

## CHAPTER 3

### *Schooling: making men out of boys*

In 1863 Maritzburg High School, later known as Maritzburg College (MC), was established as the first government secondary school in the colony. Less than ten years later (in 1872) Hilton College was established by a teacher, Rev Orde Newnham, as a secondary school for the sons of gentlemen. These two schools, along with Bishops College (which became Michaelhouse (MH)) and Weenen County College, established the Midlands as the educational heart of the colony. This is a claim that the region still makes to this day.

The schools were primarily boarding establishments exclusively for white boys. With some exceptions, they drew their pupils from the most affluent sections of the white population. Many of the 33 foundation scholars of Maritzburg High School, for example, were from prominent city families: lawyers, journalists, senior civil servants and businessmen (Haw & Frame 1988:20–21).

Government's involvement in education was constrained by budget difficulties and much of the initiative was left to private individuals or religious orders. The school system was slow to develop. The first high schools for boys were established by an 1861 law in Pietermaritzburg (1863) and Durban (1866) respectively. These as well as the private schools were built and administered according to the English public school model.

In colonial settings, education was an integral part of social engineering. In the Transvaal, compulsory education was implemented for whites in 1907 as a way of tackling the related problems of increasing white poverty and the need to maintain race prestige against the black majority (Chisholm 1984). In Southern Rhodesia a similar policy was followed, though the ethnic divisions between English and Afrikaans speakers were significant (Challiss

1992). In Australia access to education was extended in the 1860s as reformers became concerned about social order and waifs turning to crime and cluttering up the streets (Gilding 1991:18–19). This resulted in a huge expansion in the school-going population. What is common in these experiences is that education was a site of contestation and that the form that it took mirrored the specific matrix of colonial power giving settler elites privileged access to schools. Those excluded or denied partial access belonged to marginal social groups, the working class, the colonised, or, in general terms, those outside the ruling bloc.

The schools were complicit in constructing male dominance and hegemonic masculinity within the colonial order in three distinct ways. They operated as a network for a settler gentry to dominate the colonial, commercial and agricultural order. Boys from these schools, particularly as time went on, kept in contact with one another and helped one another. They became magistrates, judges, lawyers, businessmen, politicians, ministers of state, colonial and later provincial administrators. The schools played a major role in masculinising the colony's structures of power, and in the process pushed women into the public and political margins. Secondly, the schools were the cradles of masculinity. From within these schools emerged social values which were spread by the masters and boys of these schools. In this latter sense, the concept of a 'defining institution' developed by Hilary Steedman (1987) in the context of the British public school system is extremely useful. Steedman argues that the public schools were '*invested with the authority of the state, because their former pupils dominated both government and administration*' and that, via indirect control over the curriculum and powerful prescriptions about school organisation and ethos, they were able to 'define all other components of the secondary system in their own image' (Steedman 1987:114). Unlike in Britain, where the connection between the public schools and access to Oxbridge was most important, in Natal entry to university was not critical. The University of Natal was only founded in 1910. Natal's elite boarding schools were powerful for symbolic rather than functionally educational reasons. They were signifiers of settler values. They were bastions of civilisation against the imagined threat of octopus-like black barbarity.

A third key contribution of the schools was their impact on personal relationships. Gender values were not produced by some mysterious or impersonal force. The repetition of gendered tasks, themselves predicated on entrenched hierarchies, was one way in which a particular reading of masculinity was created by the institution. Another, equally important, contribution to school masculinity derived from the complex relationships between the people operating within the gender regime of the school. The relationships between masters and boys, between prefects and juniors, and between the boys themselves all impacted on the received masculinity of the institution. The boys were not obedient choristers of an existing gender order. They actively contributed to the creation of masculinity. Boys operating

in a gendered context accommodated themselves to some of its constraints, challenged and defied others. In trying to deal with the 'toughening' processes of school life, boys developed forms of social organisation including gangs. It was within these groups that boys interpreted, reflected and occasionally challenged the hegemonic masculinity of the institution.

### *The development of an education system in the Midlands*

Before 1880 education was provided sparingly and unevenly for the children of settlers. In the more densely farmed areas there were private farm schools as well as a few small boarding schools. These were often of poor quality, being run by people without educational training and for financial rather than pedagogical reasons (Hattersley 1936:226–231). For children either in geographically isolated locations or from families with serious educational aspirations, private tutors provided further education. In the two main towns, government had provided education from as early as 1849. But there was no 'coherent system' of education (Behr & Macmillan 1971:10). In the 1860s and 1870s secondary schools began to develop in response to concern by parents and government.

The development of a schooling system, specifically secondary schooling, was the product of a number of diverse factors. From the government's side, the civilising mission necessitated the raising of the educational standards in the colony. Amongst the settler population, attitudes towards education differed widely. There was no direct link between education and job opportunity at this point, so education's importance lay in other areas. For the ONFs, education was becoming an important site of class affiliation. In 1880 it was still possible to enjoy status on the basis of land ownership and duration of residence in the colony, but the increase in white population made it an important class project to erect borders of class exclusivity. Other attributes were consequently added as necessary criteria for admission to the ranks of the gentry. One of the foremost was secondary schooling.

To understand the importance of schooling, we can employ Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Children were sent to school to get cultural capital. This particular form of class-based advantage is distinguishable from other forms of capital such as economic and social capital. Cultural capital in one of its forms

... is cultural 'background', a relationship to the dominant culture that is passed along by the family. If those who inherit this form of cultural capital enter the school system, they have a very high chance of obtaining valuable credentials, which in turn will give them access to favourable occupational and social positions. Thus educational creden-

tials largely confirm and certify family background; but they also constitute a new and highly convertible form of cultural capital (Müller, Ringer & Simon 1987:4).

One cannot simply read off from these governmental and class imperatives the form that secondary schooling came to take in Natal. Yet it was not a coincidence that secondary schooling was initially delivered by schools closely resembling the British public schools, or that their form and institutions came to define the model on which secondary schools were later developed in Natal.

For Natal's education administrators the English education system was the model. In the towns boys' and girls' model primary schools were established to provide elementary education to the broad bulk of the urban population. While this included some African and Indian pupils, these were the exceptions (Harley 1994:38–40). At the secondary level, conceived by definition as elite (few children reaching this level), the public schools were the source of inspiration. Maritzburg College catered for townfolk initially but soon developed a boarding establishment which served the influential farming constituency of the Midlands. Boarding schools had been introduced in England to deal with unruliness amongst the school-going children of the aristocracy. This and other features of the reformed public school system (including organised sports, prefects and a classics curriculum) became regarded as sound administrative and procedural features of secondary schools and over time became valued as crucial in making men out of boys.

ONFs believed that a 'good' secondary education was essential for boys. If one could afford it, one's children were sent to an English public school like Lancing, Haileybury or Uppingham. British education in this period was beginning to open doors into professions hitherto dominated by the aristocracy. The Cardwell reforms in Britain in the 1860s and 1870s ended the practice of purchasing military commissions. This opened up the army as a career opportunity to the new middle class. The same was true of the civil service. To provide the men of this rising class with the requisite values and ambitions, good secondary schooling became essential. Thus the connection between schooling and a career, hitherto weak, became strong, particularly for ambitious young men. Natal's colonial service was not large but its pay was good and it was far and away the largest employer of the white middle classes. A place within it depended on education or family connections. As time went on, these two entrance requirements merged.

ONFs were prescriptive about the gender component of the education offered to their sons. There were competing definitions of what it was to be a man. From the gentry's point of view, the crudities of the white working class and the lack of sophistication in African conceptions of manliness made it important to develop a distinctive reading of masculini-

ty. These concerns mirrored changes in the metropole. In the late Victorian period definitions of masculinity changed from emphasising earnestness, selflessness and integrity to stressing Spartan toughness (Mangan & Walvin 1987). The change was captured in the expression 'muscular Christianity' – a description which became synonymous with the public schools of this period (Mangan 1981; Mangan 1990). In line with metropolitan trends, the parents of school-going boys in Natal insisted upon or accepted the development of institutions which in turn reflected this gender imperative. The secondary boarding schools became places where boys were toughened into men.

### *The secondary boarding schools of the Natal Midlands*

Maritzburg College was unable alone to meet the needs of settlers for secondary education. In 1869 provision was expanded when Hermannsburg missionaries opened a boarding school at Greytown. It immediately drew off many of MC's pupils, demonstrating the local preference for boarding establishments. In 1872 Hilton College just outside Pietermaritzburg opened as the first private secondary boarding school. By 1875 a total of 73 pupils had enrolled (Haw & Frame 1988: chapter 1).

