

Towards a Dubious Liberation: Sexuality and Power in South African Lowveld Schools, 1953- 1999¹

ISAK NIEHAUS

(School of Anthropology and Psychology, University of Natal)

This article investigates how sexuality featured as a political issue during the liberation struggle in Impalahoek, a village in the South African lowveld. The starting point of my analysis is the repressive regime in primary and high schools during the period of Bantu Education, from 1953 to 1986. I show that whilst teachers strictly prohibited and harshly punished all forms of sexuality between students, male teachers freely engaged in sexual liaisons with schoolgirls. The revolt by Comrades in the schools between 1986 and 1992 was inspired by students' discontent about sexuality. Comrades demanded an end to corporal punishment, expelled teachers who engaged in sex with schoolgirls and celebrated their own sexual virility in a local campaign to 'build soldiers'. Finally, I suggest that the management of sexuality by the African National Congress (ANC)-led government has not inaugurated sexual liberation. Sex education and medicalised discourses about AIDS have generated new forms of surveillance and contestation. I suggest that such historical experiences inform the links between democratisation and changing notions of sexuality in South Africa.

In South Africa the overthrow of apartheid did not only signal an end to white minority rule and to political repression. Apart from the establishment of more democratic forms of government, the post-apartheid era has also been marked by unprecedented sexual freedom. In stark contrast to the homophobic stance of President Mugabe in neighbouring Zimbabwe, President Mandela's government has proudly overseen the inclusion of a famous clause in the new constitution prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual preference.² The changing relation of the state to the sexuality of its subjects is also apparent in the legalisation of pornography and in the liberal policies of the South African Broadcasting Commission, which has allowed the screening of films such as the controversial *Kids* on national television. Furthermore, the state has legalised abortion and is seriously considering decriminalising commercial sex work. These steps signal the advent of more open-ended medicalised discourses on sexuality in the era of AIDS. Yet the precise nature of the links between democratisation and sexuality in South Africa has remained elusive in writings by anthropologists and other social scientists and have not been adequately described, conceptualised, nor theorised.

Based on a belief in the potential of the microscopic focus of ethnographic fieldwork to illuminate large questions, this article investigates how sexuality featured

¹ I wish to thank my research assistants, Eliazaar Mohlala and Kally Shokane, for their help and also the University of Natal, Durban, for funding my research. Peta Katz kindly shared her observations of Nelson Mandela's speech in Thulamahashe with me. I presented an earlier version of the article to the Department of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University. I wish to thank all participants - especially Hugh Beach and Don Handelman - for their helpful comments. Erik Bævre, Richard Lee, Robert Thornton, Dick Werbner, Pnina Werbner and Caroline White encouraged me to develop my ideas. Given the special nature of my topic the usual disclaimers apply with special vigour.

² D. Donham, 'Freeing South Africa: The "Modernization" of Male-Male Sexuality in Soweto', *Cultural Anthropology*, 13, 1 (1998), pp. 3- 21.

as an issue during the liberation struggle in Impalahoek.³ Impalahoek is a multi-ethnic village, situated in the densely vegetated and warm South African lowveld, with an estimated population of twenty thousand Northern Sotho and Shangaan residents. From 1968 until 1994 Impalahoek formed part of the Mapulaneng district of the Northern Sotho bantustan, Lebowa.⁴ But with democratisation and the dismantling of the bantustans, the village was incorporated into Bushbuckridge region of the newly constituted Northern Province. The manner in which villagers endured apartheid, participated in the liberation struggle and experienced political transformation under the African National Congress (ANC) led-government was not unique. The shock waves of the revolts, which occurred after the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF), in 1982, were acutely felt in all South African bantustans.

The liberation struggle in the Northern Transvaal (now Northern Province) has been fairly well documented. Like so much South African scholarship studies draw mainly upon political economic models of resistance and insurrection, but scholars have also gradually begun to explore the cultural facets of the struggle. Much debate centres on the reasons for the revolts and on the social composition of the liberation movements. Lodge mentions poverty, resettlements, over-population, drought and unemployment as the main ingredients of the revolt. He identifies Youth Congresses as the most extensive political networks in the bantustans⁵, showing how students who faced grim prospects of finding employment, demanded elected representation, an end to corporal punishment and the provision of infrastructure. Yet Lodge insists that the uprisings included a dimension of class mobilisation and attracted significant support from trade unionists, chrome miners and farm labourers.⁶

Van Kessel, Ritchken and Delius are less ambiguous in characterising the revolts as inspired by 'generational consciousness' than 'working class nationalism'.⁷ The ANC declared 1985 year of the youth and hailed the youth as vanguard of the liberation struggle. This message fell on receptive ears. By 1986 72 percent of Lebowa's population was under the age of twenty years. Enrolment in Lebowa's secondary schools increased from 91 965 in 1980 to 199 429 in 1986.⁸ Ritchken argues that initiated but unmarried men, whose social status had become marginal within the household and chiefdom, were the most prominent activists. Their opinions were

³ The information presented in this paper is extremely sensitive, potentially harmful and even incriminating. Yet in a country afflicted by horrendous sexual violence, silence is a far more serious abuse of academic freedom than the exposure of secrets. I nonetheless use pseudonyms to refer to all local persons, schools and villages to protect the identity of my informants. All local terms are in Northern Sotho unless otherwise specified.

⁴ No term to describe the 'bantustans', 'homelands' or 'national states' is politically neutral. I use the term bantustan because it most clearly expresses rejection of the policy of creating separate political-geographic entities for different categories of the South African population.

⁵ T. Lodge, 'Rebellion: The Turning of the Tide', in T. Lodge and B. Nasson et al. (eds.), *All Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Ford Foundation and Foreign Policy Association, 1991), pp. 117-128.

⁶ T. Lodge, 'Rebellion: The Turning of the Tide', pp. 125-126.

⁷ I. Van Kessel, "From Confusion to Lusaka", The Youth Revolt in Sekhukhuneland', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 4 (1993), pp. 593-614. E. Ritchken, 'Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge: Struggles to Define Moral Economies in the Context of Rapidly Transforming Political Economies. (PhD thesis, Johannesburg: Department of Political Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, 1994). P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal* (Portsmouth NH: Heineman, Johannesburg: Raven Press, Oxford: James Currey, 1996).

⁸ I. Van Kessel, "From Confusion to Lusaka", p.602.

subordinated to those of their parents and they were not allowed to speak in the courts (*kgoro*) of headmen and chiefs. Yet they lacked sufficient resources to marry and establish their own households.⁹ Appalling conditions of schooling and mounting unemployment dashed their hopes for new avenues of opportunity.¹⁰ The UDF provided the youth with a sense of belonging to a wider struggle. Their campaign was to build a new social order, purified of the corrupting influences of apartheid. They drove away unpopular school principals and teachers, outlawed corporal punishment, set up people's courts to solve domestic disputes and challenged the repressive Lebowa government.

Niehaus, Ritchken, Stadler and Delius characterise the youth's involvement in witch-hunting as a definitive feature of the revolts.¹¹ Witchcraft is not seen as an alternative to a wider political programme. Rather, the eradication of witches was seen as a fundamental part of the creation of a new community freed of the oppression, indignity and misfortune which had dogged village life under apartheid.¹² Between February and April 1986, thirty-two alleged witches were 'necklaced' in two Sekhukhuneland villages.¹³ The victims were largely elders - tight-fisted pensioners, uncooperative neighbours, sulky and domineering kin - stigmatised as the custodians of a reactionary order. Ritchken also shows how the youth sought to redefine gendered relationships. The witch-hunts were a potential warning to women who took men's jobs, lived autonomously from men, or earned an income through operating 'shebeens' [drinking houses].¹⁴ Adults agreed that the villages were infested with witches, but disapproved of the youth's disregard for established procedures in identifying witches.

