

Introduction

The Struggle for Space in Twentieth-Century Durban

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In 1974, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first arrival of white settlers at Port Natal, the Durban municipality produced a glossy book giving a photographic portrayal of the history and life of the city.¹ The content of the photographs betrayed the book's eurocentric bias. The lens had been focused overwhelmingly on the modern infrastructure and the bright city lights: railways and freeways, ships and harbours, sunny beaches and picturesque gardens, cricket pitches and racecourses. Towards the end of the collection there were two other pictures of note. One showed bare-breasted African women participating in *ngoma* dancing – 'a big tourist attraction'. The other depicted an African family, seemingly enjoying a life of contentment and tranquillity, in the well-kept garden of their 'Bantu home at KwaMashu, the big Non-white township'. One should not perhaps attach too much significance to this book, which was no more than a glossy, glorified anniversary brochure. But it does reveal something of perceptions in South Africa. *Ngoma* dancers were, for instance, portrayed as a source of entertainment for tourists – and as no more than that. And the bland depiction of family life in KwaMashu masked the harsh reality of living in an apartheid township.

One of the functions of apartheid was to make the daily existence of the underclasses, outside the workplace, as invisible as possible to the dominant classes. The refinement of urban apartheid over the period 1950–1980 maximised this invisibility, serving to 'immunise' the dominant classes from the visual and political impact of the townships. But this invisibility extended beyond the realm of day-to-day living. It was also manifested in the popular media and in local history texts. In these there was a dominant perception that the lives of the underclasses, very largely black, were not worthy of consideration or study except insofar as their lives impinged upon or constituted a problem for the dominant classes. There was little attempt to probe or examine the life and culture of the underclasses from the inside.

An alternative, corrective approach to the study of urban social history has been developed in more recent years. Specifically for the social history of Durban we owe a great debt to two pioneering scholars, Maynard Swanson and David Hamson. In 1964 Swanson produced a Harvard Ph.D. thesis which

examined the evolution of municipal race policy in Durban through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Swanson's major contribution was to document the emergence of the so-called 'Durban system' of African administration, and to show how this system became a model for subsequent urban apartheid practice at a national level.² Hemson's doctoral thesis, submitted at the University of Warwick in 1979, focused more specifically on the dock-workers of Durban. Written from a Marxist perspective, Hemson's work included fascinating detail not only on the dock-workers, but also on the general social history of Durban's African working class.³ In the past few years a great deal more work has been done on the social history of Africans in Durban by a variety of scholars, many of whom have contributed to this collection. Almost all of these scholars have been building on the foundations laid by Swanson and Hemson. One of the aims of this collection is to bring together some of this more recent work. Its focus is on the history of the African experience in Durban, which simply reflects the emphasis of the recent work. It is recognised that there is a need to break free from restrictive racial categories in writing the social history of Durban.

Almost all the essays in this collection implicitly consider the organisation and occupation of urban space – living space, cultural space, political space, and space for pursuing material ends. In twentieth-century Durban, opportunities for the exploitation of such space have existed, to a greater or lesser degree and at various times, for individuals and groups outside the dominant classes. A major concern of this collection is to examine, first, the way in which space has been created and utilised by Africans in Durban, and second, the way in which space has gradually been closed off during the course of the twentieth century. Such an examination requires an understanding of the political economy of Durban: How has the city's material base developed and changed over time? How has local state power intruded into the lives of Africans in Durban? How has central state power encroached upon the autonomy of the local state? What have been the main forces responsible for the shutting down of space? But this is also a story about the people who have striven to take advantage of these open spaces and have, in many cases, resisted the shutting down – shack-dwellers, liquor-dealers, ricksha-pullers, factory-workers, trade-unionists, petty entrepreneurs, musicians. Their lifestyle, their aspirations, and their struggles are documented as part of an effort to produce an alternative 'people's history of Durban'.

Access to various forms of urban space in Durban has been determined by a number of factors – the nature of the city's economy, regional demographic patterns, local state policy, and the exercise of central state power. How did these factors come into play at the beginning of the twentieth century?

At the turn of the century, Durban's economy centred on the harbour. Its industrial base was minuscule; and the town depended heavily on the through trade to the Rand. One feature of Durban's economic growth in the twentieth

century has been its tendency to accelerate during war-time. Durban's commerce and industry expanded considerably during the South African War; new employment opportunities were created, particularly in the transport and industrial sectors. The First World War provided a further stimulus, especially to the engineering industry which was required to service the growing volume of war-time shipping. During the years 1916–19 Durban became more committed to following the path of secondary industrialisation. But the manufacturing sector remained small in scale, and it continued to be concentrated in the central business district and Point area.⁴

In the early years of the twentieth century, Durban's population level was relatively low. In 1900 the total population of the town was about 55 700, of whom 14 600 were African. By 1921 the total had risen to 90 500, of whom 28 400 were African.⁵ The African section of Durban's population was predominantly male: the male to female ratio was 6.6 to 1 in 1921.⁶ And the majority of Africans fell into four main employment categories: tog or casual day labourers, washermen, ricksha-pullers, and monthly contract workers (many of whom were domestic workers, mainly male).⁷ Labour was thus largely a matter of servicing the commercial and domestic sectors.

This relatively small population experienced minimal intrusion into their daily lives by the local state in the early years of the century. For instance, the task of 'administering' Africans, for some bizarre reason, came under the umbrella of the town's abattoir committee. Gradually, though, the municipality was to establish an administrative structure that would intervene more and more in the lives of the town's African population. The structure was built on the revenue derived from the municipal beer monopoly. It took shape with the creation of a municipal Native Affairs Department in 1916. This was the emerging 'Durban system', which has been thoroughly documented by Swanson and Hemson.⁸

The central state impinged even less than the local state upon people's lives in these early years of the century. The first major central state intervention in the urban sphere was legislated for in the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. But the immediate impact of this on Durban was minimal. Some of its provisions, for the establishment of native revenue accounts and beer monopolies for instance, had already been implemented in Durban. Other provisions, such as those recommending the building of segregated townships and the creation of native advisory boards, were ignored by the Durban municipality until the late 1920s. This was a measure of the municipal autonomy that existed at that time.