Sending a boy to boarding school was expensive and only a small proportion of settlers initially were prepared to make this outlay. In 1880, for example, MC charged 50 guineas a year and had only 34 boarders.<sup>1</sup> The Maritzburg College Register for the 1880s and 1890s shows that many boys left school to 'go farming', presumably when finances back home became tight. At this point MC was functioning primarily to service the growing colonial bureaucracy and the professional and commercial classes. While some of the boys entering the professions were from the Midlands, the bulk were from the resident urban population of Pietermaritzburg.<sup>2</sup>

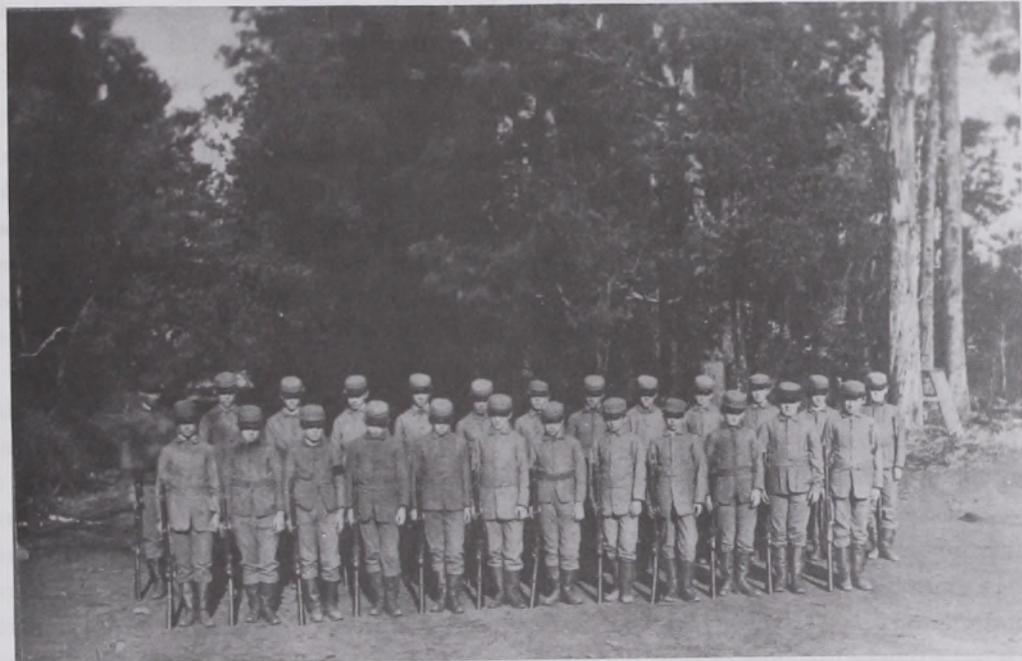
The schools may, for analytical convenience, be divided into three groups. The two oldest schools, MC and Durban High School (DHS), resembling English grammar schools, commanded a special and prestigious place in the secondary schooling arena of Natal (Randall 1982:11). A second category consisted of the private schools of Hilton, Michaelhouse and Weenen County College. Together these two categories constituted an elite – as MC boys made clear. They described 'low class fellows ... not attending College, Hilton, Michaelhouse or DHS' as 'borvers' (Haw & Frame 1988:231).

Hilton College was established in 1872. In the words of its first headmaster, Rev William Orde Newnham, 'his first and greatest desire was that "Hilton boys" should be synonymous

with "gentlemen" in the very best sense of the term, a boy who was honest and upright and true as steel' (Nuttall 1971:6).

Michaelhouse was started by the Anglican Church in Natal in 1896. It was built along the lines of Eton and Winchester to 'promote the idea of a learning community' (Randall 1982:19). Its headmaster initially had to be a man of the holy orders. James Todd, the first headmaster, believed that classics and maths were essential for 'producing men of understanding, thought and culture' (Barratt 1969:13). On the other hand, he had deep disdain for applied subjects like shorthand and bookkeeping and was deprecating about the manners and demeanour of some of the 'colonial boys' (Barratt 1969:15).

Weenen County College began in 1902. It was situated in the heart of the Midlands close to Mooi River. It was geographically the most accessible of the private schools and consequently attracted pupils from all the premier families in the neighbourhood. By 1910 it had a complement of 100 boarders and was playing rugby and cricket against the big four, MC, DHS, Hilton and Michaelhouse. It was owned and run by Ernest and Katharine Thompson and had no financial assistance from the church or old boys. It relied heavily on local



*Hilton College Cadet Corps 1881. Campbell Collections*

support. This it received. The local senator, addressing the prize-giving in 1913, said that 'the people of Weenen County felt a kind of proprietary interest in the School'. At the end of 1916 it closed when most of the staff and many of the senior pupils went on active service (Forsyth Thompson [n d]:10; Green interview 1992).

Before turning to the third category of school, it should be noted that the elite secondaries in time generated a demand for good primary ('preparatory') feeder schools. These either pre-existed, like Merchiston in Pietermaritzburg (established in 1892), or were created specially. Cordwalles was set up in 1910 by the Anglican Church to send well-prepared boys to Michaelhouse (Barratt 1969:49). This trend mirrored developments in Britain where primary schools began moving away from 'domestic education' to consciously providing the social and educational prerequisites for entry into the public schools (Honey 1987:153). This powerfully reinforced the ability of the elite secondaries to operate as defining institutions.

A third category of secondary institution comprised the government schools created after Natal had become part of the Union of South Africa. These included Estcourt, Greytown and Ixopo high schools, established between 1917 and 1919. Although they were not pretentious, they followed the pattern set down by the elite secondaries. They adopted the house and prefect system and competed determinedly in sports. From time to time under exceptional headmasters, they challenged the pre-eminence of the elite secondaries in sports or academics. By this time secondary schooling was recognised as important by the gentry at large. The move to scientific farming spurred farmers to send their sons to agricultural colleges (like Cedara) for which a secondary education was needed. Yet agriculture remained marginal in terms of profit, and many families could not afford to send some or all of their children to the more expensive elite secondaries. This breach was filled by the rural government high schools (*Greytown Schools* 1983?:13, 43; *Ixopo High School* 1965?; Pearse 1946; Haw & Frame 1988:231).

The government secondaries were an important locus of education in the Midlands. In some cases they were the result of local lobbying by prominent families, members of parliament and civil servants (frequently the resident magistrate). The Moors, for example, a powerful family in Estcourt which supplied Natal's last prime minister and a host of influential politicians and farmers, had a hand in the creation of the schools at Estcourt and Mooi River (the Weston Agricultural High School, opened in 1914). These schools were not designed for the gentry. J W Moor, a major mover in the establishment of Weston, had in mind a school for 'boys of poor parentage who were being set adrift into the world with no proper training or education'.<sup>5</sup>

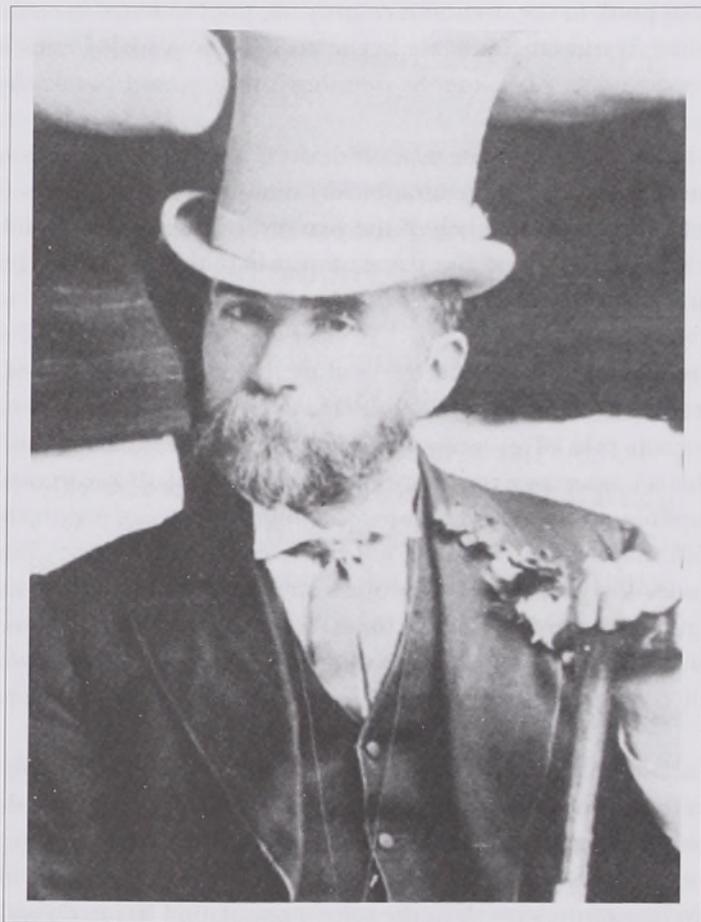
The status of schools changed over time. When secondary schooling was in its infancy, it became a way of maintaining a tight link between the old, established families who by and large patronised these institutions. As time went on and rural settlement grew more dense, it became necessary for the ONFs to admit newcomers into the fold. This occurred via a number of different mechanisms, including admission into the elite secondaries. In addition, the financial need of the schools themselves to take in more students diluted parochial exclusivity. The influx of a new class of immigrant (upwardly mobile, single, male, public school products of Britain) meant that the schools began to take in pupils from a wider social pool. In the twentieth century the pool widened even more so that the children of wealthy Transvaal capitalists began to become a major constituency. In this process, the elite secondaries became the defining institutions of Natal schooling.