References to sexuality are marginal to most analyses of the rural revolt. Yet, it is widely reported that students complained about male teachers who had sex with schoolgirls.¹⁵ Authors also refer to a campaign called 'building soldiers', in which Comrades forced girls to attend meetings at night and impregnated them.¹⁶ Third, it is observed that some victims of the witch-hunts had engaged in adulterous relationships. Fourth, by stigmatising contraception and by threatening to punish abortionists, Comrades reasserted their definition of women as child bearers.¹⁷

⁹ E. Ritchken, *Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge*, p.368.

¹⁰ These arguments draw upon Bundy's depiction of the political education of South African students in the 1980s as spectacularly rapid nationwide. He explains this in terms of accelerated growth in the numbers of children and young adults, and a substantial expansion in African schooling, despite its glaring defects. High-school leavers, he writes, 'have been thrust in the labour market at precisely the moment it is contracting'. The impact of unemployment and potential unemployability was a spur to radicalism. (C. Bundy, "'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics": Aspects of Youth and Student Resistance in Cape Town', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13, 3, 1987, p.312.)

¹¹ I. Niehaus, 'Witch-Hunting and Political Legitimacy: Continuity and Change in Green Valley, Lebowa, 1990-93', *Africa*, 63, 4 (1993), pp. 137-160. E. Ritchken, *Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge*, pp. 365- 390. J. Stadler, 'Witches and Witch-Hunters: Witchcraft, Generational Relations and the Life Cycle in a Lowveld Village', *African Studies*, 55, 1 (1996), pp. 87-110. P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, pp. 172-215.

¹² P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, p. 198.

¹³ During the South African liberation struggle the 'necklace', a tyre dosed in petrol, was used to execute political enemies - such as police informers - by burning them alive.

¹⁴ E. Ritchken, *Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge*, pp. 370 -381.

¹⁵ T. Lodge, 'Rebellion, The Turning of the Tide', p.120. I. Van Kessel, "'From Confusion to Lusaka'", p. 607. E. Ritchken, *Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge*, pp. 343,401.

¹⁶ I. Van Kessel, "'From Confusion to Lusaka'", p.606. E. Ritchken, *Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge*, pp. 374, 394. P. Delius. *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, p. 189.

¹⁷ E. Ritchken, *Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge*, p. 379.

Based primarily upon interviews and gossip, this article offers an ethnographic account of the very personal experiences and perceptions of sexuality by men in Impalahoek during the liberation struggle.¹⁸ Whilst truth may not necessarily be the most relevant aspect of gossip, gossip is a particularly rich source of information.¹⁹ Gossip creates ties of intimacy between the researcher and informants, reveals social bonds, shows contradictions of behaviour, builds and destroys reputations, establishes criteria for respectability and sanctions behaviour. As White puts it: 'Who says what about whom, to whom, articulates the alliances and affiliations of the conflicts of daily life'.²⁰ These comments are very pertinent to sexuality - a perennial source of gossip. Foucault reminds us that power is not only brought to bear upon sexuality through repression and punishment: power is also manifest in the surveillance of sexuality and in the creation of discourses about it.²¹

I argue that sexuality is a prominent theme in masculine narratives about the liberation struggle in Impalahoek. The starting point of my analysis is the autocratic regime in primary and high schools during the period of Bantu Education, from 1953 to 1986. I show that while teachers prohibited and punished even the mildest expressions of sexuality between students, male teachers freely engaged in sexual liaisons with schoolgirls. Students perceived corporal punishment as unjust and synonymous with torture. Students' discontent about sexuality explains significant aspects of the revolt by Comrades from 1986 to 1992. Comrades demanded an end to corporal punishment, called for the expulsion of the male teachers who engaged in sexual liaisons with schoolgirls, and celebrated their own sexual virility. In local campaigns to 'build soldiers' and to eliminate witchcraft and abortions the Comrades expunged sexual perversion and reaffirmed the moral association of sexuality with procreation. Finally, I discuss the management of sexuality by the ANC - led government after 1994. Far from inaugurating sexual liberation, I argue that in the era of AIDS there has been new medicalised discourses about sexuality, new forms of surveillance and new lines of contestation.

Bantu Education and the Repression of Adolescent Sexuality, 1953-1986

With the advent of Bantu Education in 1953 the governing bodies of schools in the South African lowveld adopted an extremely conservative and puritan stance towards sexuality. Nearly all teachers were educated in Lutheran, Swiss and Nazarene mission schools which prohibited any form of extra-marital sex. A new indigenous model, which had emerged with the decline of subsistence agriculture in the 1950s, also informed the perceptual grid through which teachers viewed sex. In terms of this model only men who had demonstrated their wage earning capacity as migrant workers could legitimately indulge in sex. One informant explained this notion as follows: 'When you were from initiation you were a man [*monna*], but not a real man [*monnana*]. You could

¹⁸ Whilst men freely spoke to me about sex and about their own sexual experiences, I was unable to achieve a similar rapport amongst women. Hence my aim is to portray only men's perspectives. Elzaan Chetty, a woman student of anthropology at the University of Natal, is currently conducting research on the topic of women's sexuality in Bushbuckridge. The results of her research promises to be an essential corrective to my own work.

¹⁹ N. Besnier, 'The Truth and Other Irrelevant Aspects of Nukulaelae Gossip', *Pacific Studies*, 17, 3 (1994), pp. 1-39.

²⁰ L. White, 'Between Gluckman and Foucault: Historicizing Rumour and Gossip', *Social Dynamics* 20, 1 (1994), p. 79.

²¹ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 23-24.

not have sex once you were initiated. Nobody would allow you to touch their daughter if you did not work.' Elders propagated a myth of a sex free adolescent past. I was told that in the past [*kgale*] the prohibition on eating foods such as eggs and livers suppressed the sex drive of adolescents and prevented them from maturing early. Informants also referred to arranged marriages:

Our fathers did not propose [love]. They found their wives at home when they returned from work. There was no light inside the room and they would just encounter a their wives in there. The next day their father would call them to fetch the cows in the veld. Then he would see whether his son accepted the wife. If the son shied away he would give him sex education and teach him about taboos [*diila*].

Teachers located sex at the apex of all forms of transgression and perceived sex as a contagious form of subversion. The deputy principal of the Impalahoek Primary School explained: 'We teachers consider sex as something which makes the ears of the young ones not to listen. Youths who have sex think they are adults. They are cheeky, obstinate and stubborn. We cannot tolerate this.' Yet teachers perceived the prohibition of adolescent sex as entirely possible. They sought to exorcise sex from the schools by enforcing elaborate rules about the clothing, appearance and appropriate forms of conduct by boys and girls.

i) *Clothing and Physical Appearance*. Prescriptions about clothing and physical appearance aimed to preserve the immaturity of adolescent bodies. One teacher explained: 'You were not allowed to beautify yourself. If the girls were good looking they would attract the attention of the boys and even that of the male teachers.' Primary school boys were prohibited from wearing long pants, and high school boys were only allowed to wear long grey flannel pants. In the past women teachers had to wear at least two petticoats. The skirts and dresses of schoolgirls had to cover their knees. To test the length of a girl's dress teachers asked her to pick up a duster from the floor and to wipe the chalkboard. If her panties were exposed a woman teacher would unfold the trimmings of her dress. Hairstyles were also prohibited. Boys were not allowed to wear their hair in the *sijjobane* or *bibok* styles of *muchongolo* dancers. Girls were not allowed to dye, straighten, or lengthen their hair, to have long painted nails, or to wear ear rings or stockings. Students also had to adopt the appropriate posture. Girls should not sit with their legs astride, boys should not stand with their hands in their pockets, and pupils were not allowed to look any teacher directly in the eyes.

ii) *Segregation*. At school, boys and girls sat on different sides of the class and of the assembly hall, never shared the same benches, and played at separate spaces. Whilst girls did needlework, boys did agriculture. The toilets for boy and girls were built at opposite ends of the school. When sports teams visited another school the girls sat in the front seats of the bus and boys in the rear. Should any girl be seen in the back of the bus, the teacher would ask who called her and would punish all the boys if there were no response. Boys were not allowed to be seen in a girl's company and could not walk nor even talk with any other girl on the school grounds. (Their sisters and cousins were the only exceptions.) Boys were also prohibited from watching girls doing long jump or playing netball because these activities exposed their thighs.

iii) *Cross-Sex Relationships*. Love affairs could not be countenanced. Indeed, it was a very serious offence to write love letters, kiss or to hold hands. Any girl who did not immediately tear up a love letter was deemed to be guilty of a punishable offence.

