rural white inhabitants of the area. Somewhere along this route Nongoloza shed one of his followers, and eventually he and a single companion entered the Eastern Transvaal gold mining town of Barberton.

Nongoloza's arrival at Barberton coincided with substantial European preparations for a civil reception to be held in a local hotel. At night he and his companion let themselves into the hotel dining room, where they proceeded to make merry on the food and drink supposedly set aside for the white South African dignitaries. On leaving the premises the two blacks were spotted by an African policeman who chose to pursue the escaping convicts - an unwise decision, since Note promptly shot him through the leg. The noise of the shooting, however, attracted more policemen, and this time a slightly inebriated Nongoloza and his accomplice were captured. (49) Soon afterwards Note appeared in court charged with escape from lawful

custody and several counts of attempted murder, and was sentenced to life imprisonment. From Barberton the state transported Nongoloza to Pretoria, where it not only placed him in the local prison but also deposited him well within operating distance of the Witwatersrand's urban prison-compound complex.

Note's reputation and qualities of leadership at once assured him of the overall command of the Ninevites within the Pretoria prison, where he was ruthlessly supported and assisted by loyal notables such as Meshine ("Government"), Jinoyi ("Fighting General"), Charlie ("Doctor") and Jim Dunde ("Judge"). (50) Between 1908 and 1912, however, Nongoloza also set about consolidating his hold over a criminal empire which extended over some 400 square miles of the Witwatersrand, stretching from Krugersdorp in the west to Nigel in the east, and from Johannesburg in the north to Kliprivier in the south. In order to achieve this, he united under his leadership criminal gangs entrenched in regional strongholds throughout this portion of the Transvaal, and by so doing reaffirmed his undisputed right to the title "Nkosi Nkulu".

To the west of Johannesburg, Note succeeded in gaining the allegiance of "Chief" George Schoko (alias Kleintje) and his followers. This gang, which was centred on the prospect holes in the Canada Junction area, specialized in abathelisa robberies of workers making their way to and from the West Rand. Not far from this, to the south-east, Nongoloza was followed by another important leader, "Chief" Sam Nyambezi (alias Joseph). Nyambezi and his followers at one stage lived in the Crown Deep Mine compound and from this base they raided and plundered the African locations of south-western Johannesburg. East of Johannesburg, Note's most trusted follower was perhaps Jan Mtembu, who, by 1912, had made his way to the Premier Mine near Pretoria. In the Cinderella Prison at Boksburg - a vital centre in the Ninevite organization - the gang was under the control of Jim Mandende. Mandende, a Xhosa who had won his criminal spurs back in the days of the South African Republic, was personally appointed by the "Nkosi Nkulu". In the far south-east of the Witwatersrand, Nongoloza was represented by "Chief" Jacob Xaba. Xaba and his followers invariably inhabited the open countryside between the mine compounds of Brakpan and Nigel, and from this base they lived by robbery and stock theft. By 1912, the charismatic Note had not only succeeded in uniting these five important "chiefs" under his command; he could also rely on the support of at least ten other "generals" based in mine compounds all along the line of reef. (51) At the height of his power and influence Nongoloza could count on the committed support of between 750 and 1,000 Ninevites - the large majority of them being Zulu, but also including Shangaan, Basuto, Xhosa and Swazi. (52)

That Note possessed charisma seems beyond doubt. But leadership and empires are not built on charisma alone, they also have more mundane and mechanical requirements - such as the need for communication. Nongoloza made sure that his wishes reached the Ninevites through an elaborate system of messages which could reach into most corners of the Witwatersrand. The constant ebb and flow of pass offenders in the prisons was perhaps the most central feature in this information network. New arrivals would pass on information of the gang's activities, while discharged prisoners in turn would convey Note's wishes from prison. Most frequently, discharged prisoners would make their way to one or other of the ricksha yards in Johannesburg where they would pass on Note's message. These "ricksha boys", whose occupation ideally suited them to the task, would in turn pass on the message to the communications officer of the various gangs. For example, Nkuku (alias "Forage"), who held the rank of "office boy" in the number two gang at Randfontein, used to collect messages from Nongoloza via Mpilepile in a Jeppestown ricksha yard. (53) Not all messages, however, passed through these sorts of contacts, whom the police called "recognised agents who disseminate orders and instructions to the members of the gangs outside". (54) There was also "top secret" or "operations" information passed between gangs which had no need to be routed through the ricksha yards. Thus we know, for example, that promotions within the organization were sometimes discussed in letters that passed between "generals" from different regions. (55) Mere "office boys" or "messengers" were not allowed access to such privileged information, and such messages were usually carried

only by people of "high rank". It therefore seems likely that Nongoloza's organization made use of a sophisticated two-tier communication system.

For Nongoloza and his "generals" to issue orders was one thing; to ensure that they were obeyed was another. The Ninevites, no less than any other army or larger organization, had need of a disciplinary code which could help to control members who were often tough individualists. Here, as in the case of the communications system, it was the constant movement of urban Africans into the prisons that enabled the army of Nineveh to function. Although there were members of the organization both inside and outside of the prisons, most of the disciplining of the members took place within the confined space of the communal cells that characterized the Transvaal penal system. Here there was no place to hide from Ninevite justice. Nongoloza and his officers could rest assured in the knowledge that, at some stage or other, an infringement of the pass laws would inevitably bring a deviant Ninevite to their prison "court".

Lesser offences under the Ninevite disciplinary code centred around matters of status, privilege and discipline within the ranks. Thus a man who developed a fully fledged homosexual relationship with an umfaan (boy), before having officially attained the rank of kehla (status of Zulu male who had been given the chief's permission to marry) within the organization, stood to be tried before a "magistrate". (56) This, or other relatively minor infringements resulted in the withdrawal of privileges such as tobacco, food or sex while in the communal cells. Those with rank who contravened the code stood to be demoted - a sentence which also involved the sacrifice of certain benefits while in prison. (57)

More serious offences, however, were immediately referred to "superior courts", where there were "judges", "prosecutors", "doctors" and "jurymen" present. Charges brought in these courts invariably centred around breaches of Ninevite security, and the sentences were harsh and bloody. Informers who passed on relatively unimportant information to the police or prison authorities could consider themselves lucky, since on being sentenced they would simply have their front teeth knocked out. More important transgressors were less lucky since they stood the risk of being stabbed through the shoulder blades with sharpened nails. If the "court" was of the opinion that "nails" were not a suitable punishment for the offender, then the equally unpleasant alternative of the "balloon" became a possibility. "Ballooning" consisted of tossing the victim to greater and greater heights with the aid of a blanket until, at a pre-arranged signal, the blanket would be removed and the offender allowed to plummet into the concrete floor of the cell. (58)

Yet another form of severe punishment was the dreaded "tshaya sigubu" - the systematic beating of the ribs with clenched fists. "Tomboek" Umfanawenduku, who was in the Pretoria prison at the time of Nongoloza himself, offered a first-hand account of this particular Ninevite ritual:

The penalty inflicted as a rule is anything from 3 to 10 blows. But before this penalty is inflicted they call their Doctor who is also a member of the gang, and he feels your pulse and orders the punishment reduced if he thinks the person is not very strong. He will reduce it from 10 to 5. I have on two occasions been assaulted in this manner the first time it was at Pretoria. I had already joined their society when I was ordered to be tried as I was a native constable in the Transvaal Police prior to my arrest. I was taken before the Magistrate, a prisoner named 'Toby', and he punished me for being a native constable and sentenced me to be punished by means of the 'sigubu'. I was to receive 20 blows on each side

of the ribs with clenched fists. A Doctor named Charlie, also a hard labour prisoner, was called to examine and he ordered the punishment reduced to 10 blows only. I was then taken into the middle of the room and told to stand straight up with my hands folded, and four members who ranked as private soldiers [?were] detailed by the captain. The four soldiers get around you, one at the rear and front of you, and then Captain then orders them to attention. They then clench their fists and when he orders "present arms" they extend their arms in a fighting attitude and continue this until he gives the order of 'sigubu' when each of the soldiers starts punching you from side to side until the Captain gives the order 'halt'. This is a very severe punishment and often when you cough up a person brings up blood through the effects ... (59)

But even the coughing of blood that came with 'tshaya sigubu' was considered insufficient punishment for the worst offenders of all. For them only death was good enough.