The power and influence of the elite schools derived in large measure from being boarding schools, generally situated in geographically remote areas. The boys lived with their peers and the schoolmasters for much of the year, broken up by four holidays, occasional long weekends and an enforced Sunday outing when they were obliged to 'explore' beyond the bounds of the school.<sup>4</sup>

The parents were at ease with the idea of sending their sons off to school as early as age seven and expected them to be there for up to ten years. In this context, the school became a critically important part of growing up. John Honey, a scholar of the English public schools, notes that a boy's experience here was total and created 'an atmosphere of intense communality, capable of generating powerful emotions associated with the school itself' (Honey 1987:155). Loyalty for the school was built upon loyalty to one's house, to those in authority over one, to one's friends, to one's sports team. In this environment loyalty involved putting team before self. Team spirit became an important part of hegemonic masculinity, and was reflected in intense association with masculinist institutions such as sports clubs, military regiments and old boys' societies, and loyalty to class and gender sets.

But the growth of boarding schools was slow. In the rural areas schools only began to operate effectively in towns once the railways had linked them to the coast and the interior or, as R O Pearse puts it, once 'the unsettled life of a frontier town was giving place to a more ordered existence' (Pearse 1946:9). By the turn of the century, demand for schooling exceeded supply. Part of the growth in the school population has to do with simple demographic processes, but another factor was also beginning to play a part. The farming community in Natal was beginning to push up against the natural limits of land holding. The most remote corners of the Midlands, Underberg, were being occupied in the 1890s, but elsewhere families began to realise that large families meant that not all the offspring would be farmers. The whites-only civil service, with its preference for educated, old school

products and the ranks of professionals and business people, drove home the message that an education at one of the elite schools was a worthwhile investment. From 1900, therefore, with dips caused by financial downturn and the varying fortunes of the different schools, the number of boarders at the schools in question rose and remained high. Such was the demand that new high schools, with boarding establishment (the physical extensions of the government secondaries mentioned above), opened at Greytown (1923), Ixopo (1925) and Estcourt (1927).



*Clark, R D, Headmaster, Maritzburg College*

## *The masters and their pupils*

The ideals of the English public school system took root in Natal primarily via the exportation of its old boys to the colonies. From the outset Natal's schools were staffed by men from Britain, normally public school boys. There was a chronic shortage of locally trained teachers and it was necessary to obtain teachers from overseas.<sup>5</sup> But there were forces at work other than those of necessity. Natal's Council of Education stipulated that headmasters of DHS and MC should have a degree from an Irish or British university. Michaelhouse had a similar rule, and Hilton and Weenen County College seemed to have preferred such appointments.<sup>6</sup>

Maritzburg College's first headmaster (discounting its initial hesitant opening spell before it moved to its present site) was R D Clark (1879–1902). He was a graduate of Edinburgh University and New College, Oxford. Apart from his educational background he was well connected, having married the daughter of a former governor of Madras. He was also a prominent freemason (see chapter 5) and, via the marriage of his sister, connected to the extensive Gold family, well-known farmers in the southern Midlands. His deputy was also an Oxford graduate. His successors, E Barns and S Pape, were both from public schools and London University and Queen's College, Oxford, respectively. At the turn of the century, MC began to employ local teachers. Amongst the most outstanding were C T Loram (1897) and Alan Paton (later in 1928). Loram became in the 1920s an important spokesperson for liberal ideas of segregation. He served on the Phelps-Stokes Commission on African Education as well as the South African Native Affairs Commission. Paton became internationally famous for his novel *Cry the beloved country*, but was also important in national educational circles for his work at the Diepkloof Reformatory near Johannesburg. By the 1920s, MC had abandoned the tradition of preferring British graduates and was employing instead proven local pedagogues (Haw & Frame 1988:85, 156).

Hilton was much the same. Its first five headmasters, who ruled up to 1930, were all British graduates. The founder, Newnham, graduated at St John's College, Cambridge. His successor, Henry Ellis, was a Rugby boy and Cambridge graduate. His two assistant masters were from Exeter College, Oxford, and Eton College and Cambridge. Under Ellis (1878–1904) the influential views of Rugby's headmaster Thomas Arnold were implemented. Prefects were appointed and given great powers, rugby the sport was entrenched, the school's colours, emblem and motto were modelled on those of Rugby, and the entire system was 'based on authority and tradition'.<sup>7</sup> William Falcon (1906–1933) went to a public school and then to St John's, Cambridge. He taught at Charterhouse and was a member of Milner's Kindergarten in 1902. In 1909 the Hilton staff included three teachers from Cambridge,

one from Oxford, one from Glasgow University and one from the Royal College of Science, Dublin. Hilton began employing local graduates much later than MC. Michaelhouse, too, had a strong connection with Rugby. Its predecessor, Bishop's College in Pietermaritzburg, was headed by C C Prichard, curate at Rugby and Oxford graduate. Its first headmaster was a public schoolboy and Glasgow and Cambridge University graduate. He was followed by Canon E B Hugh Jones (1903–10) of Marlborough and Jesus College, Oxford. The following three headmasters were all public school products (Uppingham, Blundells and Charterhouse) and all were Cambridge graduates. A W S Brown (1910–16) was not unusual in his approach, which 'unhesitatingly put character before intellect' (Barratt 1969:52). At Weenen County College, the headmaster, Ernest Thompson, schooled at Haileybury (his brothers went to Marlborough) and graduated at New College, Oxford.

Although headmasters invariably put their stamp upon the schools, they were not alone in doing so. They tended to assemble masters whom they felt could carry out their mission. Many of these teachers, while sound academically, were 'tyrannical in the extreme'. Alan Paton, as a MC schoolboy, remembers that 'he forgot the Latin for "to carry" and was made (by Sarky or Sucky Sutcliffe, the Latin teacher) to go on all fours and carry books from one side of the classroom to the next' (Haw & Frame 1988:191). Sutcliffe had a drill sergeant way of teaching and beat boys regularly with a heavy wooden pointer to ensure memory. Pape, headmaster and teacher (1926–1937), ruled with his cane and was regarded by some as a 'rude, noisy bully'. He saw his task as to instil discipline and resuscitate the school. Boys disliked him for being unfair and 'anything but evenhanded in the justice he so liberally meted out' (Haw & Frame 1988:248–250). He beat pupils one cut for every punctuation mistake. In other cases he beat boys until an answer to a question in class was forthcoming. He also had the habit of caning an entire class either for good measure or when failing to find the culprit of an offence. But if there was a teacher who chillingly conjured up the educational spirit that pervaded these schools it was Carpenter, Pape's right-hand man. He was not a graduate (which probably accounted for his miserable attitude) but had taught at Michaelhouse before teaching English at MC.

A lonely, remote bachelor ... He struck real terror into the hearts of the College boys and few would dare pass his lair lest an unguarded cough bring forth the rodbearing master. Carpenter used to hate boys watching him eating and if he detected anyone watching him, summary justice would descend. As a result of this, the boys sitting closest to the High Table used to sit with their faces virtually immersed in their food (Maritzburg College Museum, display caption).