The low level of industrialisation and the undeveloped local state structure, left open various forms of space in Durban in the first two or three decades of the twentieth century. First, there was physical space. Large areas of land were unoccupied or unutilised. In later years infrastructural, industrial and residential growth was to place a great premium on land, especially flat land, in the greater

Durban area. But until the 1930s there was open space. This enabled Indian market gardeners, for instance, to engage in cultivation not far from the city centre. In 1932 the boundaries of Durban were enlarged so as to incorporate in the borough the so-called added areas (South Coast Junction, Umhlatuzana, Mayville, Sydenham and Greenwood Park). These areas, covering about 35 000 acres, had previously fallen under the limited administrative purview of 'local administration and health boards'. In these largely uncontrolled living zones, the emergence of informal Indian and African settlements had created opportunities for petty commodity production – opportunities exploited by 'illicit' liquor producers among others.

The availability of physical space, and the relative absence of tight administrative regimentation, meant that 'residential space' for Africans was also largely uncontrolled in the first three decades of the century. Virtually the only 'formal' type of accommodation available for Africans at this time was that which housed single male migrant workers. In 1914 one-quarter of the city's African population of about 20 000 lived in 'barracks', run by the municipality. Others lived in private industrial or commercial compounds, meeting the needs of employers who liked to have their workers living close at hand. The first formal accommodation for African families – Baumannville, a small location comprising about one hundred and twenty so-called 'cottages' – was only built in 1916. At this time, as Paul la Hausse shows in his essay, the majority of Africans in Durban occupied 'the "living hell" of backyards, sheds, stables and other informal accommodation'.⁹ Before the late 1920s there was no real attempt to impose any kind of racial residential segregation in Durban. This gave scope for petty rentiers, white and Indian, to let out rooms and 'backyard premises' to African tenants.

Just as living space was relatively uncontrolled in early twentieth-century Durban, so were there opportunities for Africans to take advantage of space for pursuing material ends. This was true both for workers, who were able to enjoy relative freedom from the tight discipline and control that characterised the workplace in a more developed industrial society, and for non-workers who could exploit a variety of informal sector opportunities.

Frederick Cooper has highlighted the independence enjoyed by casual labourers. Because they worked on a daily basis, the sanction of dismissal did not bind them; and because of their links with nearby farming communities they were less dependent on wage labour than fully proletarianised workers.¹⁰ Cooper's conclusions were largely based on a study of dock-workers in Mombasa. His findings are borne out by Hemson's work on Durban's dock-workers. Hemson shows how casual togt labourers predominated at the docks. In the nineteenth century they enjoyed considerable freedom, working daily contracts and able to command relatively high wages. Moreover they lived where they liked, occupying backyard premises in the town, or constructing shacks in the dock area. From the 1870s, steps were taken to

exercise greater control over togt labourers in Durban. Monthly contracts and a registration system were introduced. Shacks in the dock area were demolished, and 'barracks' were constructed to house dock-workers. Control was intensified as the togt regulations were tightened in 1904. But Hemson shows how dock-workers still managed to sustain their capacity for independence and resistance to control. In 1904, for instance, hundreds of dock-workers took advantage of the security derived from their rural bases, and returned home rather than pay increased registration fees.¹¹

So the presence of large numbers of casual workers continued to have contradictory implications for the local state and the dominant classes in Durban. On the one hand, many employers preferred the greater flexibility of labour supply that came with the togt system. This was particularly the case at the docks, where the demand for labour could fluctuate significantly in the short-term according to the changing levels of shipping activity. On the other hand, the relative freedom and independence of the togt workers enlarged the task of controlling the port's African population. The size of this task was considerable, given the high proportion of the African population registered as casual workers. Between 1923 and 1927, for instance, the proportion of casual workers was always at least 50 per cent of the estimated total African population of Durban.¹²

During the first three decades of the twentieth century there also existed in Durban considerable space for those Africans who obtained a living outside of wage employment. The informal sector seems to have flourished at this time. In part, this informal sector was a rural-urban phenomenon. La Hausse has observed how, in the early 1900s, African traders from rural areas entered Durban on five-day passes to hawk 'fowls, eggs, sticks, assegais, dagga, herbs and skins'.¹³ Or women would bring in large quantities of beer (*utshwala*) from the country to sell in the town.¹⁴

At the heart of informal sector activity was the production and sale of liquor by petty entrepreneurs. La Hausse's research has captured the essential features of this trade, and has provided us with vivid details. He shows how, in the first few years of the century, the informal sector was allowed to operate with very few restrictions. For instance, 'In 1905 the streets of Durban were dense with privately licensed "native eating houses" providing food for labourers in the town as well as another outlet for beer and popular social discourse'.¹⁵ While some of the beer was brought in from the countryside, much of it was produced in the town – according to one contemporary witness quoted by La Hausse, 'in kitchens, bathrooms, open dusty yards, behind sanitary conveniences, and in fact in any recess, shanty or space'.¹⁶ By about 1908 there were liquor dealers, 'including African women and "low-class whites" in over 100 houses and dens selling both beer and more potent alcohol'.¹⁷ The establishment of the municipal beer monopoly may have contained the 'illicit' liquor trade, but it certainly did not eliminate it. Tighter police control seems only to have had the

effect of pushing the trade out into the peri-urban areas. By the 1920s the main source of this liquor supply was the shebeens in Mayville, Greenwood Park, Sydenham and other peri-urban areas.¹⁸

For several years these peri-urban areas, which came to be heavily populated, with dense shack settlements, remained the most uncontrolled forms of space where Africans could pursue material ends. 'Already by the 1920s such space nearer the urban centre was being closed down by the combined forces of state legislation, infrastructural development, capitalist expansion, and proletarianisation. In 1905, for instance, Durban's first municipal eating-house was opened.¹⁹ As such institutions expanded under the control of the local state, so the scope for maintaining private eating-houses narrowed.

More important was the local state's assault on the private production and sale of liquor. In 1908 the Natal legislature passed the Native Beer Act. The Durban corporation proceeded immediately to take advantage of the measure to establish a municipal monopoly on the manufacture and sale of beer to Africans. This had two important consequences. First, the monopoly at once criminalised all petty producers and turned them into 'illicit liquor-dealers' and police targets. Second, the monopoly generated, for the municipality, considerable revenue which, in turn, was to fund the development of the local state's apparatus of control. Beer profits made possible the establishment in 1916 of a municipal Native Affairs Department, headed by a professional manager and manned by supervisory, technical and clerical staff.²⁰ Municipal by-laws, passed in the same year, tightened the prospective exercise of administrative control over Durban's African population. Stricter procedures were laid down for worker registration and service contracts. A 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew was imposed on Africans.²¹ All these measures restricted African mobility and represented a further closing down of space.