Teachers restricted the gaze of male pupils. They were not allowed to keep photographs or pictures of any woman. The girl whose photograph they kept would also be reprimanded. 'The teachers would tell us not to keep pictures of girls. We should only have pictures of Kaizer Chiefs [a soccer team].' Sexual intercourse and pregnancy were the gravest offences. Any boy who impregnated a girl or any girl who conceived was summarily expelled. Madalene Ubisi was the only teacher ever to be dismissed from the Impalahoek Primary School: in 1982 she 'set a bad example for schoolgirls' by becoming pregnant out of wedlock.

iv) *Other Misdemeanours*. These included swearing, especially using the terms for genitals or the Afrikaans words *kak* (shit) and *voetsek* (bugger off), arriving late, not doing homework, being unable to answer the questions posed by teachers and failing tests. Students could be expelled for fighting with teachers, and would be harshly punished for smoking, drinking alcohol, sniffing glue, stealing or gambling. In lowveld schools acts of transgression and punishment were common topics of gossip. While the narratives of teachers focused upon the transgressive acts of students in an almost voyeuristic manner, those of the offenders and their peers highlighted the act of punishment and portrayed its victims as worthy of sympathy. Former primary school pupils claimed that their sexual biographies began fairly early in their lives. 'Many primary school boys had sex', I was told. 'They were above thirteen and had already been circumcised. The girls agreed. They also enjoyed sex.' According to students, punishments for the transgression of rules relating to sexual matters were common, unjust, extremely humiliating and even 'harsher than in high school'. One informant described the beatings as 'more like killing than punishment'.

Harold Shubane, who attended a primary school in Welverdiend during the early 1970s, recalled that he was unjustly punished after he and a schoolgirl were absent when their choir was called to the stage at a school concert:

When I came into the hall I saw that the choir was already on the stage. I stood at the door and waited until they had finished. When the teacher asked me where I had been I told him that I had been to relieve myself outside and that it was dark in the bushes. I was punished on the Monday. It was the worst punishment that you can think of. The teacher walked on my fingertips with his shoes! Just think of it. An adult person walking on your fingers! The girl was just beaten on her buttocks. After that I did not want to greet the teacher. He was a tyrant who did not listen.

In 1978 MacDonald Chiloane, a grade six pupil, slept at a friend's home. But his mother wrongly believed that he had slept with a girlfriend and reported him to the school principal. More than nine teachers each beat MacDonald five strokes with a sjambok.²² Ben Mathonsi told me that he was part of a group of fifteen boys who watched the schoolgirls doing high jump. A teacher saw them, called them to the staff room and beat each boy. Eric Malatsie had to weed the school gardens until late in the afternoon for merely playing and joking with girls.

The punishments for writing love letters were most severe. Teachers would force the author to read out the letter aloud in front of the assembly and would punish not only the author, but also the girl who had received the letter, and the messenger who had delivered it to her. When MacDonald Chiloane took a letter written by Enios Mokgope

²² A sjambok (Afrikaans 'whip', verb 'sjambokked'). Usually manufactured from hippopotamus hide or from very strong plastic.

to a girl in his class, a teacher caught him, confiscated the letter and slapped him through the face. The next day Enios had to entertain the school assembly with the following words:

The High Gate of London. Nobody can jump it except me and you. Dear *sponono* [beautiful girl]. Three little words. I love you. Sweetheart I'll buy you an aeroplane. During break I'll buy you a quarter loaf of bread and achaar. From your love Enios Mokgope.

Teachers then beat Enios, MacDonald and Enios' lover five strokes with a sjambok in each and every classroom of the school. In the 1970s Johannes Mapaile was forced to lie down on the table in the principal's office and was beaten more than fifty strokes for having placed a love letter in a girl's school bag. One informant recalled:

Johannes yelled so loudly. The whole school could hear he was being killed. He was beaten indiscriminately - sometimes the shots fell on his body. Hereafter Johannes ran home and wanted to quit school. But the teacher knew his father and persuaded him that Johannes should return. Since that day we schoolkids took Johannes as a criminal. We were scared to associate with him.

When we looked at him we saw trauma.

One indice of the extent to which students of the Impalahoek Primary School engaged in sexual intercourse during the 1980s, is that about two schoolgirls became pregnant each year. A very well known story is of Archie Mokoena, the son of a wealthy businessman, who had sex with several schoolgirls in a forest of blue gum trees near the school. Teachers became suspicious when Archie and a schoolgirl asked to go to the toilet nearly each day, and only returned much later. Eventually a teacher went to search for them and found them in the forest. The girl fled, but Archie was punished so severely that he too deserted and never again attended the school. In another case Alec Thobela, Harry Shubane (a high school student) and two schoolgirls spent an entire schoolday at Alec's home preparing food and having sexual intercourse. Alec was too scared to return to school when he learnt that teachers had heard of his exploits. But the next day teachers sent a group of strong boys to fetch Alec from home. Alec cried all the way as they dragged him to school and was beaten so severely that he was treated at hospital.

Students remarked that the punishments for transgressing school rules, writing love letters and for sexual misdemeanours were not nearly as harsh in the Mashile High School as in most other schools of the lowveld. Yet, in retrospect, many former pupils were surprised that the teachers never informed to them about sexual matters. One informant told me: 'As pupils we were never told that sex is unacceptable. We were just supposed to know this by instinct.' He then jokingly imitated the cryptic manner in which the principal, Mr Mahlangu, condemned sex at school. 'You come here. All my children. To learn. Not to make babies.'

Sexual experimentation was extremely pervasive in high school. This is partly due to the advanced age of many students. Sexual experience was also a mark of masculine status and esteem in the 'underlife', 'subculture' or 'counterculture' of high schools.²³ The male students who were well-known, came from wealthy families, wore

²³ E. Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961). D. Hebdidge, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983). P. Willis. *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Westmead: Saxon House, 1977).

fashionable clothes, excelled in sports, or attained top positions in their exams were the most likely to have girlfriends.

High school pupils did not share the viewpoint of their teachers that it was possible to abstain from sexual intercourse. My informants reasoned that any student, no matter how principled he was, would have sex if the opportunity presented itself. I was told how John Mzimba, a leader of the Student Christian Association, organised prayer meetings at a school in Harlem each weekend. However, the principal learnt that John had sex with a girl in the toilets and found a love letter inside her Bible. He did not accept John's explanation that he and 'his sister' merely prayed in the toilet, and expelled both of them.

Students' perception of sex as inevitable justified breaking school rules and risking punishment. Students wrote love letters despite being lashed by the teachers, and even by the parents of the women whom they admired. They often engaged in sex during excursions outside the school premises. Upon returning from sports meetings, some students would even have sex in the back seats of the bus.