Unfortunately, we have few specific cases to show what "crimes" exactly warranted the death sentence. The one case that we do know about, that of Matshayli Zungu, is perhaps not "typical" of Ninevite executions. Zungu, a Zulu miner from the Cason Compound, had the misfortune to cross the path of the local Boksburg branch of the Ninevites - a particularly tough gang that numbered amongst its members veterans from Pretoria Local and "Blue Sky Gaol" (Cinderella Prison). On being asked to join the gang and choose himself a kehla, Zungu made the mistake of refusing. This refusal caused the "Government" and the "General" to confer for a minute or two. Thereafter, the "General" - Elijah Mazinyo - simply said: "I sentence you to the rope." Whereupon Zungu was promptly strangled by means of a handkerchief. (60) The Ninevites then half-concealed the body by inserting it into a hole in the wall of the slimes dam, and the whole affair ended with the subsequent execution of 14 members of the gang. (61)

But both the choice of victim and the crudity of the execution mark the Zungu murder as being rather exceptional. "The orders for murder", wrote one of the Witwatersrand detectives most familiar with the Ninevites, "are principally against natives who have formerly belonged to the gang and afterwards turned police informers." (62) The police believed that at least some of these informers had been killed through having large doses of powdered glass administered to them - a refined method when compared with "the rope". (63) It was the same detective who described what was perhaps the most subtle Ninevite method of all. "In prison", he wrote, "the death sentence is carried out in the following manner. The prisoner is strangled with a wet towel. The Executioners then chew mealies, and stuff it down his throat. I am told that natives so found have been certified cause of death due to choking whilst eating mealies [maize]." (64)

By 1912 Nongoloza controlled an army which knew what his directives were, and one which operated with a disciplinary code that was backed by the ruthless exercise of power. However, it is not enough for armies to simply have power; they have to be seen to have power and to exercise it. But visibility implies recognition, and how were men who considered themselves to be "judges", "generals", "doctors" and "captains" to be distinguished from the ordinary mass of prisoners and proletarians herded into the conformity of a "total institution"? Where did a compound or prison number end, and a Ninevite begin?

In some ways this problem must have been at its most acute within the anonymity of the prisons. But even here, or perhaps especially here, a new inmate of the communal cells would soon learn who were the Ninevites and who were the "Scotlanders" - a rival gang, noted for their rejection of sodomy. (65) The sacrifices of food and tobacco which the "troops" made for their "officers" would distinguish the former from the latter. So, too, would have the show trials and rituals associated with Nongoloza's men. But by the end of this period there was an even more visible sign that was invariably associated with the Ninevites - and especially its leadership. This was the large "I.S." sign imprinted on the prison jacket, which denoted an "indeterminate sentence". (66) There is no doubt that the "I.S." label on the Ninevite's back was also in some way a badge, capable of eliciting its own twisted form of "respect" in a twisted institution.

What was only partly discernible in the prisons became more starkly silhouetted within the relatively relaxed confines of the compounds and their immediate peri-urban surroundings. Here, the Ninevites could more fully and freely exercise the paraphernalia of an army - jargon, drill, weapons and a uniform. In the sub-culture of Nongoloza the troops used their own distinctive phrases and slang: a "bird" was an ignorant person, a "buck" was a victim, the gang was the "stone", and a person "who came with the horses" had to be closely watched since he was a spy or a policeman. (67) Like many soldiers, they had a reputation for heavy drinking and smoking: in this case a predilection for imbibing that potent working class concoction called khali and smoking dagga - marijuana. (68) Up to about mid-1910 the most notable part of their uniform was the rather distinctive sort of hat that they wore. This type of hat was eventually discarded and, by 1912, the most notable feature in the dress of a Ninevite squad was the manner in which the trousers were closely pinned to the ankles by means of string or bicycle clips. (70)

Unlike some of its modern counterparts, however, Jan Note's "army" was not all dressed up with nowhere to go and nothing to do. Its central concern was crime, and its members knew exactly how to set about that business. The central thrust of that criminal activity, however, seems to have shifted slightly between 1908 and 1912 as a subtle change in the rank-and-file composition of the Ninevite army took place. Between 1906 and about 1910, the majority of the "soldiers" or kehla were described by the police as coming from the "vagrant class". (71) Based outside the compounds, these "vagrant soldiers" concentrated on the abathelisa trick and different degrees of violent robbery. Under the leadership of men like Nyambezi and Schoko, most of their crimes were directed against people - invariably fellow Africans. (72) But these Ninevite troops were particularly vulnerable to pass offences and exposure to the police. Indeed, as one detective noted: "These vagrants have often told me that they have no fear of gaol, as it is much better than being outside, where they are continually harassed by the police and asked for their passes." (73) This was undoubtedly an overstatement, but the "vagrant soldiers" soon learnt that they needed more defensive cover from the pass laws. So, from 1910-11, many of the Ninevites started making use of a neat stratagem, which helped keep the police at bay. They took refuge in those large industrial forts which the state had assisted in developing - the mine compounds. Compounds were designed to keep people in, but they also effectively kept the police out. (74) By 1912, a frustrated Deputy Commissioner of Police could note that the continual police harassment of "vagrants" for passes had "driven them [the Ninevites] into the mine compounds where they enlist as labourers and where they can enjoy all the protection that is extended to registered mine boys ...". (75) Once pushed into the compounds the Ninevite Masilvers ("recruiting officers") had a field day. Throughout 1910-11 they recruited migrant workers into their "army", and when a drought in 1912 pushed yet more peasants off the land and into the mines the Ninevite organization started to develop a firmer industrial base. As more "workers" than "vagrants" started to join the organization, so its criminal focus started to shift. By 1912 much of Nongoloza's army was concentrating on store and housebreaking - i.e. property rather than people had become its first objective.

The Ninevite criminal expeditions to acquire property manifested a high degree of professional sophistication and evidence of careful planning. At Randfontein, no burglary would take place until such time as the "number two gang", composed of juniors under the supervision of a "landdrost" and "lieutenant", had filed their reconnaissance report. Only thereafter would the older men and senior officers who composed "number one gang" go out on a job. When they did eventually set out to burgle a store or home, they invariably carried the tools of their trade with them - screwdrivers, files, crowbars, jumpers, keys and, occasionally, guns. The companies' tools might have worked for the mine owners during the day, but at night they worked for the "workers" and the "lumpens". In an attempt to avoid recognition and spread their activities, the Ninevite gangs would not always work the same criminal "patch". To do this they would swop passes with "army" units based in neighbouring territories; thus, for example, Nongoloza's followers in Heidelberg sometimes would go to "work" in Boksburg-North on borrowed passes.

As a result of these criminal sorties substantial quantities of loot, usually in the form of money or clothing, flowed into the mine compounds, and it is at this point that we have to consider the question of how these goods were distributed. At first glance, the fragmentary evidence at present available seems promising for the reader in search of Hobsbawm's "social bandits". For one thing, it is known that members of the same Ninevite gang frequently shared clothing - including stolen property. (76) It is also known that when a Ninevite gang broke into Schwab's Eating House and Mine Store in 1912 they returned to the compound and "All boys in the room were awakened and asked to have some meat as they had a bag full of it". (77) On second thoughts, however, this evidence is less than promising. The sharing of clothing is a common practice amongst the poor or the working class and there is nothing particularly significant in this. In any case, the sharing appears to have been confined to members of the gang. Also, meat is a commodity that deteriorates particularly rapidly, and gang members might simply have sought to minimize the risk of informing through sharing the proceeds of this particular robbery. None of this therefore can be construed as evidence of a type of "Robin Hood" generosity, and there is, in fact, little evidence of a fundamental egalitarian streak running through the Ninevite philosophy. If anything, there was a broadly unequal distribution of loot even within the hierarchical organization.