In our period the number of Midland boys at the private and government grammar schools grew steadily. Efforts by the state to facilitate this included reduced rail fees and the erec-

tion of boarding houses.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless the process was slow. At Hilton, for example, it was initially only the sons of the most prosperous families – Raw (Impendhle), McKenzie (Nottingham Road), Foster (Ixopo) – who were sent. By the early twentieth century, however, the membership of the old boys' society began to reflect the growth of the pupil pool.<sup>9</sup> MC began to take in ever larger numbers of boarders (many from the Midlands, the major feeder area). In 1888, 24 out of 96 boys were boarders. By 1890 boarder numbers had risen to 60. Although it became accepted that boys should have some secondary schooling, the sons of farmers frequently exited the system after Grade 8, or when family money ran out. Matriculation was not regarded as 'necessary' and when things were tight on the farm, boys were expected to forsake their studies and return home to work.<sup>10</sup>

The elite secondaries assisted the Natal gentry to construct class and gender identities. It became expected that prominent families would send their sons to one of these schools, and in many instances sons were sent to all three, depending on the financial position of the family.<sup>11</sup> Yet the elite schools acted more to exclude than to include. While the ranks of the gentry were gradually swelled by the products of these schools who remained in Natal, the vast majority of boys remained outside the charmed circle. Black (African and Indian) children were never admitted. The children of the less prosperous (most notably working-class white boys) were not admitted either – for these were the days of little financial assistance being offered to attend the elite schools, and where it was offered it was given to the sons of old boys. And yet the restricted admission of boys into the schools did not prevent them exercising great weight on colonial readings of masculinity. Precisely because the elite schools and their products defined masculinity, their influence reached every corner of the settler world.

### *School experience and the construction of masculinity*

Harsh elements were central to the construction of 'muscular Christianity' and were consciously inserted into the system. Teachers believed that it was necessary for boys to be beaten, to undergo hardship, in short, to be toughened.

A rare and revealing punishment book, 'A Record of Corporal Punishment – College, 1888–1918', included the prefatory note 'NB Only abnormal cases of punishment are recorded. Ordinary penalties are too frequent and frivolous to merit record.' The book is a record of brutality. In 1903, for example, 282 strokes were administered, at an average of 4.47 per punishment. In 1904 the number was up to 6,03 and in 1905, 5,96. In this year, on two occasions a boy received 12, and on one occasion 10 strokes. For truancy, an unfortunate received 14. It is interesting to reflect the concern with exactitude in the punishment

book. Connell argues that violence as part of masculinity became rational and scientific in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Connell 1995:192). The punishment book reflects the concern with regulating violence and relating it, scientifically, to a particular offence. Rather like adding a neutralising agent to a dangerous acid, punishment became the exact science of correction.<sup>12</sup> A breakdown of punishment reveals the mind of the punishment dispensers and gives some idea of the narrow borders within which boys were expected to walk to avoid beating.

*Categories of punishment and number of boys punished therefor during the period 1888–1905*

- Lazy, Neglect, Untidy, Careless, Shirking work, Failure, Cut work, Inattention = 91
- Disobedient, Impertinent, Impudent, Cheek, Disrespectful, Insolence = 22
- Dishonest, Cheating, Truant, Cribbing = 30
- Thuggish, Disorderly, Riotous, Vandalising, InkSlinging, Talking in Exams, Cut Detention, Misconduct, Brawling = 119
- Bullying = 6

The above is an incomplete list of corporal punishments meted out by the headmaster and (sometimes) his assistant. Headmasters differed in their attitude to corporal punishment. Clark was considered 'lenient almost to a fault', 'although many of his pupils came to know the sting of "Black Maria" (his cane)'. On the other hand, Barns and Pape were severe and beat pupils inexhaustibly (Haw & Frame 1988:176).

By far the most beatings were delivered by assistant masters and prefects. These not infrequently involved excesses, even by the standards of the time. In the 1890 the following incident occurred at MC. The science master, Mr Greatorex, a man of 'fiery temper' lost his temper and beat a boy seated in his class around the head, sending him eventually tumbling to the floor, apparently lifeless. The boy recovered, but a scandal developed in the press, causing numbers at the school to fall from 153 to 42 in three years (Haw & Frame 1988:121).

The history of MC is replete with tales of quick recourse to the cane and of the undiscerning and unjust nature of punishment. But this is not confined to MC. At Hilton in the late 1870s beatings were regular. An old boy remembered that 'Mr Crowe, the senior master, was a very good teacher; but nearly every day some boy would get a sjamboking, or a cut or two.' On one occasion a pupil was beaten two or three strokes for asking for a new copy book!<sup>13</sup>

It was not only assistant masters at MC who were to blame for the carnage. In 1890 the prefect system was introduced at College to cope with the increased numbers of boarders. Clark, the headmaster, gave the prefects extensive powers including the (illegal) power to inflict corporal punishment without seeking his permission and without recording the infraction. In a subsequent enquiry, the Council of Education concluded that

... at times boys have been treated with undue severity, and at other times with too much indulgence, and have been the objects of contemptuous and unbecoming language, on the part of one or more of the Masters. Corporal punishment has been inflicted with too great frequency ... (but) in many instances when deserved was inadequate ... (The headmaster said) that at least one half of the boys sent to him for corporal punishment were undeserving of it, but that he felt it his duty, in order to uphold the position and authority of the Assistant Masters, to inflict punishment without enquiry (Haw & Frame 1988:127).

Corporal punishment in the period under discussion was considered normal and, within limits, essential. Most boys preferred a beating to other non-physical forms of punishment. There was a macho bravado that accompanied beatings. They challenged one another to 'races' to see who would get the most strokes over a stipulated period of time. In a vivid account of the aftermath of a beating at Michaelhouse, some of the schoolboy fascination for, and reverence of, the beating is apparent.

After the beating it was the privilege of one's dormitory mates to inspect the damage. I was disappointed that there was not more enthusiasm. 'What, no blood?' said Crowe minor. 'Don't call that much,' said Heathfield. 'Alfie (the teacher) took pity on you, you weed,' jeered Elison, who was measuring my bruises with a ruler. Nevertheless, for the remainder of that day I was a little hero and for ten days after, the discolourations were there for all to inspect in the bath-house (Stiebel 1968:189).

Beyond this there was an acceptance that it was 'right'. 'I am sure we [we]re all the better for it' (Ixopo High School 1965?:5-6). In an interview, an old boy said that caning didn't bother him - 'it purged my guilt'. He did not bear grudges and respected teachers so long as they were fair and just (Alcock interview 1992). Beatings were therefore accepted not just because the system required them but because they proved masculinity. John Honey's description of the public school experience of masculinity is apposite. '[L]earning to endure humiliation and physical pain, to come to terms with public opinion and to know one's place, rising to be a house prefect, school prefect or games captain, and arriving at the end with that quality of self-confidence and poise which came to be the hallmark of the public school man' (Honey 1987:155).

## *Prefects*

At Hilton, prefects were introduced by the first headmaster, Newnham. They were given the power to 'put any boy "in bounds"' which was to 'make him stand in one spot for as long as they thought was necessary as a punishment' (Nuttall 1971:19–20). In 1878 the next headmaster extended the prefect system and the power of the prefects closely following the Rugby model. He issued a school constitution which outlined the tasks of prefects (praepositors).

To call the Roll at the hours required by the Headmaster; to punish loiterers and to report absentees. To keep order in the dormitories, at meal times, and at all but school times; To regulate and enforce the playing of all Big-side games; To punish all minor offences with impositions (not to exceed 100 lines of Greek, or 200 lines of Latin, or 300 lines of English); To punish deliberate disobedience to their authority with corporal punishment, to be administered by one Praepositor in the presence of at least one other; such punishment not to exceed eight stripes with a light cane or wattle switch ... Provided that any boy awarded such corporal punishment shall have the right to appeal ... to a court composed of the Head of School and an equal number of Praepositors and heads of forms. If such court of appeal shall confirm the original sentence, it shall be carried out publicly before the School assembled (Nuttall 1971:176).

The prefect system became integral to the running of the school and the powers of the prefects entrenched. A diary of a Hilton pupil in 1913 gives some indication of this. 'Quintus (Robinson) [clearly the nickname of a prefect. RM] went to get sticks at Henderson's for hidings. He seems fed up but says he has to flog ... we had the kaffirs job of clearing the grounds again today ... I and Muller got two cuts each with a stick about as thick as my wrist we were accused of not working hard enough on the field' (Nuttall 1971:49–50).

It was the new boy who bore the brunt of the prefect system. He could 'not walk across certain lawns. The corridor of the main building and past the studies is out of bounds for him. If he offends against these or other rules, he may be summoned to the prefects' room, and, provided that the sanction of the housemaster has been previously obtained, he may be corrected with a cane' (Hattersley 1945:126).

At MC the prefect system likewise entrenched itself, but by the 1920s it had exceeded its usefulness. It was little more than a tyranny of big over small and contributed to a marked decline in the number of boarders (Haw & Frame 1988:236).

With respect to punishment and prefects, the rural government secondaries were much the same. At Ixopo, for example, “Boss John” (Mr Robinson, the headmaster) used the cane freely ... How dearly he loved to line us round the room for mental arithmetic at about 2.30 on a summer’s afternoon, when all were feeling somewhat drowsy. It was a case of “quick’s the word” for if you missed your answer you got a cut’ (Ixopo High School 1965? 5–6).