Punishments for these transgressions varied widely. In 1985 Eric Malebe told a girl 'you must have started menstruation'. Though Eric did not know the actual meaning of the word, he was heavily beaten after a women teacher overheard him. After a trip to Pretoria, in 1982, eighteen pupils were disciplined: six for being drunk, five couples for having sex in the dormitories and two boys for fighting. Each pupil received more than twenty lashes and was threatened with expulsion. The only schoolboys who were actually expelled from the Mashile High School were boys who fought over girls. They included Caswell Modipane, a grade eleven pupil who beat the principal's nephew in town, and David Thobela and his friend Andrew Theko who stabbed Kid Mbetse with a knife in the centre of the school quad. Previously Kid and his comrades had assaulted David for being in love with a girl in their neighbourhood. The harshest and most humiliating punishment was the expulsion of pregnant schoolgirls. In a desperate bid to continue with their education girls abandoned their babies or committed 'back street abortions' or infanticide. For example, during music competition at the Enos Chiloane High School, in 1980, a girl gave birth in the veld and left her baby in the bushes. The next year the police arrested another schoolgirl, who had killed her own baby and threw its corpse down a pit latrine.²⁴

Young men perceived the hypocrisy of teachers as far more irksome than any surveillance or punishment. One informant mentioned that a teacher at the Impalahoek Primary School impregnated three schoolgirls.

When he taught us he always left his books in the classroom and would say: 'You! Girl! Bring the books to my office!' Then something would happen. I would say it was rape. The teacher always gave them money and told them to shut up. When they became pregnant he shifted the responsibility to someone else.

Many teachers were recruited from elsewhere - from places such as Pietersburg - and lived a migrant lifestyle - characterised by extra-marital sex - in the school's singles'

²⁴ During my fieldwork unsafe, back street abortions were of considerable concern. Dr. Alan Pugh of the local hospital recorded 188 discharge diagnosis for the period between 1 July and 31 October 1991. As many as 108 (69 percent) of these cases were for complications following abortion. Dr. Pugh reports that the busiest wards at the hospital were 'Female Medical' and 'Pediatrics'.

quarters. Their illicit love affairs were shrouded in secrecy. Teachers allegedly called girls to their quarters to fetch water, clean their rooms, or to cook and then had sex with them. Thabo Shubane said that while he was employed as a temporary teacher at the Mashile High School, during the 1980s all twenty male teachers had sex with schoolgirls. 'Everyone - starting with the principal - were involved in love affairs. Every single one. Me too. My girlfriend was in grade nine. Today she is my wife.' Students said that any beautiful schoolgirl would be reserved for teachers and that girls preferred teachers as lovers because they had more money than schoolboys.

Mr Mahlangu, the principal of Mashile High School, had a notorious reputation for engaging in sexual liaisons with schoolgirls and with other men's wives. A former student prefaced his remarks by saying: 'Sakkie [my nickname]. He can cause shit. He has so many stories. You can write a book about him.' According to gossip, Mr Mahlangu impregnated an eighteen-year-old student, in 1972, and gave her a concoction to induce an abortion. She became seriously ill and died. In the 1980s he impregnated a twenty-eight year old student who was the girlfriend [*nyatsi*] of a ZCC minister.²⁵ The minister found out and attacked Mr Mahlangu with a screwdriver. But neighbours restrained him and negotiated that he accept R2 000 from Mr Mahlangu in compensation for the loss of his paramour. A schoolgirl reportedly fainted when she had sex with Mr Mashego, the harshest disciplinarian at the Mashile. Schoolboys gossiped that Mr Mashego's 'machine' [penis] was too large for her. In 1985 another schoolgirl, who had been impregnated by a teacher, died after she committed a backstreet abortion.

Teachers regularly victimised the girls who refused to accept their proposals and the boys with whom they were involved. One teacher proposed love to Rose Khosa, but after she refused him, he started beating her whenever she could not reply to his difficult questions. Another teacher became furious when he learnt that Stanley Machate had read a love letter he wrote to a schoolgirl. Though Stanley scored 96 percent for a test, the teacher accused him of cheating and assaulted Stanley with his fists when he protested. Stanley reported the teacher to the principal, but nothing was done about the matter.

Informants believed that the principal and his henchman, Mr Mashego, used witchcraft to sustain their authoritarian regime at the Mashile High School. In 1980 parents became incensed about corruption at the school. They wanted to know where the teachers had obtained money to host parties at the school, were concerned about the very high prices of textbooks and complained that students were forced to work in the school gardens in their expensive uniforms. The parents organised a protest march, but dispersed soon after they passed through the school gate. Ben Morema, a teacher with excellent credentials, once complained to the school committee about the manner in which the principal ran the school. Shortly hereafter he became ill and resigned to take up a lectureship at the Mapulaneng College of Education. Rumours of witchcraft started after Mr Mahlangu employed a powerful Malawian herbalist as the school's gardener, and when students, who cleaned Mr Mahlangu's car, found animal fur and twigs in the ashtray. The gardener allegedly tied woollen threats to the school gate and placed herbs inside the water reservoir to pacify the students. Mr Mashego had allegedly buried an

²⁵ *Bonyatsi* was a normal, but morally non-normative practice. It denotes a long-term extramarital liaison. Men provided intermittent amounts of money to their paramours, but these were not directly negotiated for sex. See A. Spiegel, 'Polygyny as Myth: Towards Understanding Extramarital Relations in Lesotho', A. D. Spiegel and P. McAllister, eds, *Tradition and Transition in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1991), pp. 145-166.

iron rod and herbs in the school yard so that others could fear him. A former teacher at the Mashile High School elaborated:

Personally I believe that these stories are true. There were times when he [the principal] wielded great power. He would even scold his teachers in front of the pupils. He used to walk around instilling fear. He used to tell the pupils that they could only drink from the reservoir at Mashile and he would also say ‘When you’ve entered the gate you’re at home’. The principal also had peculiar slogans. ‘You can’t strike. My children. You can’t eat Ndebele meat, My body is inedible.’

The Revolt at Mashile High School, 1986 -1992

In recounting the history of opposition to apartheid, Elphas Mogale, a former ANC senator, described Bushbuckridge as ‘politically dormant for a long time’. This is because mission schools failed to enlighten people about oppression, few migrants joined trade unions and because local people despised the lifestyle of politicised urban areas. In the lowveld there was no counterpart to the Sebatakgomo migrants’ organisation, which opposed the implementation of Bantu Authorities and agricultural ‘betterment’ in Sekhukhuneland.²⁶ Political mobilisation was sporadic. In the 1950s the brothers Matsikitsane and Segopela Mashile joined the ANC and led tenant struggles against the use of child labour, but they were banished to the Transkei and the Ciskei respectively. Political activists such as Philip Chiloane and Johnstone Mlambo, who stayed in Bushbuckridge in the 1970s, failed to build significant support bases. After he spent twelve years on Robben Island, Philip Chiloane was employed as a clerk at the magistrate’s office. He campaigned against the bantustans and was killed by a letter bomb. Johnstone Mlambo, former Deputy President of the Pan African Congress (PAC), soon went into exile in Tanzania. During the 1976 uprising some pupils from Soweto completed their schooling in Bushbuckridge, but youth resented them.

This situation changed in the 1980s. A number of ANC networks became operative in the area. The Mashile brothers returned to Bushbuckridge and were both elected to the Lebowa Legislative Assembly, where they used their prominent positions to further popular causes.²⁷ After the formation of the UDF, Bushbuckridge became the scene of widespread resistance. Several UDF structures were established in the area. In April 1986 a Crisis Committee and Youth Congress were launched in Impalahoek. Though all members of the Crisis Committee were soon detained, the Youth Congress proved very resilient. They organised from the Mashile High School and attracted a large following of men, who called themselves Comrades. Indeed, Mashile High School became known as ‘Lusaka’.²⁸

The Youth Congress immediately challenged the running of the Mashile High School. In March Comrades pasted a notice on the school gate instructing students to assemble in the quad. Here they vowed not to attend school until their demands for the abolition of corporal punishment, the establishment of a Student Representative Council (SRC), a reduction of school fees and an end to Saturday and afternoon studies had been met. Schooling only resumed once Mr Mahlangu had conceded to their demands.

²⁶ P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, pp. 108-117.

²⁷ E. Ritchken, *Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge*, pp. 299-301.

²⁸ Prior to the unbanning of the ANC in South Africa, its headquarters was located in the Zambian capital, Lusaka.