Like all leaders, those in the Ninevites distributed patronage and occasional gifts to their followers. The fact that they were called "chiefs" by some of their followers is possibly also suggestive of a redistributive function. Close examination, however, does not reveal any major redistribution of goods and it would appear that the leaders kept back a major part of loot for themselves. Jan Note himself claimed to have accumulated "bags of money", but the same could hardly be said for the majority of his followers. (78) Such redistribution as did occur within the movement arose largely unconsciously and it only marginally improved the lot of the poorest Ninevites of all - the umfaans.

The hundreds of young boys between the ages of 13 and 16 who entered the Witwatersrand mine compounds, the umfaans, constituted the poorest paid workers in the industry. They were also the subject of close attention of the Ninevite MaSilvers. As an observer of the compounds noted in 1909:

When new squads of boys come in the picaninnies are watched with anxious eyes, and proposals are made at the earliest opportunity, and 'matches' are made, and 'trueness' and 'fidelity' are demanded, and failure brings about a disturbance, and likely a row. (79)

It was these boys who became the "wives" of the kehlas, or soldiers, in the Ninevite organization. As surrogate wives, however, they were kept in very much the same sort of role that Ninevites would have expected of more orthodox wives. The boys could

clean, sew or cook, but were not allowed to play any directly important economic role in the organization and its operations. Thus no "wives" would be involved in actual criminal activities. (80) But, in return for their domestic services, the umfaans would receive gifts and money from their Ninevite husbands. Almost invariably the boy-wives would also be given the kehla's portion of the loot for safe keeping. (81) To the limited extent that the poorly paid umfaans in the compound benefited from such gifts and presents, there was a marginal redistribution of goods within the Ninevite organization.

This pattern of loot distribution, however, in no way dampened Ninevite enthusiasm for the organization, or undermined the members' loyalty to Nongoloza. By mid-1912, when the Ninevite army was perhaps at its most developed, the movement was said to be gaining "further adherents daily". (82) Over two decades, Jan Note and his followers had developed an army with close on 1,000 members, a sophisticated system of communication, rigid discipline, subtle defences and well defined criminal objectives. From a motley group of peasant marginals, who sought refuge from the police in the Klipriviersberg, a lumpen-worker alliance had emerged that held criminal control in the very heartland of industrialized white South Africa. Months before politically conscious blacks met to form the African National Congress, a black army on the Witwatersrand - with branches as far away as Bloemfontein and Kimberley - was already delivering a serious practical challenge to a repressive, privileged white state. By 1912, the police were under no illusions as to the magnitude of that challenge.

The seriousness and severity of the challenge was first felt on the East Rand, and particularly in the vicinity of Boksburg and Benoni. In this area the Ninevite nerve centre was located within "Blue Sky Gaol", and it was from here that most of the criminal activities were orchestrated. Cinderella Prison, however, was more than simply an operations centre - it also constantly disgorged prisoners who had completed their sentences, the Ninevite troops. Once released, these Ninevites, including some of the most hardened and professional criminals on the Witwatersrand, were confined to the areas adjacent to Cinderella Prison by the operation of the pass laws. By an ironical and unintended twist, the pass laws guaranteed that the Boksburg and Benoni districts had an abnormally high percentage of black criminals. Further, these Ninevites made use of the same pass law in order to gain employment in one of the many mine compounds in the district. As a frustrated Minister of Native Affairs noted in 1913: "... it will be recognised that our powers are limited by the provision of section 40 of the Pass Regulations." "That section", he wrote, "requires that the released criminal be given the opportunity of re-engaging himself." (83) The net result of all of this was that the district experienced what the Public Prosecutor termed "frequent waves of crime", especially house-breaking, robbery and some murders. (84)

On 20th June 1912, the officer commanding the Benoni police wrote to his superior officers informing them that the Ninevite question had become "most serious and urgent". (85) A mere two days later the District Commandant for the East Rand, Inspector M. A. Hartigan, in turn brought the matter to the attention of the Secretary of the Transvaal Police when he pointed out that Nongoloza's army had "now attained a numerical strength and organisation sufficient to warrant its receiving prompt and energetic attention". (86) From there the matter was successively referred to the Commissioner of Police and the Attorney General, and by the end of the year the Ninevite army was under ministerial scrutiny. Government was examining "government". But the fact that the South African state was taking a serious look at Jan Note's army was not simply as a result of the Ninevite attack on property - serious as that was. What had really galvanized the state into action was the fear that its law enforcement capacity in the compounds and cities was being seriously undermined by Nongoloza's army. In particular, it had made the unpleasant discovery that it could no longer rely on some of its most important collaborators in running a labour repressive economy - the "nongais", or black police, and the industrial or compound "police".

On the mines themselves, much of the day-to-day functioning of the oppressive system was ensured through the activities of the specially selected and uniformed black compound "policemen". As management lackeys with state support, they were responsible for the discipline of the African labour force and for supplying the authorities with a constant stream of politico-economic intelligence. (87) Outside the compound gates the pass laws were enforced by their equally unpleasant black collaborators - the nongaais. In his contemporary account, Life Amongst the Coloured Miners of Johannesburg, F. S. Z. Peregrino had this to say of the nongaai:

For a picture of the average Zulu policeman at Johannesburg I would depict this: a creature, giant-like and large as to proportions, ferocious and forbidding of aspect, most callously brutal of action, and irredeemably ignorant. (88)

There could have been no love lost between these black collaborators and most African miners - and the Ninevites singled them out for singularly unmerciful attention. In this latter sense, and in a largely unconscious or unintended fashion, Nongoloza's army helped paralyse some of the black working class' most immediate oppressors.

The state was both concerned and unimpressed with this paralysis. The police were shocked to learn that on the York mine, Krugersdorp, "everybody in the compound belonged to this society [the Ninevites], including the police boys". (89) In late August of 1912, the Deputy Commissioner of Police was expressing concern about the possibility of the nongaais being infiltrated or totally demoralized by the Ninevites, and, by January 1913, he informed Pretoria that: "I do not consider that the native police is at present capable of dealing effectively with native criminals." (90) At the height of their ascent the Ninevites not only ran a successful criminal organization; they challenged the black collaborating arm of the state and achieved, at very least, a stalemate situation. An increasingly powerful South African state had no taste for stalemate situations.

The Decline of the Ninevites, 1912-1920

On 16th December 1910, "Chief" George Schoko, Jim Ntlokonkulu ("the giant of the crooked eyes") and two other trusted lieutenants set out for "work" on the Main Reef Road in time-honoured Ninevite fashion. At about noon they intercepted three black miners making their way to Maraisburg, and immediately went into the abathelisa routine. Posing as detectives, the Ninevites first asked to see the workers' passes and then demanded their purses. When the miners refused to hand over their money, Schoko and his men attacked them with sticks and eventually over-powered them. They then relieved two of the workers of £28 in gold, and administered a further thrashing to the third, who was unwise enough to be penniless. Thereafter, the Ninevites returned to their "fort" in the prospect holes near Canada Junction.