The process of industrialisation was not far advanced in Durban by the late 1920s, apart from some expansion during and immediately after the First World War and during the mid-1920s. But it was occurring at a pace sufficient to have made it a proletarianising force, limiting certain opportunities for independent economic activity on the part of Africans. This can be illustrated by two examples. Early in the century Africans, mainly men, had provided a washing service, operating on the banks of the Umgeni River or in backyards.²² Transport was another service sphere in which opportunities existed for petty African entrepreneurs. This space was exploited by the ricksha-pullers. The pullers were able to hire rickshas from the ricksha companies and operate as semi-independent entrepreneurs, somewhere mid-stream between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class. As Ros Posel shows, rickshas were a major form of public transport in the early part of the century.²³ However, by the 1920s they were under pressure. Their deteriorating position was brought out in the 1926 Mayor's Minute:

There is an indication in certain directions of Native employment that work which previously was largely in their hands is becoming lost to them. They are finding the competitive locomotion of motor buses gradually overtaking the rickshas; a similar state of affairs exists among Native wash-boys. Only six Natives were registered for the year in this class of work. At one time the washing of the Borough was almost wholly undertaken by Natives and improved methods of domestic washing are chiefly responsible for the disappearance of the Native washboy.²⁴

Industrialisation, proletarianisation and the strengthening of the local state apparatus may, by the third decade of the twentieth century, have had the effect of limiting access to certain kinds of space. However, the social and political history of Durban in the 1920s and 1930s throws into relief an African population that was far from being browbeaten, passive or docile. Rather can one find evidence of organisation and action, energy and initiative. Some spaces may have been closed down, but others were being opened up.

Two kinds of space were being exploited more visibly by Africans in Durban from the 1920s. The first was political. Large numbers of Africans organised and protested in opposition to the tighter regulation of their lives by the local state. African workers increasingly came to engage in struggles around workplace issues. The second kind of space was that which allowed for small-scale accumulation on the part of an emerging African élite with upward aspirations. These two processes of struggle and accumulation, normally in opposition to each other, were not entirely disconnected in Durban at this time. Both were made possible because the degree of state control exercised locally and centrally, although becoming tighter, was still limited. The local state was developing its administrative machinery, but it was still unable to shape Durban according to the desired mould. And the central state, the 1923 Act notwithstanding, still intervened minimally in municipal affairs. There thus existed for Africans scope for political organisation and petty accumulation. The connection between the two is illustrated by their dual, if ambiguous, embodiment in the person of Allison Wessels George Champion.

Petty trading was one means of small-scale accumulation. In 1924 there were reported to be 220 African traders operating in Durban. Of these 67 were styled as 'tableholders', 64 as meatsellers, and 50 as 'snuff-sellers'. Others sold clothes, wood or fruit, or plied their trades as tailors, cobblers or saddlers. These were mainly individual entrepreneurs who ran their businesses in the municipal eating-houses.²⁵ These operations were relatively formal. Others, as La Hausse has shown,

carved out an even more tenuous economic existence for themselves through a network of informal and illegal activities such as prostitution, beer-brewing, dagga-selling, the unlicensed hawking of second-hand clothes and medicines. For some, economic subsistence was squeezed out

of the newly-proletarianised through forms of racketeering such as rigged gambling games or the sale of love-potions with the help of female accomplices. Economic marginality defined a way of life which few of these individuals could hope to transcend. Together with the unemployed and unemployable they lived on the outer, and frequently criminal, fringes of the urban social order.²⁶

Small-scale enterprise was also encouraged and sponsored by the Catholic Church in the greater Durban area. In 1927, for instance, the Catholic Thrift Club was set up at St Paul's Native Mission in Durban. The club ran a tea-room in Umgeni Road along co-operative lines.²⁷ At this time, the Catholic Church was generally concerned with encouraging self-advancement and the self-help ethic among Africans. This was partly to counter the developing proletarian consciousness and organisation that seemed to be embodied in the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in the late 1920s. Towards this end, the Church also helped to establish 'people's banks' for Africans. One such bank was formed in Greyville, another at the Mariannhill mission station in 1927. The purpose of these banks was both to encourage Africans to save, and to provide credit for potential entrepreneurs or peasant farmers.²⁸

It is perhaps ironical that while the Catholic Church was promoting petty accumulation to counter the ICU, the leading ICU figure in Durban, Champion, stood out as one of the foremost among Durban's African petty entrepreneurs. Champion played a prominent leadership role in black politics in Durban from the 1920s. But, as Shula Marks has shown, Champion's position was 'replete with ambiguities'.²⁹ He claimed to be acting for the working class, but in many respects his own outlook and activities were conservative. He was certainly far from being the revolutionary that some of his reactionary opponents made him out to be.

Champion believed that black advancement could be achieved partly through fostering an attitude of self-reliance and encouraging thrift and accumulation. In the early 1930s he proposed the establishment of a bank for blacks. This could make capital available to finance black businesses. He had thought up the scheme while working for the Colonial Banking and Trust Company: it was then that he had 'found out the way the Europeans got rich and help their poor fellows'.³⁰ He was particularly eager to promote trading among Africans, wanting to 'smash' Indian domination of the African trade.³¹ Champion himself possessed this entrepreneurial drive, and over the years owned a number of small businesses: a butchery in Roodepoort in the early 1920s; a large store in Durban in the 1930s; a tearoom, a store and a butchery in Inanda; a co-operative boot-repairing and tailoring business in which he was the sole partner; his own newspaper; a dance and meeting-hall which he ran for profit; and a small sugar plantation.³²

Champion had not only an instinct for business, but also an interest in

acquiring property. As Swanson's essay shows, Champion was a key figure in the founding of Clermont township near Pinetown in the 1930s. A group of white speculators and officials, in league with Champion, purchased some mission-owned land and sold it off in plots to African purchasers. Clermont thus originated as one of the few African freehold townships in the greater Durban area, not unlike the private freehold townships that emerged in western Johannesburg in the early 1900s.