Throughout the next four years there were further demands. For example, in 1987 students placed placards at the school warning that conservative teachers from Lebowa's Colleges of Education 'stood in the road to progress' and that teachers who still administered corporal punishment or had sex with schoolgirls would be 'necklaced'. In 1988 a group of Comrades arrived at the school and chanted slogans against the principal. Mr Mahlangu fled into the bush, but got stuck in the mud in his brand new suit and pair of shoes. The Comrades fetched Mr Mahlangu and carried him back to his office.' They want to kill me', he yelled. But the Comrades replied: 'Who wants to kill you? We're only singing a song! Shut up! Go and sit in your office!'

Later that year UDF leaders addressed a rally at the Mashile High School, which was attended by well over a thousand people. They complained about maladministration and alleged that the principal had misspent large amounts of money. The leaders decided that typing was a useless subject and should no longer be taught at the school. Another complaint was that Mr Pheko - a former soldier - brought a gun to school each day and treated pupils like animals. Parents feared that Mr Pheko could kill their children. The UDF leaders warned that there should be greater communication between all stakeholders and that the school fees should not be increased without proper consultation.

After 1986 there was a drastic reversal of power at the Mashile High School. In the words of a former teacher: 'The tables turned. The hunters became the hunted. The mouse chased the cat.' George Monareng, Platos Machate and Richard Ubisi -three prominent Comrades from Harlem - who carried guns at all times - virtually ran the school. Whenever the principal spoke in the school assembly, Comrades would interject and say 'Mahlangu is lying!' Comrades would also ask him why the school funds were exhausted, reject his explanations and remark: 'Mahlangu uses our money for his personal benefit.'

Whereas teachers had previously surveilled and punished students, students now surveilled the behaviour of teachers and threatened violence against those who offended them. There were rumours that the Comrade leaders had compiled a list of corrupt teachers whom they planned to execute. In fear of their lives, seven teachers left the Mashile High School. They included harsh disciplinarians, teachers who were rude to students and teachers who allegedly spied for the apartheid police. Once a husband reported a male teacher, Mr Selinda, to the Comrades for being in love with his wife, who still attended school. The Comrades severely sjambokked Mr Selinda and left him for dead. Upon his release from hospital, Mr Selinda, too, quit teaching at the school. Male teachers now had to be very discreet about their love affairs and were under great pressure to marry the schoolgirls whom they impregnated.

During the revolt school rules were no longer stringently applied. A former student commented: 'Student politics was our blessing. It saved us from being beaten.' Only grade eight and nine students occasionally received corporal punishment. Other serious offenders were told to pick up papers, wash the toilets or to water the school garden. Students now wore their hair in any style they pleased: girls straightened, permed and braided their hair, and some boys even wore dreadlocks. *Sqebezana* ['hot pants'] became a fashionable item of the girls' school uniform, and some girls sat with their legs astride in class without being reprimanded. Teachers only warned students who wrote love letters and no longer acted upon rumours that students engaged in sex. Pregnant girls were no longer expelled. According to one teacher: 'They would write

exams, take leave for a day to give birth, and again write exams the very next day.’ Only in the cases of consistent misbehaviour were the names of students recorded in a ‘black book’.

Pupils openly taunted teachers. A former student recalled: ‘We were no longer punished. If a teacher gave us class work we won’t write. If our books were too heavy we’ll leave them at home. We also came very late. We stayed away until short break. When the school was on we would just loiter about.’ On one occasion Max Monareng, the SRC leader’s brother, stood outside smoking and slapped a teacher who told him to return to class. Students also tried to get away with cheating in their exams. Boys put knives and guns on their desks and proceeded to copy the answers from their textbooks. When a male teacher caught a schoolgirl copying answers from her thighs, she told him: ‘If you leave me [to copy] I’ll sleep with you.’

The revolts had a less drastic impact on primary schools. The Youth Congress sometimes demanded that older boys join them in protest marches, forced the primary schools to close on politically significant occasions and confronted the primary school teachers who imposed unjust punishments. Though school rules were now less zealously enforced, primary school students still perceived themselves as the powerless victims of teachers. In the words of one student:

At primary school we were too scared to report injustice to the Comrades. When we were punished it ended in school. We were scared that the teachers could beat us again and fail us. Because of fear we did not feel the need to challenge [the teachers]. We were too young and scared. There was nothing we could do. It would have been better if we had been conscious of the situation.

There was something reminiscent of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* in the actions of the Comrade leaders.²⁹ Whilst they condemning the exploitation of schoolgirls by teachers, they appropriated the most attractive schoolgirls for themselves. George Monareng proposed love to Andrew Shubane’s girlfriend, Maggie. (She was from Soweto and stayed with her grandmother in Impalahoek.) Though Maggie refused and asked Andrew to help her, he was too scared to oppose George. George sometimes abducted Maggie. On other evenings he slept at her home and told Maggie’s grandmother to shut up whenever she questioned him. To escape from this unbearable situation, Maggie eventually returned to her parents in Soweto.

In Impalahoek the ‘building soldiers’ was known as ‘operation production’ or as *go yata* (to multiply). The explicit aim of this pronatal strategy was to replace the Comrades who had been killed during the freedom struggle, ‘to make many children who could be the Mandelas of tomorrow’ and ‘to expand the demography of blacks so that we would outnumber the whites in the case of war’. Comrades who opposed this campaign called it ‘legalised rape’ and commented that it was the brainchild of ‘reactionary students who had learnt about Hitler’s reproduction’. Marshals of the Youth Congress would fetch youngsters from their homes to attend late night meetings. Until three o’ clock in the morning leaders would inform them about the history and objectives of the ANC. The marshals then sjambokked all the boys who did not attend the meetings voluntarily and forced the girls to have unprotected sex with them in the forest. Comrade leaders also urged the girls to stop using birth control injections and threatened parents that their homes would be burnt if they demanded bridewealth for

²⁹ G. Orwell, *Animal Farm* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1945).

their daughters. Justice Mosoma recalled that one evening, in 1990, when he was a grade twelve student, a group of about fifty Comrades sang freedom songs outside the home of his mother's brother (*malome*) and demanded that his two female cousins join them. Justice was severely assaulted when he came to the gate and told them that his cousins were not at home. Operation production had tragic consequences. Young women were raped by 'heroes of the struggle' and gave birth to numerous fatherless, 'Comrade kids'. Justice Mosoma remarked: 'Many parents sent their daughters far away - to places where the Comrades were not so powerful. If I were a parent I would have done the same'.

The transgressive 'ideology of the erotic'³⁰ which reigned supreme while the repressive structures of apartheid were crumbling, was also apparent in *sipyetla* dances, which became popular in Bushbuckridge from 1986 onwards. Though based at local shebeens, *sipyetla* dancing teams normally danced in other villages where they were unknown. The dancers would form a circle, clap their hands to the rhythm of disco music and chant: '*Sipyetla! Sipyetla! Can you do it? Can you do it?*' Dancers then moved into the centre of the circle and stripped off items of their clothing until they were entirely naked. Many dancers were highly intoxicated. At a local shebeen three young men reportedly had sex with three adult women in the centre of the circle (a divorcee, a widow, and a married woman) and at Mbeki City an entire *sipyetla* group purportedly had group sex. The police arrested several *sipyetla* dancers at shebeens and charged them with public indecency. In their sermons ZCC ministers publicly denounced the unbecoming conduct of *sipyetla* dancers as a sign that the end of the world is near. These wild dances were a sign of their times. In so far as *sipyetla* shocked established structures of power, it was intimately related to the transgressive practices of the Comrades.