The victims, on the other hand, made their way to the Langlaagte Police Station, where they reported the robbery to Detective Duffey and Police Constable King. Duffey and two of the miners set out in the direction of Maraisburg in pursuit of the attackers, whilst King, in the company of the third worker, set out to search the Canada Junction area. King had the misfortune to find whom he was looking for. No sooner had he succeeded in ordering the Ninevites out of the hole in which they were hiding than he was attacked and fatally stabbed in the head. The terrified worker accompanying him fled back to Langlaagte, where he reported the murder. After a night-long search police eventually discovered the body of King, thrust into an ant-bear hole, on the morning of 17th December. (91)

This Ninevite attack on a white state official aroused considerable indignation, and a black journalist was probably only slightly overstating the case when he later wrote that "Public and police alike felt that Ninevism, that cynical challenge to authority, [had to] be wiped out". (92) Members of the public, the Fire Brigade, Prisons Department officials, the Police Band, and over 300 policemen were all in attendance at King's funeral. (93) Determined to find the killers of the constable, Major Mavrogordato (CID) assigned one of his most able officers to the case on a full-time basis - Detective A. J. Hoffman.

Despite thorough and protracted searches of the more usual Ninevite haunts to the south-west of Johannesburg, Hoffman enjoyed no immediate success in his hunt for Schoko and Ntlokonkulu. This was hardly surprising since both Ninevites, "feeling the heat" near Johannesburg, had decided to migrate to more moderate climes in search of "work". Schoko, in fact, had headed for Kimberley, the only large city outside the Witwatersrand which offered the Ninevite "chief" the type of prison/compound complex with which he was so familiar. Ntlokonkulu had opted for the country life, and eventually made his way to the far south-east of the Reef, where he placed himself under "chief" Jacob Xaba.

Almost a month after King's murder, Hoffman's arrests of "vagrants" and scouring of criminal haunts started to pay off. The detective received information to the effect that the wanted Ninevites were in the vicinity of Vlakfontein. On the night of 18th January 1911, he and Detective Probationer H. G. Boy tracked a group of suspects towards Hartley's farm. The first thing that they found was "a dying heifer from which the hindquarters had been cut" - a sign of Jacob Xaba's catering arrangements for a Ninevite get-together. (94) Following the trail, they came to a hut, the Indian inhabitants of which "were bewailing the loss of their money, poultry and clothes". (95) Eventually, at about 2.00 a.m. on the morning of the 19th, the detectives and their black assistants came across Xaba, Ntlokonkulu and the main Ninevite party. On the approach of the police the Ninevites, who were preparing a sheep for roasting, at once fled. Hoffman, however, gave personal chase and, with the assistance of a nongaai, succeeded in arresting Xaba. Boy tracked the remainder of the fleeing Ninevites, and towards daybreak arrested "The Giant with the Crooked Eyes" - Ntlokonkulu - near a mine pumping station. (96)

The capture of Xaba was in itself an achievement. Indeed, both Hoffman and Boy received commendations and rewards for their part in these events. But, within hours of Ntlokonkulu's arrest, the detectives achieved further success when the "Giant with the Crooked Eyes" informed the police that Schoko had been involved in a fight in Kimberley, and that he was lying in hospital there, recovering from stab wounds in the stomach. (97) Telegraphic communication with the Kimberley police ensured the rapid arrest of "Kleintje" - George Schoko. Within 40 days of the King murder three of the most notable Ninevite leaders had been taken into custody and Nongoloza's army was on the defensive.

In March 1911, Jacob Xaba appeared in the Johannesburg Supreme Court and was sentenced to three and a half years' imprisonment with hard labour for stock theft. Not long thereafter, Schoko and Ntlokonkulu were sentenced to death for the murder of the white constable, and executed in Pretoria. A further setback for Nongoloza's army occurred in August 1911. David Ganda and Jim Nomkehl, the most prominent remaining members of Xaba's unit, were arrested and prosecuted for housebreaking, attempted murder and murder in the Heidelberg District. Worse still was to follow. In a specific attempt to deal with professional criminals, the government legislated for the "indeterminate sentence". (98) When Sam Nyambezi appeared in court in February 1912 on seven counts of robbery and public violence, he was promptly awarded the indeterminate sentence, whilst 15 members of his gang received lengthy prison sentences.

By early 1912, then, the state had already started to make inroads into the Ninevite organization - and particularly into its leadership. But the success that it had achieved was also largely piecemeal and unintentional in the sense that up to about mid-1912 the police were not fully aware of the depth, breadth, or extent of the Ninevite army. Certainly they saw "gangs" under the control of Schoko, Kaba and Nyambezi, but they were not fully cognisant of the linkages between them, or of the overriding loyalty to Nongoloza. For the real shock that came with fuller knowledge, the police had to await the nastier events of May and June 1912.

On the night of May 12, "Governor" Jim Swazi, "General" Bill Langalene, and "Colonel" Bill Frisby set out from the Cason Mine compound for a criminal sortie into the Boksburg district. The members of this particular Ninevite squad had joined Nongoloza's army while in jail - probably Cinderella Prison - and co-operated closely thereafter. By the end of the evening, for motives that are not entirely clear, they had murdered a black policeman named Tsobana, using a gun acquired from one "Apricot". (99) A mere two evenings later, on the 14th May, "General" Charlie Mxotshwa of the New Kleinfontein compound - a man who, it was said, could call on as many as a hundred "soldiers" spread as far afield as Nigel - marched a squad of Ninevites into the Brakpan district in search of robbery victims. On open ground near the railway station the Ninevites approached a white miner named Owen Duffy, who was making his way with his goods from Benoni to the single quarters of the Brakpan mine. Duffy asked "General" Mxotshwa and three of his "soldiers" to help him to carry his mattress. Minutes later he was clubbed to death, but on ransacking his goods the Ninevites could only uncover a key and a knife. (100)

These two brutal killings, within days of each other, shocked the East Rand and jolted the police into action. It was while undertaking enquiries into these murders that Detectives W. Futter and H. G. Boy first came to appreciate the full magnitude of Nongoloza's army. The publicity attendant upon these trials produced further public concern and, by mid-June, the Ninevites were receiving parliamentary attention. (101) It was in the immediate wake of these events that the state started to counter-attack Nongoloza's army in earnest.

The government looked, in the first instance, to the police to achieve the destruction of Jan Note's army. Some of the groundwork had already been done, albeit unwittingly, since Ninevite notables such as Kaba, Schoko and Nyambezi had already been accounted for. The police consolidated on this start by building up a reasonably sophisticated picture of the organization and its modus operandi. They also took the more practical step of infiltrating informers into the compounds of several East Rand mines, a precaution that reaped benefits on at least one subsequent occasion. (102) But, as the most senior police officers were not slow to point out to the Department of Justice and others, the problem of the Ninevite army did not simply end there. What point was there in the police rounding up Nongoloza's followers in the morning when, in the afternoon, Cinderella Prison disgorged another squad of committed followers whom the pass laws confined to the area? What was the purpose of prosecuting and punishing members of an organization when the very act of imprisonment brought them into more immediate and disciplined contact with the Ninevite leadership? Clearly what was required was action, not only on the Witwatersrand but within the prison system itself.