The inflicting of corporal punishment with such ease and frequency cannot be explained solely with reference to persuasive British educational models and even less to sadism (though both played some part). Within Natal there were three sources which demanded corporal punishment. The parents, who beat their own children, were a major factor. The boys, as we saw above, another. The state’s educational officers were a third. In about 1912 an inspector reported adversely on Ixopo Government School.

Std III appears to need special attention and treatment. This class consists of 14 pupils, all but three of whom are boys. These boys ... are more interested in their shooting and swimming than in their school work. They are not altogether dull, but they are in need of less gentle treatment than they are receiving at present (Ixopo High School 1965?:15).

### *Initiation, fagging and bullying*

If the dangers of corporal punishment from teachers and prefects for boys appeared huge, they were nothing compared to what boys, particularly juniors, had to face on a day-to-day basis from fellow pupils.

Initiation awaited all (boarding) pupils. It was an ordeal, part of the toughening process, part of the assertion of hierarchical power by senior over junior boys but also part of the creation of identity. Tolson’s description of these rituals is: ‘the boy was brutally initiated into a sadistic culture of hearty back-slapping’ (Tolson 1977:34). At MC, ‘O’Grady’s Drill’ was held. It involved being drilled by a senior boy, and if mistakes were made, having to run the gauntlet of senior boys with knotted towels. New boys were also required to sing a song at a specially arranged concert. If the senior boarders did not like it, the offender had to swallow a desertspoonful of a concoction including mustard, soap and castor oil (Haw & Frame 1988:225).

At Hilton, ‘squeakers’ (in the 1880s) and ‘new poops’ (1890s and beyond) were subjected to ‘semi-barbarous’ initiation by the seniors known as ‘new poop or kid fixing’ (Hattersley

1945:59). Specialities were the sailor's toss and merciless ducking in the dam. 'Ugly tales have been told about small boys' sufferings down the hole in Devil's Decoy [a particularly deep part of one of the Estate's pools which "appeared to reach sinister depths" (Hattersley 1945:60)] now filled in and no longer a torture chamber' (Nuttall 1971:28–29).

At Michaelhouse things were similar. Ruth Pennington, wife of a Michaelhouse master in the 1920s, described initiation of 'cacks' as 'unbelievably terrible' and 'absolutely brutal' (Pennington interview 1992). New boys had to stand on top of a pile of boxes and recite poetry or sing. If the offering was not appreciated, the boxes would be kicked down. Another form of initiation was the 'long-established practice of initiating newcomers by pitting them against physically superior pugilists' (Barratt 1969:55). And ducking in the big communal bath was common, taken to the extent on occasion of near-drowning.

At times initiation might not be so traumatic an experience. If a boy was physically strong or surrounded by a group of close friends from his primary school days, it might be mild. In the government country secondaries, initiation existed but was generally milder in form and less important as a ritual of institutional entry (Alcock interview 1992; Nicholson interview 1992).

Initiation occurred with the blessing of the headmaster and teachers, and naturally with the hearty endorsement of the prefects. As Nuttall puts it for Hilton, 'The school's cherished reputation for toughness resulted in many a sensitive youngster suffering agonies of fear at the toughening process' (Nuttall 1971:28–29). Some steps were taken to prevent 'excesses' and Ellis, the Hilton headmaster, used to check for example that beatings by prefects at the site of initiation (the dam) were not excessive, but for the most part either a blind eye was turned or it was regarded as a healthy and important part of the extra-curricular activities of the school (Haw & Frame 1988:225; Pennington interview 1992). Remembering the Michaelhouse regime in the early 1920s, J W Cross said that the masters had the view that the school could do without namby pambies (Cross interview 1993).

Fagging was common at the private schools but less so at MC. It is not clear from where the term originates, though its misogynistic echoes are unmistakable. It involved junior boys doing chores for older boys in a peculiar mimic of the family situation.<sup>14</sup> Fagging was part of a broader institutional set of codes developed by the senior boys to regulate school life beyond the classroom. Apart from the services actually provided by junior boys for senior boys – making their beds, polishing their shoes, buying them tuck, etc – the extended fagging system had as its rationale the establishment of a hierarchy. The system was structured around length of enrolment in the school. In the first two years at Hilton you were a 'new poop', subject to the whims of senior boys. Your inferiority would be drummed into you

ceaselessly throughout these two years. You were at the mercy of prefects and seniors. You could be caned for not watching First XV rugby or for not remembering the names of the cricket or rugby teams.<sup>15</sup> In boarding houses with tyrannical prefects and seniors you could be summoned and forced to do anything. In houses where paternalism held sway, the service ethic would be imparted – ‘new poops’, for example, would clean sporting equipment. To remind juniors of their place, on Friday evenings, they would be subjected to ‘Hot oven’. ‘Old poops’ sat on the beds with their legs against the wall while ‘new poops’ were forced to scuttle beneath, being flayed by the older boys as they went. A further, more regulated, reminder of place came after evening cocoa break when prefects beat offenders for offences such as ‘walking over the grass’ (Fly interview 1992).

Fagging existed and continued because it was endorsed by teachers, enforced by seniors and accepted by juniors. There were rarely inroads made into it as a system. Occasionally a new headmaster would recognise its dangers and attempt to break or refashion it, via an attack on the power of the prefects. Boys who rebelled did so by fighting their oppressor, but this did not change the system, though it might resolve an individual case of injustice. For the most part, the juniors accepted the authority of the prefects and seniors and, when the system was working well, respected the prefects (Hattersley 1945:71; Nicholson interview 1992).

It is not easy to define bullying in the system described above. On the one hand, bullying – the use of position and power by seniors to coerce juniors – was inscribed within the practice of fagging and was consequently regarded as legitimate. On the other, ‘bullying’ was often used to refer to actions which reflected inequalities of power (status, seniority and strength), offended a sense of ‘fair play’ and were thus regarded as illegitimate.

Bullying, like initiation, also had the purpose of creating sameness and outlawing difference. Uniformity was created around house and school identity and around the respect for school sports heroes and love of games. Unquestioning loyalty to the school or house was an expression of uniformity.

The institution became more revered than its purpose and the moral imperative to be loyal took on a greater importance than any evaluation of the object of loyalty however sincere ... Powerful rites of intensification were fostered to this end. These consensual rituals bound together the whole group as a moral community (Mangan 1981:143).

For those who were perceived as weak and different, a grim fate was in store. Little is known about the secret lives of anguish in the boarding schools. There is nevertheless sufficient evidence to show that intolerance of difference (sexual, social, morphological) existed. If

one's voice was too high, one's legs too thin, ability at games absent, one became the object of ridicule. In order to avoid constant humiliation, boys fitted in. Difference was suppressed, uniformity championed.

The oppression of junior pupils by seniors and the release of the pack instinct to correct a black sheep were also condoned.<sup>16</sup> At MC, the punishment book records very few cases of action against bullying. On a rare occasion at Hilton, 'an overgrown "new poop" was taught a lesson by two younger boys who happened to be old poops. They beat him up. Ellis [the headmaster] intervened and the Head Boy "soundly spanked" them' (Hattersley 1945:47).

Bullying was common. At MC around 1880 a group of boys had, as their 'main delight', 'to bully unmercifully a gentle, studious, mother's boy nicknamed 'Bully'. Besides teasing him relentlessly, they were in the habit of jostling the unfortunate 'Bully' into the *sluit* or seizing his canvas book bag and twisting it until the band around his neck almost strangled him' (Haw & Frame 1988:48–49) At Hilton in the 1890s '[a] sadist who ironically called himself "Gentle Hugh" ... had an evil reputation for cruelty to smaller boys and was remembered by at least one of them as "a nasty looking specimen whom I feared and despised"' (Nuttall 1971:28–29). At Michaelhouse 'a refined form of sadism was to place bees on the bare stomachs of small boys and rub the stings in' (Barratt 1969:40). Conformity was a powerful drive in this system. To avoid being bullied required first accepting the rules of the system and one's own place within it, and then endorsing the system. For those who either could not or would not fit, the weight of cruelty was heaviest. A stutterer, for example, would be singled out for harsh treatment – having to stand on a table and tell jokes, much to the delight of the listeners (Alcock interview 1992).

For the most part, bullying occurred without official intervention or censure. It was the result of many things; the atmosphere of violence engendered by corporal punishment and the power of prefects, (possibly) the broader social context of settler violence in Natal, the large age gap of pupils, from 12 to 19 and by psychological factors.<sup>17</sup> This last point requires elaboration. Michael Kaufman argues that being a man (in contemporary Western society) involves being tough and taking opportunities to demonstrate this toughness. This is, according to Kaufman, a result of men being 'unsure of their own masculinity and maleness'. In the schools, toughness involved dishing out and enduring pain and discomfort (Barratt 1969:25; Kaufman 1987:14–15). Andrew Tolson explains the phenomenon of aggression and violence between boys in terms of their maturation trajectory: As a boy 'grows up, the ambivalent structure of his masculine identification becomes a quest for resolution, and a boy develops a compulsive need for recognition and reward. In the culture of masculinity, rewards are always distant, at a premium. They must be fought over, competitively, through a long struggle for supremacy' (Tolson 1977:25).