It would certainly be foolhardy to view a movement as multi-faceted as the Comrades as a mere response to the repressive regime in the schools. The Comrades genuinely opposed exploitation and apartheid. The Youth Congress boycotted white-owned supermarkets, organised work stoppages on occasions such as May Day and called upon villagers not to pay annual site taxes (R1), service rents (R15 for water and graveyard maintenance) and stock levies (85c per head for large stock and 40c per head for small stock) to the Tribal Authorities. Due to sustained resistance the activities of the Tribal Authorities had almost ground to a complete halt. Other campaigns were aimed explicitly at gaining legitimacy among adults. Comrades apprehended the notorious *psyanga* gang and formed squads to escort commuters home at night. The Comrades also campaigned for improved infrastructure. In 1989 more than ten thousand people marched to the nearest police station to demand the more effective provision of piped water, roads and electricity. Catholic priests walked in front of the procession, and women marched along carrying empty water canisters.

As elsewhere in the Northern Transvaal, local Comrades intervened in the morally ambiguous field of witchcraft, dedicating themselves to the complete elimination the mystical causers of misfortune. Between April and May 1986, Comrades attacked more than one hundred and fifty suspected witches in the Bushbuckridge

³⁰ R. Parker, *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

region, killing at least thirty-six.³¹ In Impalahoek Comrades petrol bombed the home of a herbalist whom they suspected of selling witchcraft substances. Comrades also set alight the home of a man who had allegedly caused one of his neighbours to suffer a heart attack, and stoned to death an elderly woman whom they believed had turned her neighbours' children into zombies. The Comrades conducted further witch-hunts in Impalahoek during 1988, 1989 and 1990. In 1990 Comrades took about one hundred suspected witches to a witch-diviner on the outskirts of the Swaziland border. The diviner confirmed that thirty-four suspects were guilty. Their imagined deeds included poisoning, causing madness and causing mysterious deaths. Only decisive action by the police saved the witches from being killed or expelled from Impalahoek.

A closer scrutiny of 'operation production' and of the witch-hunts reveals that, while Comrades challenged the notion that sex was the prerogative of adults, they upheld the moral virtues of procreative sex. This is expressed by the following words of the Zulu freedom song:

*Ngwavu, ngwavula, ngwa rula kaNyamazane. Hauze!
Mfazi ka Botha, anga zala naku zala. O zala mangundwane.
Unfasa ka de Klerk anga zale. Naku zala o zaka mangundwane.
Umfazi ka Mandela o zala MaComrade.*

Break up, break away, we're going to kaNyamazane. Hauze!
Botha's wife does not conceive. She gives birth to rats.
De Klerk's wife does not conceive. She gives birth to rats.
Mandela's wife gives birth to Comrades.

In 1988 Comrades appointed a disciplinary committee to investigate the deaths of two schoolgirls who had backstreet abortions. In one instance the abortionist was found to be the girl's own mother - an unemployed widow who could not afford to support any additional grandchildren. In the other case the girl's boyfriend, who had already impregnated someone else, had forced her to abort. In both cases an elderly woman had supplied them with a concoction made from bleach, essence of life, laxatives, boiled Coca Cola and herbs. The Comrades called all those, whom they deemed responsible to a meeting and warned them that they would become 'the victims of circumstances' if they ever again attempted to commit abortions.

As in the case of the Chewa of rural Zambia,³³ witchcraft connoted images of infertility and of perverse sexuality. Prime symbols of witchcraft were two witch-familiars, symbolising sexual desire: the ape-like *tokolot©i* and the snake-like *mamlambo*. Informants imagined the *tokolot©i* to be a large ape with horrible teeth. It could be of either sex. The male had a large penis and the female huge breasts. They believed that witches, themselves assumed the shape of the *tokolot©i* when they set off at night to rape sexually desirable men and women. The *tokolot©i* caused pregnant women to abort or to bear deformed creatures and injected men with a syringe to make them impotent. The *mamlambo* ('mother of the river' in Xhosa) was described as a peculiar root, which metamorphosed into the shapes of a hairy snake and of a white lover with silver hair. The *mamlambo* enriched its owner and made passionate love to

³¹ South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR), *Annual Review of Race Relations, 1987* (Braamfontein: SAIRR, 1988), p.907.

³³ M. Auslander, "'Open the Wombs": The Symbolic Politics of Modern Nguni Witchfinding', in J. and J.L. Comaroff, eds., *Modernity and Its Malcontents* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993),

him or her, but these hedonistic pleasures occurred at great costs. The *mamlambo* prevented single people from marrying, attacked the spouses of married persons, and demanded regular sacrifices of chicken, beef and human blood. Eventually the *mamlambo* would consume all its keeper's close relatives.³⁴

The pronatal ideology of the Comrades was also borne out in actual witchcraft accusations. Mrs Ubisi, a fifty-two year old woman who was accused of witchcraft, was said to have behaved assertively like a man. She allegedly tied a horn around her waist to have sex with other women and kept a *tokolot@i*, which ate the foetuses of her own babies. Another victim of the witch-hunts was a man who allegedly assumed the shape of the *tokolot@i* and raped his own daughter. He caused her to be pregnant for eleven months and to give birth to twins: the one was a *tokolot@i*, the other a monkey. Doctors allegedly killed the twins and buried them in small coffins.

The Youth Congress never achieved unqualified legitimacy among adults. Whilst adults commented positively upon the reduction in school fees and taxes, parents feared that the actions of the Comrades challenged their control over the discipline and sexuality of their own children. Adults also resented the Comrades for using improper methods to identify witches.

On 25 November 1989, the Sofasonke Civic Union was founded in Harlem with the explicit agenda of opposing the Comrades politically and of reimposing adult authority. Sofasonke's executive committee comprised two high school principals, a teacher and a Nazarine minister. Its constituency was drawn from the ranks of teachers, parents, headmen and the kin of those who had been accused of witchcraft. One member, Ripho Nonyane, had been an ANC activist whilst he studied at Teacher's College, but later became a fierce opponent of the Youth Congress. During 'operation production' Comrades sjambokked Ripho who tried to protect his sisters. Ripho retaliated. At 03h00 he went to each boy's home and sjambokked them in front of their parents. The sphere of Sofasonke's activities soon spread to Impalahoek. On 26 November, a group of eight hundred Sofasonke supporters, most of whom were women, burnt the homes of seven Youth Congress leaders. Armed Sofasonke groups patrolled the villages at night, ensuring that there were no youth on the streets.³⁵ Late in December Sofasonke launched another attack. They burnt five homes in Impalahoek - belonging to families who gave refuge to youth leaders. Since no arrests were made, many informants believed that the police tacitly supported Sofasonke.

On 28 January 1990, Nelson Ramodike, Lebowa's chief minister, with representatives of the South African Council of Churches and of the UDF, met Sofasonke and Comrade leaders to end the violence. The next day Ramodike made an urgent appeal for peace at the Mashile High School. Yet that very night several houses and cattle were burnt. Sofasonke assassinated an organiser of the Youth Congress and Comrades retaliated by necklacing Sofasonke's chairman - the principal of a school in Harlem. Over the Easter weekend, Sofasonke butchered the sister of a Comrade leader. Only after a riot squad of the Lebowa police arrested twenty Comrades and five Sofasonke members did the violence subside. Throughout the conflict Sofasonke failed to attract the wholehearted support of adults. Parents feared that Sofasonke endangered the lives of their children. An elderly man summarised his feelings as follows: 'It has

³⁴ I. Niehaus, 'Witches of the Transvaal Lowveld and their Familiars. Conceptions of Duality, Power and Desire', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, XXV, 2-3, 138-139 (1995), pp. 513-540.

³⁵ E. Ritchken, *Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge*, p. 414.

been much worse since Sofasonke has been around. They said that they were better than the Comrades, but they also killed people.’

Sex and Schooling in the Era of AIDS, 1992 - 1999

On 16 March 1991 - one year after unbanning of the ANC - Nelson Mandela addressed a packed stadium at a political rally in Thumamahashe. Mandela promised that the South African Defence Force would be democratised and would no longer be deployed against the people’s organisations. He said that the ANC was formed eighty years ago to unite African people and emphasised that those who preached tribalism were enemies of the ANC. So were the former political exiles, who defied the elected ANC leaders. Mandela then warned that the spread of AIDS was a huge problem. Men took too many lovers: there were still too many polygynous marriages and responsible men should be content with only one wife. Mandela also blamed the promiscuity of young women for teenage pregnancies and AIDS.