In September 1912, the Minister of Justice instructed the Director of Prisons to convene a conference of Prison Superintendents in Pretoria. The purpose of the meeting was to formulate recommendations to the Minister for dealing with the Ninevites in prison. The resolutions arising from the Pretoria gathering suggested a more or less predictable blend of "stick and carrot" measures - plenty of stick and very little carrot. Amongst the reforms suggested was that the "best classes" of black prisoners be allowed to associate more freely where exercise yards were available, and "that single cells for separation at nights be provided as far as possible". The flow of

Ninevite intelligence was to be disrupted through removing well known leaders to Robben Island, and replacing black warders with Europeans. Further, members of prison gangs should be punished for this "offence" and Prison Boards should be asked "not to recommend remission of sentence to known members of these gangs". (103)

This counter-attack by the state on his army did not escape the notice of Nongoloza himself. Note was naturally concerned when, during 1911-12, he found that a growing number of his most able "generals" were being confined to prison. But what seems to have concerned the Nkosi Nkulu most of all was the new indeterminate sentence that had been passed on Sam Nyambezi. Nongoloza, under a commuted life sentence, was due to appear before the Prisons Board in July 1912 and he stood to forfeit the chance of a remission of sentence if unabated Ninevite activity persisted. (104) At some point after February, therefore, Note sent out a message from prison that he "wanted things kept quiet for a while as he was endeavouring to get his sentence reduced". (105) Thus Detective Hoffman might have had only part of the story when he noted in August that: "Most of the leaders are at present in gaol, and consequently we have a lull in serious crime." (106)

As it transpired, the Prisons Board that met on 8 July 1912 decided not to make any recommendation in Jan Note's case but simply chose to reconsider the matter in a year's time. It would appear that this constituted a serious blow to the hopes and plans of Nongoloza, who by now had been in Pretoria local jail for at least four years. Shortly thereafter Nongoloza was "befriended" by his new European gaoler, Warder Paskin, and now the authorities saw their chance for the most powerful attack of all on the Ninevites. The Prisons Department and the police dangled the opportunity of future sentence remission and state employment before the eyes of the King of Nineveh. On 27th December 1912 Nongoloza made a statement to the Director of Prisons through his friend Warder Paskin:

... the new law and the new prison administration have made me change my heart ... I am quite prepared to go to Cinderella Prison or any other prison where Ninevites say they get orders and to tell them that I give no orders even if it costs me my life. I would tell them that I am no longer king and have nothing to do with Nineveh ... (107)

At some time after mid-1913 Nongoloza, a man who at one stage could muster a thousand lumpenproletarian troops on the Witwatersrand, a leader who had the unquestioned support of generals, captains and lieutenants spread throughout hundreds of square miles in South Africa's industrial heartland, became a "native warder" in the South African Police. (108)

Neither Nongoloza's defection nor the other measures taken by the state were sufficient to ensure the rapid or total disintegration of the Ninevite army. While the basic nexus of pass law, compound and prison remained intact at the heart of a repressive political economy, there was always a sociological host culture capable of sustaining such movements. (109) What the state's various measures did achieve, however, was the crippling of the Ninevite movement in its most developed form, and its fragmentation. By late 1914 the Minister of Justice, N. J. de Wet, was confident that the state clearly held the upper hand. (110)

The upper hand was never allowed really to relax during the following 20 years. The effect of the war and its aftermath on the Ninevite movement has yet to be studied in detail, but it is clear that the remnants of Nongoloza's army continued to fight its own struggle in the compounds and prisons while the Empire's troops were engaged on other fronts. The Ninevites who murdered Matshayeli Zungu in 1915, for example, were drawn from the compounds of four mines - the Angelo, Comet, Cason and

Driefontein. But it was perhaps in the immediate wake of the Great War that the greatest resurgence of the Ninevite movement took place - and for many of the same structural reasons that facilitated its development after the South African War. As is usual in post-war periods, the value of real wages dropped markedly, and in South Africa this hardship was felt particularly acutely by the black population. Under these circumstances it is not surprising to find further "marginalization" and an increase in crime. And, as in the post-Boer War period, it is likely that the state's apparatus for controlling the pass laws operated more efficiently once the war no longer diverted most of its energy. The net effect of much of this would be to make more Africans "criminals" and to swell the prison population. In 1919, the Ninevites were certainly active, both in and outside of the Kimberley prisons. (111) They were also reported as being present, albeit in embryonic form, at the Noordhoek prison. That they were still capable of making ambitious plans for state officials is also evident from the report of at least one Prison Superintendent. The officer in charge of the Durban Point Prison reported in 1919:

At the early part of this year a Ninevite affair was discovered, wherein it was planned to throw the European warders overboard from the ferry boat whilst crossing the bay. This was happily nipped in the bud and the ringleaders punished with salutary effect. (112)

The years thereafter, however, saw a gradual decline in organized Ninevite activity. At present there is no evidence to show it being present in its original form in the mine compounds after 1919 and, to an increasing extent, the movement became confined to the prisons proper. In 1927 it was reported as being present in the Barberton Prison, and, as late as 1935, Jan Note's Ninevite model - by now nearly half a century old - could still inspire black combination in the Durban Point Prison. (113) Perhaps the convicts, as Nongoloza himself once did, continued to draw inspiration from the book of Nahum:

Thou also shalt seek a refuge
Because of the enemy.

Conclusions

In his study of "social banditry", Eric Hobsbawm notes that it is "usually prevalent at two moments of historical evolution: that at which primitive and communally organised society gives way to class-and-state society, and that at which the traditional rural peasant society gives way to the modern economy". (114) But, he notes, "the only large regions in which it cannot be easily traced are Sub-Saharan Africa and India". (115) It is within the context of these two broad observations that the social historian of South Africa is first tempted to insert the Ninevites.

It is not a wholly unpromising start. At least as much as any other period in South African history, the years between the mid-1880s and 1920 fit Hobsbawm's description. (116) The fall of independent African states, the rise and decline of a black peasantry, imperial intervention and capitalist expansion, the formation of Union and the Native Land Act of 1913 are only some of the historical high-water marks which lap against the processes which Hobsbawm outlines. But the similarity between the Ninevites and his "social bandits" does not lie simply at this generalized structural level, it goes deeper.

The groups that Hobsbawm describes are essentially rural people with ties of kinship and custom. Much of this, too, is to be found in the Zulu-dominated Ninevites. The "chief" at the head of the gang, but more especially the presence of

the kehla, point strongly towards Zulu custom and traditional society. The language of the "urban" Ninevites was strongly flavoured with rural metaphor and they spoke constantly of "buck", "birds", "farms" and "men who came with horses". And, to the extent that they did have a programme at all, the Ninevite leadership did not exclude rural objectives. Note himself spoke of his love and longing for cattle and the country, and one follower, Umfanawenduka, told the police how the leaders constantly tried to "entice natives to go away into the hills and live with them" and to "desert from the work on various mines on the Reef". (117) Seen from this perspective, the Ninevites were landless labourers seeking to return to a peasant life that was being rapidly destroyed: urban bands with a form of rural consciousness resisting proletarianization. (118)

The age and social groups recruited into the "social bandits" and Ninevites, respectively, also bear comparison. In the case of the Ninevites, these similarities are perhaps brought into sharper relief if we keep in mind a shattered Zulu military system, Mzoozepi's early experiences and the extension of European commercial agriculture into Natal during the late 19th century. Hobsbawm writes of the social bandits:

Again, certain age-groups - most obviously the young men between puberty and marriage - are both more mobile and less shackled by the responsibilities of land, wife and children which make the life of the outlaw almost impossible for adult peasants. It is indeed well established that social bandits are normally young and unmarried. Men marginal to the rural economy, or not yet absorbed or re-absorbed into it, will be drawn into banditry, notably ex-soldiers, who, with herdsmen, form probably its largest single occupational component. So will certain occupations which maintain a man outside the framework of constant social control in the community, or the supervision of the ruling group - e.g. herdsmen and drovers. (119)

Although we do not have a detailed socio-economic background of the Ninevites as yet, there is something of a familiar ring in these words.

But it is also at this point that the similarities end. This becomes quite clear as soon as Hobsbawm outlines what he considers to be the central characteristic of the groups which he has examined:

The point about social bandits is that they are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported. (120)

The Ninevites were no band of peasant outlaws eliciting the admiration, help or support of their people.