## *General living conditions*

The boarding establishments were generally devoid of human and material comfort. Virtually all commentators describe conditions as 'spartan'. Until the twentieth century, baths at the private schools were taken in the open, frequently literally necessitating a breaking of the ice in winter. There was no hot water other than that fetched by juniors for the seniors. Bathing was communal. At Michaelhouse, for example, the bathroom consisted of 'a large iron tank capable of holding 24 bathers and "a species of shower bath" – a perforated pipe running round the room; hot water could only be obtained in cans from the kitchen wing' (Barratt 1969:18). It was consequently also a place favoured for fagging and bullying. An indication of this is given in the terse statement by Haw and Frame that 'opprobrium' was attached to shirkers of showering (Haw & Frame 1988:229). Being isolated, the benefits of modernisation came late, Hilton, for example, receiving electricity only in 1926. Dormitories were very sparse, containing a bed and a trunk per boy and nothing else. Medical attention was rudimentary. At MC it was believed by pupils that all ailments were treated with castor oil, so most bore illness stoically. Testimony to the conditions pertaining at these schools were the catastrophic epidemics which from time to time afflicted them. At Hilton, for example, one boy died and 14 per cent of the school was affected in 1919 by scarlet fever. And in the following year enteric fever took the lives of five boys (Hattersley 1945:58).

Perhaps the source of most discontent amongst schoolboys was the food. The records of these schools are filled with constant complaints by boys and parents concerning the quality and amount of food.<sup>18</sup> The schools generally responded by arguing the benefits of a lean diet – a lean, fit and tough boy. This was not always convincing. Throughout the period, maize porridge and bread were the staple, and meat was rare. Initially sugar was an unexpected and miserly addition to the tea, though this improved.

In so far as the human warmth of the institutions was concerned, this too was ladled out sparingly. It frequently fell to the wives of teachers, particularly of the headmasters, to dispense the necessary. This involved having boys around for tea in the afternoons. Efforts were made to give every boy at the school such an outing each year. Apart from the cakes which were eagerly guzzled, these functions served to reduce the emotional barrenness of the schools. Ruth Pennington remembers comforting homesick and miserable boys, and sometimes holding their hands when they had received bad news, such as a death in the family. This was all the female company that a boy was likely to receive (Pennington interview 1992). There were very few women physically within the schools. At the turn of the century, at Michaelhouse for example, there were only three – the wife of a teacher, a matron and a music teacher (Barratt 1969:27).

## *Personal relations, friendship and gangs*

Boys belonged to a range of formal groupings including the sports team, the academic class and the house. Beyond these groups, all boys with the exception of 'two or three solitaries who disliked gang life' (Stiebel 1968:158) also belonged to informal groupings.

There were three types of informal male grouping. The smallest was the close friendship, generally a one-on-one relationship. Here boys were able to find comfort, to explore different ways of relating, to escape, if but momentarily, the prescription of school masculinity. The second comprised a small number of boys who generally allied themselves on entering the school. There was protection in numbers and comfort in the known. Such groups would form the unit for extramural activities, especially during the unstructured time of the weekends. The largest group was the gang. Frequently it was based on a hierarchical principle, a senior boy and his mates constituting the core. The periphery might be made up of younger boys belonging to the same family, or of younger boys with some claim to gang-affiliation, for example sporting prowess. Gangs were often led by boys from the first cricket or rugby teams. It was not uncommon for a friendship group to be transformed into a gang as boys proceeded through their schooling years. Gangs were generally defined in opposition to other gangs and to juniors.

The most common group was the friendship group, which was normally established in the first year of school. 'At the beginning of each school year, new boys, unless they had friends or relatives already at the school, formed themselves into gangs which usually remained intact until school leaving. The number of boys in a gang varied, the smallest was two, the largest a dozen or more' (Stiebel 1968:158).<sup>19</sup> New boys came defensively together to face the new, alien and intimidating school environment (Fly interview 1992). Once formed, the friendship group performed a variety of functions including providing protection against other groups and seniors, companionship and a further source of identity (Cross interview 1993). Over time, as the boys moved through the school, the nature of the groups changed. They became close-knit – boys gave one another nicknames to ward off the depersonalising 'major', 'minor' and 'tertius' used to distinguish one 'Smith' from another. They also coined names for teachers, generally of a derogatory kind, to cement one another in a collective identity against the dispensers of knowledge, punishment and routine. At MC, for example, speech peculiarities were singled out to identify teachers. There was 'Twicky' Oberle, who had a slight lisp and used to say 'Now this one will be a little twickie', 'Scaatch' Leach, whose Yorkshire accent was lampooned, as was his concern that boys not 'scaatch my car', and Duck or Quack Kingdon, who had a 'peculiar quacking manner of speech' (Haw & Frame 1988:193–194). Gangs also became the place for expressions of

discontent and rebellion. The most common forms were smoking, going out of bounds and fruit raids (Haw & Frame 1988:229–230).

Despite occasional rebellion, boys in groups tended to support rather than undermine the school regime, especially its gender regime. 'Hints of non-conformity were suppressed by the boys themselves, and their informal culture was at every point bound up with, and supportive of, the ethic of the school' (Tolson 1977:35). Publicly, the rules of the system were obeyed. Boys accepted their place within the school hierarchy, knowing that to challenge it, and the conventions that supported it, was to risk victimisation. As Victor Stiebel put it, bullying was experienced by 'those boys who expected to be persecuted (knowing that they did not fit in), the bumptious and the timid' (Stiebel 1968:149). No boy was always within (or outside) the system, however. Moments of defiance, unwitting transgression of rules, or infringement of codes could bring violent recrimination and a reassertion of rules. In their responses to power inequalities and to violence, boys did not challenge the dominant masculinity.

Friendship groups are recorded at Hilton as early as the 1880s. A well-known one was the 'breakneck gang'. It 'was skilled in the use of a monkey rope for the descent of a steep cliff ... Breaking bounds at night ... (gang members) would take with them supplies of bread, cocoa, and if possible a fowl, and make for a cave at the foot of the falls. In warm weather a midnight bathe in an adjacent pool might follow' (Hattersley 1945:47). At Michaelhouse, Stiebel's friendship group in the 1920s spent Sundays together when it was mandatory to leave the school grounds and enjoy the outdoors. They hid away from other groups and took 'calm pleasures'. 'We were immensely happy to shed the routine of school life, to cook our skoff, to gorge it and then to lie flat on our backs, reading, gossiping or snoozing' (Stiebel 1968:160).

Friendship groups could be transformed over time into larger, coercive units, which in this chapter I have termed gangs. But there were other ways in which gangs came into being. At Michaelhouse '[l]arge gangs consisted of a chieftain – usually one of the school's idols – who had gathered around him younger brothers, relatives and friends ... for those subjected to bullying, it was well to avoid' (Stiebel 1968:158).

The friendship group had the capacity to challenge dominant school masculinity, but failed to do so. For the weak and the timid, they existed as an enclave, sitting uneasily side by side with dominant school forms of expression and organisation. Their failure to move beyond the margins is to be explained by the fact that at inception the groups were defensive units for young boys with little influence in the system. Later, members of the friendship groups became seniors and in the process were toughened and inured to violence. To

be violent was to express one's masculinity. Violence resolved difference. By adolescence boys no longer sought or expected to be comforted. 'Nobody wanted coddling' (Alcock interview 1992). In this transition, dominant school masculinity was embraced. The other informal social grouping, the gang, was less equivocal in its acceptance of dominant masculinity. It easily accommodated expressions of toughness and was run along the hierarchical lines familiar to the schools.

The most promising site of challenge to dominant masculinity was the close friendship. This can provide 'a model for nonhierarchical, reciprocal relations that run counter to the hierarchical modes that have dominated Western society' (Diamond & Quinby 1988:ix). The one-to-one friendship permitted the exploration of intimacy and sexuality, two areas covered by taboo. If these subjects could be brought out into the open, if the sensitivity and trust which could be developed in close friendships was integrated into styles of male relating, then dominant masculinity might be shifted.