Nelson Mandela’s speech inaugurated new discourses about sexuality. He left little doubt that after the elections of 1994, South Africa’s new government would not support men’s complete freedom to pursue erotic pleasure. Instead, men’s freedom would be restrained by the precepts of hygiene and human rights. Men were outraged and complained that Mandela was wrong to deny them their ‘traditional rights’ of having many women. Indeed, Mandela’s translator told an anthropologist to discount what he had said because everyone knew that only teenage girls spread AIDS.

The most important changes that occurred in the management of sexuality in lowveld schools during the post-apartheid era were the re-establishment of the authority of teachers, the advent of non-corporal punishment and the gradual introduction of sex education. The restructuring of lowveld schools began even before the ANC’s election victory. In 1992 the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) launched a ‘back to school’ campaign. In the words of one ANC leader: ‘The rhetoric came to an end and the practice began. We won many demands, but we realised that our slogan “Liberation First Education Later” was biting back. During the campaign Civic Associations and the SRC formed disciplinary squads to force students loitering about in the streets to return to class and to wear school uniforms. Pregnant schoolgirls, and also the boys who had impregnated them were told to set a good example for the other students: they had to remain at home until their baby’s birth. The couple had to set a good example to the other students. Since 1991 the political influence of the Comrades diminished. The Youth Congress no longer held weekly meetings at the local sports ground and Harlem’s Comrades even lost control of the SRC at the Mashile High School. During the ‘back to school’ campaign a disciplinary squad lashed two schoolboys who arrived at school late. In response, furious students from Impalahoek pelted stones at the squad and forced Harlem’s Comrades to resign from the SRC. They decided that in future only the principal would administer punishments.

In re-establishing disciplinary control, teachers were supported by all structures of the liberation movement. In terms of the South African Schools Act of 1998 former School Committees were replaced by School Governing Boards (SGBs) of twelve members - comprising the principal, two teachers, seven parents and two students - and SRCs became known as LRCs (Learners’ Representative Councils). The Act also outlawed corporal punishment. In 1998 all teachers in Bushbuckridge signed forms

distributed by the Northern Province Department of Education, acknowledging that anyone who administered corporal punishment was guilty of a criminal offence punishable by six months' imprisonment. By 1999 only a few teachers still lashed students. One teacher explained that there was really no alternative to corporal punishment. "We still apply corporal punishment but not so severely. Now it must be called discipline and there has to be an element of love." Another teacher even felt entitled to punch and kick a schoolboy who told him to *Voetsek* ('bugger off' in Afrikaans) when he told the boy to return to class.

But non-corporal punishments have largely replaced beatings. A school principal who let students dig pit latrines earned the Tsonga nickname *ma chelaku o mile* ('to dig hard soil'). At the Mashile High School offenders and their parents were summoned to discuss their transgressions with the SGB. Students were either given a warning, were suspended for a specified time period or were permanently expelled. Over the past few years students have been dealt with in this manner for fighting, carrying dangerous weapons, bringing the name of the school into disrepute and for being insubordinate. Suspensions have also been used to silence students. In 1999 the LRC demanded that Mr Mahlangu refund all students the R15 they paid for 'sports fees' because nothing visible had been done with the money. Students also objected that the school fees were increased from R60 to R120 and that Mr Mahlangu acted as the LRC secretary. Though the SGB refunded each student R5, they summoned all parents to a meeting and told them that they could not countenance a situation in which students controlled the school's finances. Consequently the LRC chairman was removed from his position, some outspoken LRC members were suspended for two months, and three LRC leaders were expelled. Another student, who had been suspended from the Mashile High School for two months for drinking beer at a sports meeting, expressed a widespread sentiment when he described suspensions as even more inhumane than corporal punishment. 'Mashile is still on the vanguard of abusing schoolkids', he said. 'These suspensions are ridiculous, unfair and absurd. They block people's progress towards a brighter future.'

In 1992 the Health Services Development Unit (HSDU) launched the first adolescent sexual health project at a local hospital. Initially health educators only trained young people as 'peer educators'. But in 1995 HSDU received funding from the Kaizer Family Foundation to employ additional staff and to conduct a Knowledge, Attitude and Practice survey on the sexual behaviour of nine hundred school-going youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one years in the Northern Province. The survey's results can only be described as disturbing. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents lived without both biological parents and 43 percent without one biological parent. Between 76 and 88 percent of the respondents were sexually experienced. Many had begun to have sexual intercourse by the age of fifteen and had more than one sexual partner. Though 83 percent of males and 63 percent of females knew of condoms, only 45 percent of males and 8 percent of females used condoms. Between 27 and 39 percent of the adolescents had contracted sexually transmitted diseases and 33 percent of the female interviewees had been pregnant.³⁶ Since 1997 HSDU has conducted sex education workshops with teachers on subjects such as adolescent counselling, AIDS awareness, sexual abuse and development of the body. HSDU have also started establishing sexual health clinics throughout Bushbuckridge.

³⁶ J. Stadler, *Adolescent Sexuality and Sexual Health in the Northern Province* (Johannesburg: The Health Systems Trust, 1996), pp. 10-18.

Two further projects have been launched in the field of sexual health. The Bushbuckridge Health and Social Service Consortium (BHSSC) employs fifteen unpaid volunteers to counsel and support people who suffer from AIDS, and the Harlem Reproductive Health Youth Groups Development Project employs unpaid volunteers to conduct sex education. According to statistics from the local hospital 156 people were confirmed to be HIV positive. Indeed, a health worker told me: 'It is best to think we are all HIV positive. If I think I have it [AIDS] I won't give it to another person.'

In the post-apartheid era teachers have begun to see adolescent sexuality as an inevitable expression of the human instinct that should be controlled according to the precepts of hygiene, rather than as an offence that they should eliminate through punishment. Younger teachers said that it was ridiculous ever to have believed that one could stop youngsters from having sex.

Since 1995 sex education programmes have been implemented with various degrees of enthusiasm in lowveld schools. The Impalahoek Primary School has taken sex education most seriously. Several teachers have attended HSDU workshops and have begun to describe the old attitude towards adolescent sexuality as 'a useless cause'. The principal believes that students should be informed rather than punished and has appointed boys' and girls' consultants to advise students about sexually transmitted diseases, menstruation, contraception and pregnancies. Almost each month students above the age of twelve years are taught sex education - about sexually transmitted diseases, rape and safe sex. The principal has also invited the BHSSC to teach Aids Awareness classes. He described these interventions as very successful. 'The children are interested because they are not aware of these dangers. Until now we have not had a single complaint from a single parent.'

Since 1997 school rules have become more relaxed. Boys are now allowed to wear long pants and girls are permitted to have hair 'make ups'. Primary school students who engage in love affairs have become subject to the benign educational regime of their consultants. Motion Khosa recalled that in 1998 teachers found a love letter in which a grade-seven-boy proposed marriage to a grade-six-girl. In the letter he complains that his mother - who works in Hoedspruit - fails to take care of him. She neither prepares breakfast for him nor makes his bed in the mornings. Moreover, he is afraid to sleep alone at night. Teachers discovered that the young couple regularly had sexual intercourse, but were very sympathetic to their domestic situation. Teachers warned them that unless they terminated their love affair their parents would be told of their exploits. In the same year, teachers discovered that instead of attending class a twelve year old schoolgirl had sex with her 'boyfriend', who washes taxis in town and buys her food and items of clothing. Further investigations revealed that the girl's mother was constantly drunk and that her brother, a shop assistant supported the entire household. In such cases teachers warn students that they are too young to marry and inform parents that their children are merely experiencing adolescence, an inevitable stage of growth, which will naturally come to an end. As a result of these consultations teachers have intervened in cases of child abuse. In 1998 a schoolgirl was absent from school for more than fifteen days. Teachers learnt that the girl's maternal aunt - her caretaker - sold her to businessmen who had sex with her. The aunt warned her that the businessmen would slit her throat if she refused. The consultants took the girl to social workers and asked that she be transferred to her biological mother. They also laid a charge of rape against the businessman at the local police station.