In the industrial revolution that engulfed southern Africa after the discovery of diamonds and gold, there was a particularly rapid succession of social formations. In the midst of these traumatic changes there was no time for the landless to linger in the countryside, and those suffering most from the ravages of

proletarianization were swept into the migrant labour system that carried them to the cities and compounds. South Africa's "peasant outlaws" - still carrying some of the conceptual baggage of the countryside - came to town with the rest of their kinsmen. There, living literally and figuratively on the margins of industrial society, they were transformed into essentially urban gangs. No wonder they were difficult to trace in this particular part of sub-Saharan Africa - they were living in the prospect holes, abandoned mine shafts, derelict buildings and caves surrounding the towns - far from their rural homelands.

Hounded and harassed by the pass laws in the centre of the white cities, these lumpenproletarian groups struck at the most vulnerable members of the industrializing system - the black migrant workers making their way home with wages. On the very geographical margin of the Witwatersrand they stole and plundered from their fellow Africans, or terrorized the inhabitants of the urban black "locations". As such they were feared, hated and resented by the majority of proletarians or migrant workers. Here there was no room for help, support or admiration. When the Ninevites did come into close contact with urban institutions, they were of the most depressing, authoritarian and dehumanizing sort - the prisons and the mine compounds. These institutions provided the Ninevites with rich recruiting grounds since in South Africa miserable wages and endless pass law convictions ensured that today's proletarian was tomorrow's prisoner. (121) As exclusively male institutions, the prisons and compounds also provided a host culture readily able to sustain intimidation, violence, organization and perverted sexual expression. It was largely these institutions which ensured that this part of sub-Saharan Africa produced not social but profoundly anti-social bandits.

But the role of the Ninevites should not be minimized simply because they were not "social bandits" and because much of their activity was directed against fellow Africans. Neither is their part in South African working class history so unimportant as to warrant only the single cursory line which Walker devotes to them. (122) Certainly the Ninevite leadership had a low level of political awareness, but it was at least sufficiently conscious as to perceive its followers as being in a state of rebellion in an unjust society. To the extent that its activities were not directed towards the black working class, the organization saw itself as redressing the balance between the exploiters and the exploited, the haves and the have nots, the powerful and the powerless, in a markedly inegalitarian society. (123) Under the leadership of one charismatic man and professional criminals, there developed a powerful and sophisticated organization which welded together lumpenproletarian elements and part of the working class. At the height of its development the Ninevite army - albeit for essentially non-political objectives - succeeded in paralysing the black collaborating arm of the white ruled state. For at least these reasons, if for none other, we should reassess the resistance and revolutionary potential of the lumpenproletariat in South Africa's historical evolution.

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Notes

Geneva is not noted for its rich sources relating to South African working class or criminal history. I am thus totally indebted to Tim Couzens, who helped make this study possible through his generous help in many ways.

- (1) Amongst others, see Chris Allen, "'Lumpenproletarians' and Revolution" in Political Theory and Ideology in African Society (mimeo., Edinburgh University, 1970), pp. 91-115; Robin Cohen and David Michael, "The Revolutionary Potential of the African Lumpenproletariat: a Sceptical View", Bulletin of the Institute of Development Studies (Sussex), Vol. 5, Nos. 2-3, Oct. 1973, pp. 31-42; and Peter Worsley, "Frantz Fanon and the 'Lumpenproletariat'" in Socialist Register 1972 (London, 1972), pp. 193-230.
- (2) Particularly Richard Cobb, The Police and the People (London, 1974); Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London (London, 1971); George Rudé, Paris and London in the 18th Century (London, 1969); and the following works by Eric Hobsbawm: Primitive Rebels (Manchester, 1959), Bandits (London, 1972), and "Social Banditry" in H. Landsberger (ed), Rural Protest (London, 1974), pp. 142-157. Of the same genre is D. Hay, P. Linebaugh and E. P. Thompson (eds), Albion's Fatal Tree (London, 1975).
- (3) Cohen and Michael are most explicit about this in their stimulating essay on the "African Lumpenproletariat", op. cit., p. 41.
- (4) The sociological parameters of the prison are best discussed in E. Goffman, "On the Characteristics of Total Institutions: the Inmate World" in D. R. Cressey (ed), The Prison (New York, 1961), pp. 68-106. The sociology and functions of the compound system are fully discussed in C. van Onselen, Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933 (London, 1976).
- (5) From "Jan Note's Life and Introduction to Crime" in South Africa, Dept. of Justice Annual Report 1912, pp. 238-240. (Author's emphasis)
- (6) The origins of Mzoozepe's life of crime thus fit the syndrome outlined by Hobsbawm in his "Social Banditry", op. cit., pp. 143-144: "He becomes an outlaw for some infraction of the official law which the peasants do not consider to be a crime - a conflict with the rich, the State or the foreigners, a case of legitimate revenge, or the like. This 'honourable' origin of his outlawry is insisted on, and in fact represents not only image but also, to a very great extent, fact." Unfortunately we do not know whether the peasants viewed Mzoozepe's life in this way, but we do know what R. V. Selope Thema (Editor of Bantu World) thought of it. In Bantu World, 5 Dec. 1942, "Scrutator" wrote: "Jan Note [Mzoozepe] was not an agitator. He was just a human being, driven to desperation by the nature of the pass laws, the dishonesty of a white man, and the unsympathetic attitude of the Police and the magistrates." See also R. V. Selope Thema, The Plight of the Black Man (Liberty Press, Pretoria), pp. 6-9.
- (7) From "Jan Note's Life and Introduction to Crime", op. cit.
- (8) Standard and Diggers' News, 31 May 1895.
- (9) It is thus significant that one of the prime stimuli for the formation of the white mineworkers' union came when mining capitalists sought to cheapen the cost of steamship travel from Europe to the Rand and, by so doing, increase the supply of cheap labour. See Standard and Diggers' News, 22 Aug. 1892.
- (10) By its very nature much of this evidence is fragmentary and derives from a large number of sources. Perhaps as good an introduction as any, however, is "Vagabond's" "The Streets of Johannesburg by Night" in Standard and Diggers' News, 19 June 1895. The men described here - especially the soldiers and deserters - confirm closely to the European groups which Hobsbawm notes in his Bandits (1972), pp. 33-35.
- (11) The same observation as made in the above footnote holds true here. Something of the flavour of the time, however, can be caught from the "Confessions of a Canteen Keeper" in the Standard and Diggers' News, 5 Oct. 1892. For a detailed case study of crime, ethnicity and class formation during this period see C. van Onselen, "The Randlords and Rotgut" in Institute of Commonwealth Studies (London), Collected Seminar Papers, No. 20, The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Vol. 6 (1975).
- (12) "Jan Note's Life and Introduction to Crime", op. cit.