While the 1913 Land Act prohibited African land purchase in white rural areas, and the 1923 Urban Areas Act denied Africans the right to freehold title in municipal townships, it was only with the passing of the Native Laws Amendment Act in 1937 that Africans were barred from buying landed property in urban areas outside the reserves. So before 1937 there was some limited scope for the purchase of property by Africans in the greater Durban area. Clermont was one example of this. There was another closer to the centre of Durban: Chateau and Good Hope Estates, adjoining Cato Manor. The land, covering about ninety-two acres, was originally bought by Mrs J Casteleijn in 1929. She sold about half this area to an Indian, Latiff Osman, who in turn subdivided it and sold the plots to Africans. The other half, Chateau Estate, was subdivided by Casteleijn herself, who also sold quarter-acre plots to Africans at a rate of £25 per plot. Most of the buyers were clergy, schoolteachers, shopkeepers or semi-skilled employees; two of the plots were bought by John Dube.³³ Opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurship, and vacant, purchasable land, represented certain kinds of space open to a minority of Africans in Durban, at least until the late 1930s. Another kind of space that remained relatively open at this time was the political terrain. In the past fifteen years or so the study of African opposition and struggle in Durban has been considerably advanced. Probably the most pioneering work has been Hemson's research on Durban's dock-workers. But others have made important contributions.³⁴

African struggles in Durban can be placed into two main categories: those centred in the work-place, and those arising out of wider urban, community issues. It would be a mistake, however, to draw too sharp a distinction between worker action and popular protest. As we shall see, populist leaders like Champion might take up specifically worker causes; and workers became involved in wider urban issues.

One of the earliest intense phases of African opposition and protest occurred during the years 1918–20. The struggles of these years largely centred on worker issues and were dominated by workers. Events in Durban followed a similar pattern to those in Johannesburg and Cape Town during the same period. The material circumstances of workers had deteriorated drastically during the First World War, as wages had lagged far behind rising prices. From 1918 workers around the country began to express their discontent.

In Durban diverse groups of workers organised and acted. In 1918 the ricksha-pullers went on strike in protest against an increase in the rents for their

vehicles charged by the ricksha companies.³⁵ In June a deputation of tog workers went to the municipal Native Affairs Department to demand a virtual doubling of tog wages. In July John Dube, as President of the Natal Native Congress, called a meeting, attended by about eight hundred workers, to demand wage increases. In August coaling workers, employed at the docks on a monthly basis, came out on strike. The next year more coaling workers resorted to strike action, to be followed in November by municipal tog workers. African members of the local police force demanded a wage increase. In 1920 about a thousand dock workers went on strike.³⁶

Generally employers refused to yield to the demands of strikers. Ringleaders were victimised; and a number of coaling workers were brought to court and fined. However, by 1920 wages were being raised.³⁷ Both employers and the municipal authorities had, in the short term, wanted to avoid giving the appearance of yielding to worker pressure. In the longer term they were forced to make concessions in the face of vehement demands and militant action by workers.

Hemson documents further strikes in Durban in the years 1925–27. Again dock-workers were in the forefront of the resistance.³⁸ But the second half of the 1920s and the early 1930s represented a rather different phase in the history of African opposition and protest in Durban. As already noted, the phase following the First World War had predominantly involved workers acting upon worker issues. From the mid-1920s a more broad-based popular opposition developed in protest against measures imposed by the local or central state, affecting the wider African community in Durban.

At the forefront of this popular opposition was the Durban branch of the ICU, headed by Champion. Champion assumed the leadership of the Durban branch in 1925, and over the next few years placed himself in the vanguard of a set of challenges launched against Durban's local power structure. Initially most of these challenges were legal actions brought by the ICU against the Durban corporation. And many of them were successful. A court decision brought an end to 'dipping', a humiliating procedure that required African workers, like cattle, to pass through disinfectant tanks. By 1926 about thirty-five thousand Africans were annually being subjected to this indignity. The Supreme Court decision to abolish compulsory 'dipping' was just one of a number of legal victories secured by the Durban ICU in 1926 and 1927. Other victories included the lifting of the nightly curfew for Africans, the exemption of African women from carrying night passes, and the decision to take away from the police the power of arbitrary arrest over Africans.³⁹

These legal challenges represented a particular form of space being exploited by a small leadership group in the ICU centred around Champion. These challenges preceded – and may even have provided some necessary impetus to – a mass-based form of popular protest that gathered rapid momentum in Durban in 1929 and 1930. This protest gained its most visible expression in two

events, the 1929 beerhall boycott and the 1930 'Dingane's Day' pass-burning campaign. Both events have now been well documented, particularly by Hemson and La Hausse.⁴⁰ It is necessary here, therefore, only to highlight certain aspects of these episodes.

In Durban in the late 1920s, a change in the character of opposition and protest was occurring that was both similar to and simultaneous with a transition observed by William Beinart and Colin Bundy in their work on the Independent ICU in East London.⁴¹ In both cases there was a move away from a formal, 'bureaucratic' organisational style of opposition towards more popular, militant forms of protest. Central to this transition was the more vehement articulation of worker grievances and the growing participation of workers themselves in urban struggles. As Hemson has shown, the 1929 Durban beerhall boycott originated among dock-workers.⁴² It was not instigated, as has often been thought, by Champion and the ICU. Indeed, Champion's role in the 1929 protests was decidedly ambiguous. Certainly he assumed a prominent leadership position in the boycott. But Hemson suggests this was opportunism on Champion's part;⁴³ and La Hausse argues that Champion was equivocal about the use of radical tactics and eventually came to be carried along on a tide of militant popular protest.⁴⁴

What is striking about the 1929 boycott is that there was a remarkable degree of mass participation and solidarity. Meetings called to oppose the beer monopoly in 1928 and 1929 attracted crowds of up to five or six thousand, made up largely of dock-workers, domestic workers, messengers and lumpenproletarians.⁴⁵ Municipal beer sales plummeted, seriously threatening the financial basis of the native revenue account. Also significant, as it was in East London, was the growing role played by women in the beer protests. Informal brewing and the shebeen trade provided a major source of income and independence for African women in Durban. It was not surprising, therefore, that women should have joined the struggle against the monopoly and played a major role in sustaining the boycott.⁴⁶