A first, and major, difficulty was in establishing close friendship. Close male friendships challenged the ethos of the team. While everything in school was done in groups, it was a potential statement of dissidence to form a close friendship, from which others were excluded. Secondly, there was suspicion about boys who talked about their inner emotions. M C C Adams noted that in the British public schools in the early twentieth century, 'To be masculine was to be unemotional, in control of one's passions' (Adams 1990:25). The expression of individual emotion was considered to be female and was discouraged (Heward 1988).

It was sometimes acceptable to have close friendships with women, though there were precious few opportunities. Stiebel was lucky enough to develop a friendship with his music teacher. 'Whilst I was at Michaelhouse a friendship developed between us which became so close that it lasted after I had left the school. It would be difficult to overstate her importance, but I can say that without her warming presence I do not know what would have become of me' (Stiebel 1968:157). I have no comparable description of male friendship, though many of my informants spoke fondly of special school friends, with whom they had kept in contact through 60 years and more (Cross interview 1993; Fannin interview 1992). Such post-school contact suggests a depth to these friendships which distinguished them from the other forms which I have described above.

Apart from the reasons already mentioned, attitudes towards sexual conduct were a major stumbling block. The attitude towards sex was ambivalent. On the one hand, there was curiosity; on the other, suspicion. The way in which sex was approached also changed over time. A range of informants, speaking about the turn of the century and the period before

the First World War, stated that sex was not discussed at all (Pennington interview 1992; Ogilvie interview 1992). Others denied that boys ever explored sex with one another (Smythe interview 1993). No written source that I have consulted sheds any light on this early period. There are, however, comparative accounts which are suggestive. In the English public schools at the turn of century, sexual repression was the norm. Boys were told that masturbation would make them blind or insane and there were cases of suicide and self-mutilation by boys trying to conquer sexual feelings (Adams 1990:31; Hall 1991:30). Women (in the form of the mother) were revered. Bizarre attitudes towards the opposite sex were held, resulting in sadism partly a result of 'resentment of her place on the moral pedestal'. Where women ceased being 'pure' and failed to fit the male-designated social role, they were reviled (Adams 1990:18, 20). It is likely that forms of sexual expression changed in the schools after 1918. The catastrophic effects of war allied to a greater openness about sexual matters provided new ways of talking about and experimenting with sex. The written accounts available for the Midland schools are post-war and informants who spoke of sexual exploration at schools were themselves products of the post-war era (Braithwaite interview 1993).

Sex was generally handled by pupils in two ways: publicly, via group discussion and activities, and privately (masturbation). Both these forms tended to be acknowledged and accepted by boys, though not by teachers. In an exclusively male environment sexuality could not but be related to other males. While this might have had nothing to do with homosexual behaviour as it is at present understood – the exercise of sexual choice exclusively in relation to other males – it was so construed in the boarding schools when masturbation, for example, became a sensual or loving act.

In terms of the international climate of sex, the late nineteenth century was not propitious for a challenge to hegemonic heterosexuality. Lynne Segal has suggested, following Foucault, that in the nineteenth century the emergence of homosexuality coincided with, and was linked to, the disappearance of male friendship. 'Intense male friendship was perceived as inimical to the smooth functioning of modern institutions like the army, the bureaucracy, educational and administrative bodies. Homophobia was the chief weapon against too great an intimacy in male friendships' (Segal 1990:139). Robert Nye offers a complementary explanation for the discovery of 'sexual perversion' in the 1870s and 1880s in France. Here the sexual witchhunt had to do with military defeat (against Prussia) and resultant national shame (Nye 1993:98). A consequence was that within public discourse masturbation became a source of disdain and homosexuality an issue of censure. Science regarded both of these as symptoms of 'degeneration', a form of insanity (Nye 1993:100–101). In the 1880s homosexuality became stigmatised as everything 'front-line troops of patriarchy' were not (Tosh 1994:193). At the same time the challenge of the

transgressive sexual politics of people like Oscar Wilde to the heterosexist nature of society was making little headway (Dollymore 1991). Similarly, early twentieth-century feminists were unsuccessful in advancing debate about sexuality in terms other than ones which propped up hegemonic heterosexist ideas of women as the sexual servants of men (Lewis 1994).

In the colonial context at this time, heterosexuality was becoming entrenched. A dichotomised identity emerged where real men were pure, healthy and heterosexual and 'other' men were not heterosexual: effeminate and transvestite. In South Africa the historical literature on male sexuality is sparse. In a rare and illuminating article, Zackie Achmat argues that the absence of serious treatment of homosexuality is political – obscuring the politics of desire, shunting it to the (racial) margins, leaving normative heterosexist discourse intact (Achmat 1993). He claims that homosexuality was a liberating practice for the colonised subject, but in seeking to contain that subject and prevent disruption within the social order the colonist effected a conjunction of racial inferiority and sexual deviance in the identity of the colonised subject, and in this way stamped out or contained the possibilities of a liberatory discourse and practice. This was made easier by the development of a homosexual culture in the discrete environs of prisons and mining compounds populated primarily by black men.

It is not clear when and how sexual prejudice began to manifest itself in the schools. There was a good deal of ignorance amongst boys and men about sex (Hall 1991:4). Conditions were rife for misinformation on subjects such as masturbation. Sex thus occupied a place of mystery and danger in the worlds of schoolboys. Exactly how boys made sense of their own sexuality and gave expression to their own desires is difficult if not impossible to know. This is not surprising as boys and men had great difficulty in talking about sexual matters and references to such prejudice are effectively absent from the historical record.

Society-wide sexual values were not always the arbiters of sexual conduct in schools. At times boys were able to flout convention and explore sexual relations with other boys. But sexual activity at other times was censured. Homophobia was a factor in close friendships. The stigmatisation of 'being a homosexual' was a danger, no matter how innocent and platonic a friendship might be.<sup>20</sup> For boys wishing to develop close friendships the challenge was to present themselves as good, pure fellows. In this way they could shelter under the mantle of school reverence for companionship and comradeship. But not all boys were interested in establishing close friendships or creating a safe space in which to explore sexuality with another. Most seemed 'oversexed' and were simply interested, according to Stiebel, in satisfying 'their desires in a variety of ways' (Stiebel 1968 172).

Victor Stiebel's accounts of his days at Michaelhouse are by far the fullest and most candid description of the manifestations of schoolboy sexuality. In his memoirs he distinguishes between 'full-blooded homosexuality' of which he doubted that there was any at the school – 'I do not believe that many of the boys went the whole hog.' On the other hand, he freely admits that 'sexstimulation ... was accepted and no one was shocked to see in broad daylight a big boy pressing urgently with his body against a wall or a tree a boy who was smaller; both would be smiling' (Stiebel 1968:173).<sup>21</sup> This was accepted by boys as 'a natural part of school life'. Some of these liaisons appear to have been forced, but Stiebel notes that it was preferable 'if a partner could be found to co-operate'. Often such arrangements had the advantage of a senior boy offering to "protect" a younger boy' (Stiebel 1968:172). Such an arrangement would involve sexual activity as well as friendship and chores by the junior and assistance by the senior. Indications are, however, that at other times any hint of sexual impropriety on the part of boys would be barracked. Boys discovered masturbating, in private or with another, would be taunted and become the butt of jokes. Much of the activity seems to have been misogynistic. Swear words, which abounded at these schools, are not contained in the record. Baker refers to the quality of swearing, however, as the 'dirtiest, meanest, scurviest trick of a set of the lowest half-bred Kafir curs that ever were littered' (Baker 1987:129). Nor do we have details of the 'dirty stories' so frequently told (Stiebel 1968:173). Yet they are likely to have emphasised sexual difference, and in the sexual dualism which they invoked, contained an assertion of female inferiority. We have some oblique references. The schools preferred male teachers, and when a woman was employed, she was subjected to an ordeal. At MC around 1910 one such unfortunate teacher was 'the butt of almost continuous ragging by the barbarous horde of adolescents she was expected to teach. Much of the ragging took the form of "sexually ambiguous remarks"' (Haw & Frame 1988:195). Also at MC, a major part of the new boys' concert was to enquire about the sexual knowledge of the incoming pupils (Haw & Frame 1988:227). This generally involved humiliating boys who showed their ignorance. The language used is not stated, but in the ritual there is a swagger which emanates from male power sexually to dominate women. In an interesting comparative study, White and Vagi argue that boarding schools developed 'hypermasculinity and attendant antifemale rituals' (White & Vagi 1990:68). In more recent times the schools have been characterised as places of unrestrained sexual experimentation and display. It is freely admitted that mutual masturbation sessions in dormitories and games involving the measuring of erections and the power of ejaculation occurred. Whether these activities had their antecedents in the period under discussion, the evidence does not reveal.