Sex education has assumed a much lower profile in most high schools. Teachers at one high school recalled that BHSSC volunteers once addressed students above the age of fourteen years about AIDS, but said that they, themselves, had never done so. 'The kids think they know more [about sex] than we do. They'll laugh at us and will think we are going insane.' At the Mashile High School, sex education was the prerogative of individual teachers. One teacher argued that it was only by helping students with information that we could reduce the risks of pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Thus, he told me, he always gave students the following 'brotherly advice':

You will play soccer this weekend [have sex]. So put on your soccer boots [condoms]. I also tell the girls to avoid walking around at night when they are alone and to make sure that someone knows where and with whom they are. I also tell them about AIDS- the mass killer.

High school teachers have been less avuncular and protective than primary school teachers. They have either continued to punish or have completely ignored the students who have sexual intercourse. One woman teacher reported a schoolboy for merely sitting on top of a desk and chatting to the girls. Different teachers then took turns to beat him in the staff room. Students described the incident as 'absurd'. Otherwise, teachers have disregarded the love affairs of high school students. An informant told me that - while he attended Mashile in the 1990s - students regularly had sex in the nearby blue gum forest, even during school hours. Yet in all those years, none of these students were ever punished. Another student recalled how he had beaten a girl in town and how her parents reported him to the school principal. He confessed that he had beaten her, but explained that he did so because she was his girlfriend and had cheated him with another student. The teachers took no further action. Pregnancies, which had previously been such an important concern, have also been ignored. 'If she is suspended she definitely won't pass', I was told. 'She already learnt her lesson when she gave birth.'

One reason for the new-found silence about sexuality became apparent when students from Mashile undertook an excursion to Durban in September 1999. One evening a member of the School Governing Board found a group of rowdy and drunk boys in the girls' dormitory. He told the boys to leave and lashed each one with his belt as they passed the door. Yet he was acutely embarrassed when he found a teacher in a girl's bed. The girl allegedly promised the teacher that she would have sex with him if he bought them liquor. In a similar manner as teachers accept the inevitability of sex between students, they accept that teachers would always have sex with schoolgirls. 'These love affairs are not allowed, were not allowed and will never be allowed, but they are happening. It starts with the principals. I don't think it will ever stop.' Silence sustains a delicate balance: high school students are permitted to have sex on condition that they ignore the sexual misdemeanours of male teachers.

In recent years scandals only erupt when students and teachers compete for the same lovers. For example, Jeremy Inama was transferred to Pietersburg after it was discovered that he had threatened to fail girls unless they slept with him and raped the girlfriend of a student leader. The local Civic Association called a meeting at which schoolgirls testified that Jeremy had shown them pornographic literature before he had sex with them. The Association forced Jeremy to compensate the husband of one of his victims, who had threatened to shoot him, with R4 000. In another incident several

schoolboys threatened to assault Karetsane Morema - a teacher at the Mashile High School. Karetsane told schoolgirls that he would fail them unless they terminated their love affairs. Yet through time Karetsane had taken at least three schoolgirls as lovers. Once, he even stayed with a schoolgirl in the teachers' quarters.

Conclusions

To maintain that sexual repression and sexual liberation were the most important factors in the revolts that erupted in South Africa's rural areas in the 1980s would be as foolhardy as offering Reich's psychoanalytic account as a total explanation for advent of National Socialism in Germany.³⁷ Such a view is a vast over-exaggeration. Yet, it would be even more erroneous to suggest that any relationship between apartheid and sexual repression, visions of political liberation and sexual freedom, and between sex education and the post-apartheid situation is purely coincidental. As we have seen, in South African lowveld schools changing notions of sexuality were definitely connected to political transformations. Sexuality has shaped politics in a myriad of different ways, and has in turn been shaped by politics. In a similar manner as Reich's psychoanalysis provides unique insight into why fascist ideologies had such a pervasive, popular appeal in pre-war Germany, a Foucauldian perspective on sexuality illuminates significant aspects of the political struggles in South African rural areas. Despite its shortcomings³⁸, Foucault's emphasis on discourses of sexuality and the regulation of bodies enables us to transcend narrow, disembodied views of political programmes and to ground our analysis of politics in passions and sensations such as pain, anger and pleasure.

Perhaps the most consistent theme in the history of sexuality in the South African lowveld has been the subordination of young women. Yet this subordination is by no means an end in itself. It is rather a consequence of masculine fantasies about power. As elsewhere, sexuality is seen as a vital component in men's realisation of the 'individualised' and 'relational' modalities or aspects of personhood. With respect to the former modality, sexual virility is vital to the realisation of masculine agency, subjectivity and self-assertion. With respect the latter, sexuality creates progeny and networks of social relationships. Masculine power is indexed by the capacity to realise these potentials. For example, in his classical model of the agriculturally self-sustaining community, Meillassoux depicts the power of elders as vested in their ability to control of young women as the means of reproduction.⁴⁰ This view is also contained in Mbembe's comments about the banality of power in post colonial Africa. Mbembe describes the 'postcolony' as a world of 'anxious virility' in which the 'very act of exercising command cannot be separated from the way licentiousness is produced.'⁴¹ Postcolonial bureaucrats, teachers and prefects arrogate the excessive rights to take women and have practically unlimited rights over those under them. 'These "rights" exempt acts of copulation from inclusion in the category of what is shameful.'⁴²

³⁷ W. Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970).

³⁸ Critics have correctly asserted that Foucault overstressed the unidirectional narrative of supersession. Cultural change tends to be more various, more fractured, more incomplete. His work is also marked by an over-reliance on the texts of medical specialists. Finally, Foucault did not problematise the role of cultural exchanges across space. See D. Donham, 'Freeing South Africa', 16-17.

⁴⁰ C. Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁴¹ A. Mbembe, 'Provisional Notes on the Postcolony', *Africa*, 62, 1 (1992), pp. 3-37.

⁴² A. Mbembe, 'Provisional Notes on the Postcolony', p. 23

In conclusion, I would suggest that the personal experiences of the Comrades, who later became leaders of the new South Africa mediates between the local and national aspects of the politics of sexuality. Here, I find Rosaldo's concept of a 'cohort' - denoting individuals who share a collective identity and a sense of life's possibilities by virtue of having come of age together and sharing formative historical moments when crucial choices are made⁴³ - particularly illuminating. Harsh experiences during the years of Bantu Education alerted a cohort of South Africa's future leaders to the intimate connections between political and sexual repression, as in the suppression of homosexuality and pornography, and in the denial of women's right to safe abortions. However, the licentiousness of 'operation production', too, has had a profound impact upon sexuality. These unique sets of experiences render the reprehensible acts of Bushbuckridge's male politicians - such as the rape of a fourteen-year-old girl and the alleged killing of a spouse⁴⁴ - comprehensible.

ISAK NIEHAUS, School of Anthropology and Psychology, University of Natal, Durban 4041, South Africa.

⁴³ R. Rosaldo, *Illongot Headhunting, 1883-1974: A Study in Society and History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980) pp. 110- 120.

⁴⁴ In 1995 Patrick Mogale, an ANC senator representing the Northern Province was dismissed after being charged of raping and impregnating the fourteen-year-old daughter of his neighbour. At the time of the rape Mogale was a school principal (*African Sun* 6 to 20 February, 5 to 18 September 1996). In 1999 Luxon Mathebula, former head of Safety and Security in the Mpumalanga Provincial Parliament and his girlfriend were arrested and charged for the murder of his wife, Aletta Mnisi.