Beinart and Bundy show how elements of Xhosa nationalism and 'traditionalism' blended into urban struggles in East London.⁴⁷ This trend was paralleled in Durban in 1930. A meeting between Champion and the Zulu paramount, King Solomon, in that year, suggested a possible alignment between two rather different constituencies.⁴⁸ This had been preceded by a number of ICU meetings in Durban at the end of May. According to the police observer at these meetings, they were attended by chiefs 'from all parts of the country'.⁴⁹ This convergence of rural 'traditionalism' and urban popular protest was also noticeable during the anti-pass campaign in December of that year. On 'Dingane's Day' thousands of Africans gathered in central Durban. The main purpose of the meeting was the destruction of passes. It is interesting though, as La Hausse has observed, how speakers at the meeting used the rhetoric of 'traditionalism' and appealed to a heroic past to praise Solomon and earlier Zulu kings.⁵⁰

The years 1929–30 marked a high point of popular struggle in Durban. This is not to say that there was no organisation or protest in Durban in the 1930s. The Communist Party remained active in the city in the early 1930s, concentrating on organising the dock-workers.⁵¹ After his return to Durban in 1934 from banishment, Champion organised ICU meetings. One was attended by a crowd of two thousand, but at others attendance was generally sparse.⁵² In the late 1930s, further meetings were held under various banners, including that of the ICU, but they lacked the militancy, vibrancy and mass participation that characterised popular protest in 1929 and 1930.⁵³

The slowing down of opposition and protest in Durban in the 1930s mirrored national trends in black politics, as this was also a period of stagnation for the ANC. Why was there this lull in Durban in the 1930s? Was it a case of political space being closed down by state repression? In 1930 political space was still sufficiently open for six thousand people to be able to meet near the Durban city centre and for speakers to deliver fiery anti-white rhetoric: one speaker, Ngonyama, said that Africans 'should cut the throats of the government, as had been done in Russia'.⁵⁴

Why did this militant trend not continue in Durban in the 1930s? This question is not easily answered. One can hardly explain it in terms of increasing state repression, because the level of such repression was in fact very limited. It is true that there was a massive reinforcement of police strength in Durban late in 1929, followed by a crackdown on illicit liquor-dealers and tax defaulters.⁵⁵ But this could not have prevented a continuing upsurge of protest in 1930. It is also true that Champion was banished from Durban in 1930 under the Riotous Assemblies Act (interestingly, not because of his role in the beerhall boycott, but rather because of his 'flirtation' with Solomon).⁵⁶ Nor, though, does this explain the subsequent lull. To attach too much significance to Champion's absence from Durban is to overstress his leadership role in fomenting protest in the late 1920s and to underplay the mass-based, spontaneous character of that protest.

Another possible explanation of this lull might be found in the attempts of the local state to defuse African militancy by pursuing an ameliorative policy. Following the 1929 beerhall boycott and riots Justice de Waal conducted an enquiry into the events. While his report absolved the Durban municipal authorities of any blame, it did call for steps to be taken to improve the social conditions of Durban's African population. So, in 1930, a white Native Welfare Officer was appointed to the municipal Native Administration Department. One of his tasks was to organise facilities for African recreation, sport and entertainment. Film shows were provided for hostel-dwellers; occasional sports galas were held; and over fifty African soccer clubs were operating in the Durban area by 1937. The value of these leisure activities was clearly spelt out by the Native Welfare Officer himself in 1931: 'This interest on the part of Europeans would certainly limit the spread of vicious and evil influences, and

the native community of Durban could be moulded into a law abiding and contented section of the community of the Borough'.⁵⁷

Another move that followed the De Waal report, and was also aimed at defusing African discontent, was the creation of advisory boards. The 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act had made provision for such boards to be established. But Durban only set up its first advisory board in late 1929. The Durban Native Advisory Board comprised ten Africans (representing the ICU, the Natal Native Congress and the various hostels) and four white town councillors, one of whom filled the chair. It was nothing more than an advisory body, which had no powers; and generally its 'advice' was ignored by the city council. Moreover the advisory boards (others were set up in the 1930s) tended to articulate the interests of the African aspirant entrepreneurial class, having little to say on behalf of workers.⁵⁸

One obviously cannot accept that Africans were lulled into relative inertia in the early 1930s by film shows and soccer games. Indeed, there is no ready explanation for this lull in political activity as there was still much space open for the expression of opposition and resistance. The degree to which the politics of protest was suppressed either by the local or central state was small compared to the juggernaut policy that came later in the century.

Closely connected to the struggle for political space was a struggle for cultural space. Veit Erlmann's essay shows how black musical performance in Durban before 1920 reflected the cultural dominance of the African petty bourgeoisie. But from the 1920s he notes the emergence of 'vibrant working-class cultural formations'. This working-class culture was centred in the clubs, beerhalls, shebeens and dance-halls that lay not far from the city centre in the vicinity of Greyville and Cartwright's Flats. The municipal beerhalls, although somewhat restricted, served as important venues for working-class cultural expression. And, as Erlmann shows, 'They were complemented by numerous less auspicious halls, backrooms, and sheds that workers managed to transform into relatively uncontrolled spaces.' Moreover, such was the organisation of residential space in Durban at this time that both the African petty bourgeoisie and working class lived close to the cultural nexus, where 'dance halls, churches, and soccer fields provided a fertile ground for the fusion of elite culture and working-class dance and music'.

However, as Erlmann goes on to show, even this cultural space was contested. It has been mentioned above how, in the aftermath of the 1929 riots, the Durban local state increasingly came to use recreation as an instrument of social control. Thus an attempt was made in the 1930s to transform *ngoma* dancing into 'a harmless form of energy release, confined to and supervised in certain spaces at certain times'. But the attempt was not entirely successful, as *ngoma* performances continued to express an oppositional cultural form.⁵⁹

If the space for political protest and cultural expression was still relatively unrestricted, this was becoming less so in the case of living spaces in Durban.

the 1930s. In 1932 the borough boundaries were considerably expanded by the incorporation of peri-urban areas which had previously been subject to minimal administrative control by local health boards. This incorporation of peri-urban space had the effect of bringing thousands of Africans and Indians into the ambit of municipal control. As the city's industrial, infrastructural, and administrative nexus was expanded outwards, so were the lives of those peri-urban dwellers to be increasingly impinged upon.