Sexual exploration involving two consenting males was generally clandestine. As Peter Lewis notes, the homosexual alternative was invisible because a gay discourse did not yet exist (Lewis 1991:178). Stiebel describes how he was propositioned to participate. After recounting some sexual tale, a fellow pupil, Jack, said quite suddenly

'I say, why don't you and I have a flick (masturbation) together?' Although not entirely surprised by the question I was nonplussed. 'But where could we do it?' I asked. Without hesitation Jack replied. 'In the Bogs (lavatories) after Lights Out. Any night you like, man' (Stiebel 1968:173).

While boys knew about such occurrences, they were sometimes too implicated to crack down upon offenders. But there are tales which show that tacit acceptance was not always the response. An informant who insisted on remaining anonymous recounted that a senior boy who was 'molesting' juniors was frogmarched by seniors into a flooded river in wellington boots where he drowned. Natal was and remains a deeply homophobic society. The schools were not places where these values were challenged. Boys who had an interest in exploring homosexual relationships were forced into the closet. Those who sought to develop deeper emotional ties were consequently often obliged to conceal close friendships, whether platonic or sexual. Alternatively they could become loners, coping with the system by occupying its margins. Finally, they might establish close friendship, within a friendship group, developing a closer attachment to a particular member of the group. In this way, sexually prejudiced derision could be avoided.<sup>22</sup>

The close friendship was not common in the schools of Natal or Britain (Lewis 1991:180). It was forced underground or denied.<sup>23</sup> It did not become an accepted form of male relationship and consequently was unable to resist established forms of masculinity. In Natal's all-male boarding schools, the context was simply too hostile and all-encompassing to provide the space for the flowering of challenge.

The impact of the elite schools of Natal on the region's gender relations was great. They contributed to the masculinisation of power – feeding their male products into positions of influence and authority in much the same way as public schools in Britain did. It hardly needs restating that elite schools also reinforced the racially exclusive order. The school was the major institutional pillar of this process of social, political and economic insinuation. This process was assisted by the development of what Steedman calls a cultural style. The markers of this cultural style were not simply an ability to do the job, but 'were those qualities and styles of thought traditionally fostered in the schools of the upper classes. This "cultural style" was elevated to the level of a set of objective criteria to be used in the selection of an elite' (Steedman 1987:133).

The influence of the elite schools also radiated out into institutions which were not immediately the locus of ONF power. Boys who attended the elite schools could claim a particular identity and the privileges which went with it, and found in time their gender values comfortably reflected generally amongst white men who were not of the same social rank.

Compulsory education for whites between the ages of 7 and 14 was introduced in 1910. Education for this age group became free in 1918 (Behr & Macmillan 1971:134, 182). Where demography allowed, (that is, in the larger towns) single-sex schools for boys were the norm and these reflected many of the structural and ideological features of the elite schools. By the universalisation of schooling for Natal's whites elite-school, gender values were conveyed to the male pupils in the government schools which were emulating the defining institution.

The schooling of girls received nearly as much attention as that for boys. Girls-only schools were established by government, church and individuals so that by 1880 a number of secondary schools were functioning in the Midlands – St Mary's at Richmond, St Anne's at Hilton and Collegiate in Pietermaritzburg (Vietzen 1973). These and other schools grew in strength throughout the period, prompted by similar considerations which had moved the ONFs to value education for their sons and to invest in it. As Sylvia Vietzen notes, 'It would be reasonable to expect that, in an era when women's emancipation was only just beginning, girls' education would have been inferior in quantity and quality to that of boys. On the contrary, in Victorian Natal, there were many respects in which the educational needs of girls were more adequately and appropriately met than were those of boys' (Vietzen 1973:328). The attention given to the education of girls had three important consequences: it gave girls some career opportunity and many of the skills necessary to play a part in the household, which in turn gave them social power there within; equality of treatment within education gave the ONF girls and women a sense of self and a belief in their rights and powers which proved a particularly strong class adhesive (but also strongly corrosive of specific feminist concerns) and they experienced institutions (many of which were single-sex boarding establishments) which disseminated a set of gender and class values which harmonised with those of their male siblings and menfolk and produced a loyalty to and belief in the importance of communal institutions.

## Notes

- 1 ED, 1/1/14, 201/1/1, Council of Education Minute Books, 3 June 1880 Ordinary Meeting, p 120.
- 2 Maritzburg College Museum, Pietermaritzburg High School and College Register.
- 3 *The Harvester Newsletter of Weston Agricultural College*, 1, August 1984. I would like to thank Mrs Moira Tarr for her assistance here.
- 4 Such boarding schools have been described by Andrew Tolson as 'an upper middle-class extreme' which transmitted, as a sanctioned part of their experience, a notion of 'manhood' which remained the ideological reference point of the training of 'gentlemen' (Tolson 1977:34–35).
- 5 ED 1/1/2, *Council of Education Minutes*, 26 April 1889, p 3.

- 6 ED 1/1/14, 201/1/1 20 *Council of Education Minute Books*, January 1878–June 1888, p 6; Haw & Frame 1988:10.
- 7 Nuttall 1971:15. For the influence of Arnold, Rugby and the British public schools more generally, see Mangan 1985.
- 8 ED 1/1/1, *Council of Education Minute Book*, Meeting 7 February 1878, p 12.
- 9 Between 1902 and 1906, the minutes of the meetings of the Old Boys Society show that Midland locales were increasingly providing the school with pupils. A full list of all members of OHS in 1901 shows that out of 207 Old Boys, 54 came from the Midlands, and a further 37 from Pietermaritzburg (*The Hiltonian*, 1(1) September 1901:28–29). The same is true for Michaelhouse: 67 per cent of boys in 1917 were from Natal and Zululand. Michaelhouse Archive, Report to Synod, July 1917.
- 10 Nevertheless there was a general increase in secondary scholar numbers. In 1921, MC peaked at 386 (Haw & Frame 1988, pp 21,106, 113; Daphne Pennefather interview 1992).
- 11 The Moors (Estcourt) and the Nicholsons (Richmond) sent children to all three schools. It became so important to send sons to these schools that in the 1920s some farmers bonded their farms for this purpose (Fly interview 1992; Ravenor Nicholson interview 1992).
- 12 The Punishment Book is housed at the Maritzburg College Museum.
- 13 Reminiscences of Sir Duncan McKenzie, at Hilton in the late 1870s (Nuttall 1971:176). At Michaelhouse the situation was much the same (Barratt 1969:40).
- 14 For an interesting parallel of family construction in the all-male gold mining hostels of the Witwatersrand, see Moodie 1988.
- 15 This practice was also in existence at MC where it was a caneable offence not to shout long or loud enough in support of the team (Haw & Frame 1988:228).
- 16 Among the boys themselves there were efforts to bring 'black sheep' into line – a boy who didn't shower properly and was accused of smelling was, for example, forcibly scrubbed. Such institutionally useful behaviour was supplemented by collective attacks on deviants (never the establishment First team rugby and cricket players). So, for example, boys daring to play soccer were pilloried and even liable to a beating by prefects (Fly interview 1992).
- 17 At Hilton this was belatedly recognised as a problem when a preparatory school was opened in 1907. 'The youngsters ... only come into contact with the bigger boys at meal times, and then they have their own table ... For boys of such a tender age, arrangements of this kind are of the greatest importance' (*The Hiltonian*, 5 (10) January 1907:76).
- 18 For example, Hilton College Archive, Headmaster's Letter Book, 12 October 1906.
- 19 Stiebel uses the term 'gang' to refer to what I have termed a friendship group.
- 20 This was not universally the case. There are many examples from British public schools in the mid-twentieth century which testify to a much more relaxed attitude towards romance between boys. 'Romantic friendships were universal at Rugby ... There was a certain amount of love, a certain amount of romantic friendship and then of sex, sometimes casual and sometimes involving love affairs. The only difference from the outside world was that it was exclusively homosexual. The sex was accepted among boys and a blind eye was turned to it. It was not an orgy – it simply went on all the time as it does in ordinary life. Homosexual sex was joked about but then so was everything else' (Devlin & Williams 1992:153).
- 21 Connell shows that engagement in sexual acts with other males does not necessarily signify

homosexual behaviour, which he defines as involving a conscious move into gay sub-culture (Connell 1992).

- 22 A psychoanalytical explanation for this pattern is provided by Michael Gilding (1991). Men who experience their masculinity in relation to other males whom they do not perceive as masculine ('wimps', 'nerds', 'poofs') wonder whether they will be able to hold onto their masculinity. To allay their fears, difference has to be asserted, involving competition with other males.
- 23 In the remarkably honest account of his life as child of rich parents in the English countryside, Ronald Fraser describes his exploration of sexuality with a working-class boy (significantly not one of his schoolmates), noting the blurring of friendship and sexuality and describing how male friendship could foster sexual discovery (Fraser 1984:177).