- (13) See, for example, Standard and Diggers' News, 13 April 1895.
- (14) "Jan Note's Life and Introduction to Crime", op. cit.
- (15) Note's introduction to crime is thus almost a classic illustration of a process which the police were well aware of at the turn of the century. See, for example, the evidence of T. E. Mavrogordato, Acting Head of the CID, Johannesburg, to South African Native Affairs Commission 1903-05, Vol. IV, pp. 861-863.
- (16) These wage robberies and inadequate state protection were the source of constant complaint by the mine owners. See, for example, Transvaal, Report of the Chamber of Mines for 1897, p. 394.
- (17) Newspapers throughout the 1890s abound with reports of such thefts by state officials. For a selection of examples, see the Standard and Diggers' News of the following dates: 20 March 1891 (ZAR police); 9 August 1894 (ZAR Railway officials), and 4 Jan. 1895 (Portuguese border officials). Since such robberies hampered labour flows, the Chamber of Mines complained bitterly about them. See Tvl., Report of the Chamber of Mines for 1895, pp. 69-70, and Report of the Chamber of Mines for 1896, pp. 170-171.
- (18) This geographical location compares favourably with the European case studies. See Hobsbawm, "Social Banditry", op. cit., p. 149.
- (19) From "Statement by Jan Note", SA Dept. of Justice Annual Report 1912, pp. 237-238.
- (20) This, of course, was also the era during which other Africans started to interpret the Bible in a more radical way that frightened the established churches. In particular, it was a decade which saw the emergence of "Ethiopianism" - black independent churches - and Johannesburg was one such centre. See, for example, Standard and Diggers' News, 29 May 1895 and 9 July 1895.
- (21) From "Statement by Jan Note", op. cit. (Author's emphasis) The book of Nahum is filled with verses which Note perhaps found relevant and inspirational. For example, "The people are scattered upon the mountains" and "Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold".
- (22) "Statement by Jan Note", op. cit.
- (23) So much so that the Chamber of Mines eventually organized its own police force to cope with highway robbers. See D. M. Wilson, Behind the Scenes in the Transvaal (London, 1901), pp. 196-197. See also footnote 17 above.
- (24) Standard and Diggers' News, 19 Feb. 1890 and 28 March 1890.
- (25) Standard and Diggers' News, 2 Aug. 1892.
- (26) See, for example, Standard and Diggers' News, 28 June 1895.
- (27) Standard and Diggers' News, 31 Jan. 1890.
- (28) See especially, Standard and Diggers' News, 21 Aug. 1894 and 7 Jan. 1895.
- (29) "Statement by Jan Note", op. cit.
- (30) Hobsbawm, Bandits (1972), p. 18.
- (31) Classical feeder-groups for bandits. See Hobsbawm, ibid., pp. 33-35.
- (32) Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels (1971), p. 33.
- (33) As Hobsbawm has noted of the Mafia: "Obviously it was a complex movement, including mutually contradictory elements." Ibid., p. 41.
- (34) Peter Warwick, "African Labour during the South African War, 1899-1902", Institute of Commonwealth Studies (London), post-graduate seminar paper, October 1975.
- (35) Ipepa lo Hlanga, 20 Nov. 1902. My thanks to Peter Warwick, who made this reference available to me.
- (36) See, for example, the case histories quoted in S.A. Annual Report of the Dept. of Justice 1914, p. 235. More generally, Napier Devitt, Memories of a Magistrate (London, 1934), p. 144.

- (37) Warwick, "African Mine Labour during the South African War", in this Volume.
- (38) For the origin and development of the compound system, see van Onselen, Chibaro.
- (39) See Warwick's evidence in the case "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni and 15 others", p. 48, in Archbishop Carter's papers, Archives of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. (Hereafter cited simply as "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni".)
- (40) These patterns are well illustrated by the case of the Zulu Ninevite, Nkuku (alias "Forage"). Nkuku, a mineworker, was first introduced to the organization by an unemployed Zulu, Mahlebabai, who resided in Block A, Randfontein Mine Compound, in 1906. Nkuku was led by Mahlebabai ("Captain No. 1") to a disused mine shaft, where he was introduced to, amongst others, Kleinbooi, Mafuta ("General") and Jack ("Fort Captain"). There Nkuku was duly sworn into the Nongoloza and given the rank of "office boy" in "number two gang". See State Archives, Tvl. Depot, Pretoria, Dept. of Justice Volume 144, File 1, Number 3/778/12, statement by "Forage", 16 June 1912. See also ibid., statement by Det. W. W. Futter, 19 June 1912, and statement by Det. Probationer H. G. Boy, 19 June 1912. (All subsequent references to this source are cited DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12.)
- (41) According to Jan Note, sodomy was already a feature of Ninevite life while the gebengu were still in the Klipriviersberg. See "Statement by Jan Note", op. cit., p. 238. There is also little reason to doubt that homosexuality was a feature of compound life in the pre-war years. What is also clear, however, is the fact that such relationships became increasingly formal, organized and acceptable in the post-war years. See footnote 42.
- (42) Transvaal Chamber of Mines (Johannesburg), 1889-1910, N Series, File N 35, "Unnatural Native Vice Enquiry 1907", pp. 2-3. See also, Black and White. The Black Underworld: How it is Created (Transvaal Leader, 1909), pp. 1-2.
- (43) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, M. A. Hartigan, District Commandant Boksburg, to Secretary Transvaal Police, 22 June 1912.
- (44) Sunday Times, 16 June 1912. See also DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Det. A. Hoffman to Deputy Commissioner CID, Johannesburg, 12 Oct. 1911.
- (45) Sunday Times, 16 June 1912.
- (46) The amalaita were distinctive bands of urban Africans found both in Natal and in the Transvaal after the war, and who differed from the Ninevites, with whom they were partly in competition and conflict. The psychological, sociological and economic forces which shaped the amalaitas distinguished them sharply from the Ninevites, and I hope to deal with them in subsequent writings. For the present, suffice it to say that the amalaitas rejected sodomy, and that in prison they constituted the core of the "Scotlanders" gang. See also note 65.
- (47) Splinter groups from the Ninevite mainstream certainly made their way to the Orange Free State and Kimberley between 1906 and 1912. (The latter town, in particular, was more than capable of providing the host culture of prison and compound.) See Tsala ea Becoana, 5 Nov. 1910, and Sol Plaatje's contribution to Pretoria News, 3 Feb. 1911. (In both cases the "amalaitas" referred to demonstrate the hallmarks of the Ninevites.) Elsewhere, it was claimed that Jim Ntlokunkulu ("The Giant with the Crooked Eyes"), a noted Ninevite leader, had been sought by the police in the "kloofs and farmlands of the Free State". See James Ndela's "How the Ninevites were Suppressed", Umteteli Wa Bantu, 6 Jan. 1934. Perhaps more reliable is the evidence of Dr D. W. Tomory of Bloemfontein, who interviewed Ninevite Jan Williams shortly before the latter was sentenced to death for the murder of "an aged native" near the OFS/Tvl. border in 1911. See DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, D. W. Tomory to Sec. for Justice, 26 Sept. 1911.
- (48) This speculation derives from the rather unsatisfactory account of "How Jan Note became a Criminal" by "Scrutator" in Bantu World, 5 Dec. 1942.
- (49) This account of Note's activities is pieced together from DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Det. A. J. Hoffman to Deputy Commissioner CID, 12 Oct. 1911, and Sunday Times, 16 June 1912.