In the meantime, those members of the underclasses living in more central areas were already coming to be restricted in their access to physical space. The 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act had provided for the establishment of segregated townships for Africans in urban areas. It was not a compulsory provision, and the Durban corporation was slow to implement segregation or to build townships. But from the early 1930s, the corporation began to move in this direction. Local ratepayers' associations, predominantly white, were demanding that their areas be segregated. In 1931 Durban's Chief Constable, Whitsitt, complained that Africans of the 'won't work, illicit liquor selling class' were being 'harboured' on private premises, mainly Indian-owned, throughout the borough. So during the early 1930s specific parts of Durban were proclaimed segregated areas under the 1923 Act; and in 1937 the whole of Durban was proclaimed. The basic objective of the proclamations was clearly stated by Whitsitt: 'The whole idea of having an area proclaimed is to get rid of the Native inhabitants with the exception of domestic servants.'⁶⁰

These proclamations were an early manifestation of the Durban municipality's eagerness for urban segregation, foreshadowing the city council's later enthusiasm for group areas legislation. The enforcement of segregation in the 1930s might have been even more vigorous had it not been for one condition laid down in the 1923 Act: before a segregation proclamation could be implemented, alternative accommodation had to be made available for those people evicted from the proclaimed area.

This condition placed the onus on the Durban corporation to provide more accommodation for Africans. It thus partly explains the limited expansion of African housing in Durban in the 1930s. It was in this context that Lamont township, to the south of Durban, was constructed and opened for occupation in 1934. But, as Louise Torr's essay shows, Lamont was not built merely to facilitate segregation in central residential areas. Local liberals, voicing their views through the Durban Joint Council, had been urging that 'a native village' be established. But, more importantly, the militant popular protest of 1929-30 had 'alerted the local authorities to the dangers of a frustrated aspirant African petty bourgeois class identifying increasingly with the working class'. The 1929 De Waal report had specifically called for the building of a township to accommodate the 'better class native'.⁶¹

As Torr's essay also goes on to show, the ideal of a 'model village' for the 'better class native' hardly matched the harsh reality of living conditions in

Lamont. The township was tightly controlled by its white superintendent; the difficult topography and inadequate drainage posed serious problems; the houses were small and facilities poor; and the distance of Lamont from the city centre both imposed high transport costs on residents and limited informal sector opportunities.⁶² Moreover, the construction of Lamont did not typify Durban's housing policy in the 1930s. The emphasis was still mainly on the provision of single-quarters for migrant workers. In 1930 there were, in addition to private industrial and commercial compounds, four municipal hostels accommodating almost eight thousand African men, and one holding about three hundred women.⁶³ In the late 1930s, the corporation embarked on a building programme to expand the provision of single-quarter accommodation.

The provision of two different types of municipal accommodation for Africans in Durban – family housing in townships, and single-quarters for migrants – reflected the attempt to maintain a system of what Doug Hindson calls 'differentiated labour-power'.⁶⁴ This differentiation between stabilised and migrant labour began to sharpen in Durban from the 1930s. Until the 1920s Durban's African labour force had remained predominantly male and migrant. Even domestic service had been largely a male preserve. During the 1930s more and more permanently urbanised Africans settled in the Durban area. And the sex composition of the city's African population changed, as the ratio of men to women decreased from 6,6 to 1 in 1921 to 3,4 to 1 in 1936.⁶⁵

While the African population of Durban was undergoing certain changes in composition, it was also growing in numbers in the 1930s and, more especially, in the 1940s. Two major factors spurred the African influx into Durban in these years. The first was accelerating impoverishment in the vast rural hinterland of Durban. As Simkins has shown, the reserve economies in South Africa were able to maintain a fragile productive base from the 1920s until the 1950s, but this was only because massive outmigration from the reserves alleviated overpopulation.⁶⁶ The counterpoise to rural outmigration was, of course, urban immigration. Furthermore, African tenants on white-owned land in Natal were increasingly being forced off this land as white farmers, aided by state legislation, found it more profitable to put their land to productive use than to derive various forms of rent from tenants. It was these evicted tenants, along with inhabitants from the reserves, who flocked to cities like Durban in the 1930s and 1940s.

The second factor was the further development of a manufacturing sector in Durban. Evidence of some manufacturing growth during and immediately after the First World War has already been adduced. A more dramatic growth was to occur in the 1930s and 1940s. The rateable value of Durban's industrial area more than doubled between 1925/26 and 1935/36, from £859 500 to more than £1 740 000. The number of manufacturing establishments in the Durban/Pinetown region rose from 565 in 1929/30 to 1 161 in 1949/50.⁶⁷ Most of this growth occurred in a few sectors: metal and engineering; construction;

chemicals; and clothing and textiles. A Dunlop factory, the subject of Ari Sitas's essay, was established in Durban in 1934. The Second World War provided a major stimulus to Durban's manufacturing sector. The metal and engineering industries assumed special importance during wartime. And demand for locally produced clothing increased as the war drastically curtailed imports. Between 1925 and 1954 total employment in the clothing and textile industry in greater Durban increased more than tenfold.⁶⁸

The combination of rural outmigration and manufacturing development produced a significant growth in the African population of Durban in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1949 the estimated size of Durban's African population was almost three and a half times what it had been in 1932:

Table 1 Estimates of Durban's African Population

1932	43 750
1936	63 547
1940	69 993
1943	73 284
1946	104 155
1949	150 000

Source: Various municipal and government sources; see note 69.

As the African population level was rising, so was the male to female ratio changing. Between 1936 and 1946, Durban's female African population doubled from over 14 200 to over 28 500. Over the same period, the ratio of African males to African females declined from 3.46 to 1 to 2.65 to 1.⁷⁰ Also significant was the rapidly growing presence in Durban of Africans under the age of eighteen. Between 1936 and 1943/44 this figure rose almost fourfold, from over 4 000 to over 15 000.⁷¹

This growing presence of African women and children in Durban in the 1930s and 1940s is an indication of the increasing stabilisation of the city's African population. This trend seems to have been closely related to the rapid development of the city's manufacturing sector. Between 1934 and 1946 the number of Africans employed in industry in Durban rose by 162 per cent, from just over 12 000 to over 31 400.⁷² Manufacturing employers, concerned to raise the skill level of their workers, preferred stabilised labour to migrancy with its accompanying high labour turnover. Thus the 1948 Broome Report noted that some of Durban's leading industrialists and the railway administration, among others, were promoting labour stabilisation by paying workers increments for continuous service and making provision for leave.⁷³

Notwithstanding this trend towards stabilisation, the proportion of African migrants to permanent city-dwellers still remained very high in Durban in the mid-1940s. According to an official government estimate for the year 1946, of

the 104 100 or so Africans living in Durban, about 77 500 were migrants, and a mere 26 600 permanently urbanised.⁷⁴ It certainly seems to have been the case that Durban's relative proximity to reserve areas meant that many Africans maintained rural links. But this very proximity also makes the rigid classification of people into migrant or non-migrant categories highly problematic. Many Africans, for instance, appear to have commuted on a weekly basis between Durban and the rural areas. Whether such people were classified as migrant or non-migrant is not clear. However, a definite trend towards stabilisation is apparent, and this became more pronounced in the late 1940s and early 1950s. One unofficial estimate reckoned that about 50 per cent of Durban's African population were living permanently in the city by 1953. It also seems that during this period a growing number of migrants were staying in Durban for longer periods, and that urban income was increasingly being used to supplement the meagre subsistence of impoverished rural households.⁷⁵

What were the spatial implications of both this African population growth in Durban and increasing stabilisation? We have seen how in the early 1930s the local state tried to exercise greater control over its African population through various mechanisms. First, the Durban corporation took advantage of legislation that limited the entry of Africans into urban areas. Second, it strove towards a greater regulation of living space by proclaiming certain central areas of Durban to be segregated, and by providing more, albeit insufficient, formal municipally controlled accommodation. And third, the corporation adopted a more benevolent paternalist approach with a view to defusing black popular discontent. These strategies were an attempt on the part of the local state to deny Africans easy access to certain forms of space: physical space, especially in more central areas, and political and cultural space. Reduced access to central areas of the city served both to limit economic opportunities and to close off living space. The provision of supervised recreation and entertainment facilities was designed to counter black political mobilisation and to check autonomous cultural activity and vitality.

However, by the 1940s it was becoming clear that few, if any, of these local-state strategies were succeeding in Durban. The tightening of influx control mechanisms had failed to halt the massive African influx into the city. While some physical space had been closed down there were still many vacant areas which were rapidly being taken over and occupied by Africans. The Durban corporation had not been prepared to make the necessary investment in a housing programme which might have brought a higher proportion of the African population under more controlled living conditions. The attempt to defuse political discontent may have been partly successful during the 1930s, when there was a lull in African political activity in Durban. But this lull was short-lived, and from the late 1930s through the 1940s, there was an upsurge in worker organisation and action in Durban.

The failure of the Durban corporation to keep pace with African urbanisation in the provision of accommodation is borne out by the figures. Of the 63 547 Africans estimated to be living in Durban in 1936 only about 8 900 were housed in municipal accommodation. And of these the vast majority, about 7 800, lived in single-quarter hostels, leaving only 1 100 in family housing.⁷⁶ During the late 1930s and 1940s the corporation embarked on a housing programme which more than doubled the municipal accommodation available to Africans. In 1948 there were about 23 800 Africans living in municipal accommodation. Of these, about 14 000 were living in hostels, and the remaining 9 800 in family housing. The considerable growth in the latter figure since 1936 had been largely due to the building of Chesterville in the mid-1940s.⁷⁷ Approximately another 40 000 Africans were housed either in private compounds for commercial, industrial or government workers (about 19 000), or in rooms provided by employers of domestic workers (about 21 000).⁷⁸

These figures suggest that around 1948 there were in Durban at least 45 000 Africans who were not living in municipal accommodation, compounds or quarters for domestic workers. These were the inhabitants of the mushrooming shack settlements. Reports of more and more shacks being built in and around Durban had been coming in since the early 1930s. In 1939 there were estimated to be about 1 000 shacks in the city. By 1946 there were about 5 000 known African-occupied shacks.⁷⁹

These shack settlements grew up, to varying degrees, in different parts of the greater Durban area. Some emerged beyond the city's boundaries, in places like Glen Anil and Newlands to the north of Durban. Many shack-dwellers were drawn to the southern industrial area of the city. In one case, 'at Jacobs Road, what appeared to be a large stack of loose bricks, stores for ultimate use in building construction, was found, on closer examination, to consist of some 23 cubicles housing 70 natives'. Some shack-builders dared to venture close to some of Durban's most venerated areas; in 1949, shacks were even found near the Botanic Gardens and on land opposite the Country Club. But the vast majority of shacks were concentrated in the Cato Manor district. Here the growth was dramatic during the 1940s. In 1943 an estimated 15 000 Africans were living in the Cato Manor shantytown; by the end of 1950 this figure had risen to about 50 000.⁸⁰

The expansion of shack settlement in the 1940s represented a failure of control on the part of the Durban local state. It was a case of economic imperatives clashing with the local state's desire to control its African population. The latter imperative gave way. As T.J. Chester, the manager of Durban's Native Administration Department, commented in 1943, 'We wanted their labour, and either we had to sabotage our war effort by turning them out of town, or tolerate them where they were at Cato Manor. We took the lesser of the two evils.'⁸¹ The outcome was that Africans were able to occupy a sizeable portion of Durban's physical space in an area that was within easy commuting

distance of both the southern industrial district and the central business and residential network. And in so doing the inhabitants of Cato Manor created for themselves new economic, social and political spaces.