- (50) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Statement by Tomboek Umfanawenduku, 19 June 1912.
- (51) This picture is reconstructed from scattered material contained in DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12.
- (52) See generally DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, and especially D. M. Tomory to Sec. of Justice, 6 Sept. 1911.
- (53) Ibid., Statement by Nkuku, 16 June 1912.
- (54) Ibid., Deputy Commissioner of Police to Sec. Tvl. Police, 28 Aug. 1912.
- (55) Ibid., Statement by Tomboek Umfanawenduku, 19 June 1912.
- (56) The status of kehla and its relationship are best described in the statement by Tomboek Umfanawenduku, ibid., and in another statement by "Office" Josimale (age 13), dated 17 June 1912, and contained in the same file. That this was not always considered to be a minor offence is evident from "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni", op. cit.
- (57) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Statement by Tomboek Umfanawenduku, 19 June 1912.
- (58) For various punishments, see ibid., "Statement as to the Position of Native Criminal Gangs in Prison", and Statement by Johnson Johannes, 19 June 1912. For "nails", see also Diamond Fields' Advertiser, 23 May 1919.
- (59) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Statement by Tomboek Umfanawenduku, 19 June 1912.
- (60) "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni", op. cit., p. 25.
- (61) Cape Times, 20 Aug. 1915.
- (62) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Det. A. J. Hoffman to Deputy Commissioner, CID, 12 Oct. 1911.
- (63) Ibid., "Statement as to the Position of Native Criminal Gangs in Prison", 1912.
- (64) Ibid., Det. A. J. Hoffman to Inspector in Charge, CID, 12 Aug. 1912. See also ibid., Statement by Tomboek Umfanawenduka, 19 June 1912.
- (65) For "Scotlanders", see DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, "Statement as to the Position of the Native Criminal Gangs in Prison", 1912. For an example of conflict between the rivals, see Diamond Fields Advertiser, 23 May 1919.
- (66) Apparently the state introduced the indeterminate sentence with the Ninevites at least partly in mind. See editorial on "The Native Criminal" in the Star, 18 June 1932. For a description of the inside of Cinderella Prison and "I.S." inmates, see, for example, Africa's Golden Harvests, Oct. 1919, p. 131.
- (67) See "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni", op. cit.
- (68) See DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Statement by Det. Probationer H. G. Boy, 19 June 1912. Boy's observations are borne out by an examination of "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni", op. cit. The importance of these drugs in black working class culture in southern Africa is fully discussed in van Onselen, Chibaro.
- (69) See, especially, "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni", op. cit., p. 31.
- (70) See DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Statement by Det. Prob. H. G. Boy, 19 June 1912.
- (71) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Det A. J. Hoffman to Inspector in Charge, CID, 12 Aug. 1912. See also ibid., Statement by Det. W. Futter, 19 June 1912. Futter described these early Ninevites as being of the "vagrant type".
- (72) It was this early violence, and murders in 1912, which later earned the Ninevites the unqualified hostility of certain black journalists. James Ndela, for example, had this to say of the movement in the 1930s: "That it has since disappeared altogether is, needless to say, a great achievement in the interests of law and order, and the safety of African life and property."
- (73) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Det. A. J. Hoffman to Inspector in Charge, CID, 12 Aug. 1912.
- (74) For this reason "vagrants" and the "unemployed" continued to use compounds as a sort of refuge in the cities. See, for example, the evidence of Joe Loqoqoza (pp. 40-41) and Matoko Biyela (p. 12) in "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni", op. cit.
- (75) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Deputy Commissioner to Secretary, Transvaal Police, 28 Aug. 1912.

- (76) See, for example, the evidence of Matoko Biyela in "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni", op. cit., p. 15.
- (77) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Statement by "Office" Josimale, 17 June 1912.
- (78) "Statement by Jan Note", op. cit., p. 238.
- (79) "The Black Underworld", op. cit., p. 1.
- (80) "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni", op. cit., p. 26.
- (81) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Statement by Tomboek Umfanawenduka, 19 June 1912.
- (82) Ibid., J. E. Donale, OC Benoni Police, to DC Boksburg Police, 20 June 1912.
- (83) Ibid., Department Memo dated 12/2/1913.
- (84) Ibid., J. W. Goodman, Public Prosecutor, to Attorney General, 12 June 1912.
- (85) Ibid., J. E. Donald, OC Benoni, to DC Boksburg Police, 20 June 1912.
- (86) Ibid., District Commandant, Boksburg, to Secretary, Transvaal Police, 22 June 1912.
- (87) For detailed analysis of this, see van Onselen, Chibaro.
- (88) Quoted by Sol T. Plaatje in Pretoria News, 11 Feb. 1911. See also the attack on Swazi, Zulu and Shangaan police in Tsala ea Becoana, 5 Nov. 1910.
- (89) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Statement by Johnson Johannes, 17 June 1912. See also ibid., Deputy Commissioner to Secretary, Transvaal Police, 26 Aug. 1912.
- (90) Ibid., Deputy Commissioner to Sec., Tvl. Police, 28 Jan. 1913. See also ibid., Deputy Commissioner to Sec., Tvl. Police, 28 Aug. 1912.
- (91) The Star, 17 Dec. 1912.
- (92) James Ndela, "How the Ninevites were Suppressed", Umteteli Wa Bantu, 6 Jan. 1934.
- (93) The Star, 19 Dec. 1912.
- (94) Umteteli Wa Bantu, 6 Jan. 1934.
- (95) Ibid.
- (96) Ibid. This account, however, is largely based on State Archives, Pretoria, Justice Vol. 117, File 3/780/11, Deputy Commissioner of Police, to Sec. Transvaal Police, 26 Jan. 1911.
- (97) Umteteli Wa Bantu, 6 Jan. 1934. See also, State Archives, Pretoria, Justice Vol. 117, File 3/780/11, Deputy Commissioner of Police to Sec. Transvaal Police, 26 Jan. 1911.
- (98) See "The Criminal Native", The Star, 10 Jan. 1932.
- (99) Transvaal Leader, 22 June 1912.
- (100) See Transvaal Leader, 12 June 1912 and 19 June 1912.
- (101) Sunday Times, 16 June 1912.
- (102) See DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Det. A. J. Hoffman to Inspector in Charge, CID, 12 Aug. 1912. Also "Rex v. Mkosi Mkemeseni", op. cit.
- (103) See DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Secretary for Justice to Chief Commissioner of Police, 3 Jan. 1913.
- (104) Ibid., Secretary for Justice to Roos, 17 March 1913.
- (105) Ibid., Statement by Nkuku, 16 June 1912.
- (106) Ibid., Det. A. J. Hoffman to Inspector in Charge, CID, 12 Aug. 1912.
- (107) "Statement by Jan Note", SA, Department of Justice Annual Report 1912, pp. 237-238.
- (108) Napier Devitt, Memories of a Magistrate (London, 1934), p. 144.
- (109) See, for example, Sunday Times, 27 Oct. 1935. In 1935, Pondos and Khosas, under "Chief Hlovu", set up the Isitshozi on the west Rand. From all accounts, this gang had features almost identical to those of the Ninevites. See also B. Davidson, Report on Southern Africa (London, 1952), p. 117.

- (110) DJ Vol. 117, File 3/780/11, Minister of Justice to Justice Ward, 5 Aug. 1914.
- (111) See Diamond Fields Advertiser, 13 Jan. 1919, 23 May 1919 and 28 May 1919. My thanks to Brian Willan for these references.
- (112) UG 54-20, Report of the Director of Prisons for 1919, p. 49..
- (113) UG 42-28, Annual Report of the Director of Prisons for 1927, and UG 28-1936, Annual Report of the Director of Prisons for 1935.
- (114) Hobsbawm, "Social Banditry", p. 149.
- (115) Ibid., p. 148.
- (116) See Colin Bundy, "The Emergency and Decline of a South African Peasantry", African Affairs, 71 (1972), pp. 369-388.
- (117) DJ 144/1 - 3/778/12, Statement by Tomboek Umfanawenduka, 19 June 1912.
- (118) This would be in accordance with Hobsbawm's observation that "Insofar as bandits have a 'programme', it is the defence or restoration of the traditional order of things ...": Hobsbawm, Bandits, p. 26.
- (119) Hobsbawm, "Social Banditry", p. 152.
- (120) Hobsbawm, Bandits, p. 17. My emphasis.
- (121) This, of course, is no novel observation - even South African "liberals" such as the Rev. Ray E. Phillips pointed this out in later years. In an address to the Johannesburg Rotary Club on "The Rising Tide of Native Crime", he noted: "... in South Africa and on the Witwatersrand, we find conditions such that few African natives can hope to escape a criminal record" (The Star, 7 May 1940).
- (122) Walker, writing of 1912, notes: "Other developments betokened the growing strain. Secret 'Ninevite' gangs, bred of appalling social conditions, murdered freely if clumsily in the Bantu squatter-towns that fringed the wealthy Rand." E. A. Walker, A History of Southern Africa (London, 1965), p. 548.
- (123) Even the generally hostile black journalists recognized this element in Jan Note - albeit in historically inaccurate and highly ideological form. "Scrutator" (Selope Thema) wrote: "Although he was helpless and defenceless, he decided to declare 'war' against his persecutors. Without arms, he said, he was going to wage a relentless struggle against the white man. He was going to rob him, to break into his stores, burgle his house and make him uncomfortable in every way possible." Bantu World, 5 Dec. 1942.