Shack settlements like Cato Manor were less subject to control by the local or central state apparatus. In 1943, for instance, the local Commissioner of Police (SAP) complained to the Minister of Justice that it would be impossible to carry through the latter's order to enforce the pass laws in Cato Manor.⁸² As Cato Manor became more and more densely populated, so it became less accessible to the police. Internal, unofficial authority structures emerged in Cato Manor. In one particular shack community a self-appointed headman exercised administrative authority by letting sites, collecting rents, and taking on responsibility for the maintenance of order.⁸³

The belief of Cato Manor inhabitants in their autonomy and independence was most strongly evident after the 1949 Durban riots. As Iain Edwards has shown, Africans assumed that as a result of the riots they had 'won the battle of Cato Manor'. This new assertiveness is further brought out by Edwards: 'Shantytown leaders formed a civilian guard to protect the newly won space and defiantly called upon both police and City Council to admit that the area was now finally out of their control and to leave the settlements alone.'⁸⁴ In 1960 Champion delivered an address on Cato Manor. He described it as 'the place in Durban where families breathe the air of freedom'.⁸⁵ Certainly some oral testimonies given by former Cato Manor residents confirm that many perceived life in the shantytown to have been better than the drab, regulated existence in townships like KwaMashu and Umlazi to which shack-dwellers were relocated. However, one should also avoid romanticising the history of Cato Manor. There can be little doubt that the material conditions, in terms of almost non-existent sanitation, health and water facilities, must have been appalling in the settlement.

Cato Manor not only symbolised the occupation of urban physical space, it also represented the opening of economic and political space. There existed many economic opportunities to supply basic commodities and services to the settlement's rapidly growing population. These opportunities were exploited by petty entrepreneurs and by operators in the informal sector. Such activities took various forms. Some were conducted in an individualist style; others were organised on a co-operative basis. Most fell outside the realm of any legally defined, officially recognised form of enterprise.

The provision of accommodation itself offered opportunities for the more individualist petty accumulators. Most of the land in Cato Manor was owned by Indians. Some of these landlords were substantial property-owners, but they generally rented out only the shack sites. There thus emerged in the 1940s a sub-rentier class of African shacklords. Some of these enlarged their shacks so that a single shack might comprise fifteen to twenty rooms, each of which could be sub-let. In 1950 one such shacklord paid an Indian thirty shillings a month

for land on which he had erected seventeen shelters, sixteen of which were sub-let at rents of £1 a month.⁸⁶ Other evidence shows that by the early 1950s shack-renting could yield monthly profits of between £30 and £50.⁸⁷ Also profitable was the whole business of shack-building. While most occupiers built their own shacks, there was a growing class of skilled African shack-builders working on contract.⁸⁸

A whole range of petty entrepreneurs engaged in the supply of commodities and services to the Cato Manor community. They included unlicensed traders, hawkers, painters, and backyard motor mechanics.⁸⁹ Special opportunities for unlicensed African traders existed in the aftermath of the 1949 riots which had the effect of virtually destroying Indian trading in Cato Manor. Much of this small-scale trading by Africans, although unlicensed, was generally 'above board', involving the sale of food and other commodities at road-side stalls or 'shackshops'. Other activities verged from the unlicensed towards the illicit. Iain Edwards has noted how Cato Manor 'became the centre of a middleman operation whereby stolen goods were transferred from the thief to their eventual market in the city itself'.⁹⁰ Cato Manor was part of a dagga-dealing network which originated in northern Zululand and Pondoland.⁹¹ And then, of course, there was the biggest business of all – concocting liquor and running shebeens.

In Cato Manor and elsewhere in Durban a co-operative movement took root in the second half of the 1940s. We have already seen how fledgling co-operative organisations, encouraged and promoted by the Catholic Church, got off the ground in Durban in the late 1920s. From about 1946 the movement seems to have gained new momentum. Co-operatives took various forms. They could function as communal buying clubs whose members sought benefits as consumers. Or they could serve as informal wholesale organisations in which members sought to make profits as middlemen. Or else the co-operatives could operate as small-scale banks or loan clubs.⁹² Edwards has stressed the significance of the co-operative movement at this time:

The co-operative movement was to be the real site of organisational growth in Durban in the period from 1946 to 1950. While older overtly political or trade union bodies remained static and lacked a really coherent support base, the cooperative societies were to develop on and sustain a growing militancy which was intended to provide ordinary Africans with the confidence, skills and a belief in their economic power to transform their position in society.⁹³

The co-operatives seemed thus to represent a peculiar convergence or blending of entrepreneurship, consumerism, and militancy.

The African influx into Durban in the 1930s and 1940s was accompanied not only by the occupation of physical space and the exploitation, by some, of economic openings, but also by the carving out and penetration of political

space for the expression of protest against various forms of oppression. Much of this protest was organised by workers around work-place issues. As Vishnu Padayachee, Shahid Vawda and Paul Tichmann have shown, from the mid-1930s 'many new trades unions were formed in Durban by Black workers (mainly African and Indian) either along racially divided or non-racial lines'.⁹⁴ Numerous strikes occurred in Durban during the years 1937–50. About seventy-five strikes in this period have been listed by Padayachee et al; and most of these, about forty-six, occurred between 1937 and 1942.⁹⁵ Among the more significant actions were the strikes by about four hundred Indian and African workers at the Falkirk iron foundry in 1937, and the strike by black workers at Dunlop from late 1942 to early 1943.⁹⁶

This worker organisation and action forms the subject of Tim Nuttall's essay in this collection. He documents a wave of strikes that occurred in 1937; these represented the efforts of workers to reverse the wage cuts of the early 1930s. Wage demands, brought on by the pressure of war-time inflation on real wages, also lay behind the strikes of 1941–42. Dock-workers, whose bargaining position had been strengthened by the increase of traffic during the war, were in the forefront of this action. The driving force behind the dock-workers was a remarkable leader, Zulu Phungula, a migrant tog worker from the Ixopo district.⁹⁷

Iain Edwards' research highlights the less obvious forms of mobilisation occurring outside the realm of formal trade-union or political organisation from the 1940s. Edwards' work brings out the paradoxical state of African politics in Durban in the late 1940s. On the one hand, the better-known organisations, like the ANC, the Youth League and the Communist Party, were generally weak and lacking in influence in Durban at this time. The ANC's Durban branch, which had only 140 members in 1949, had become very much Champion's personal 'fief'.⁹⁸ On the other hand, Edwards also observes the growth of 'a new militant assertiveness' among the African proletariat in Durban after the Second World War. This 'assertiveness' was embodied in 'the shantytown movements, millenarian sects and co-operatives which were to be the organisational bases of proletarian power'.⁹⁹ One such movement was the Natal African Tenants and Peasants Association. The association was established in the mid-1940s under the leadership of Sydney Myeza. It served to 'unite various shantytown communities' and provided them with an organisational base.¹⁰⁰

Edwards also suggests that this new 'militant assertiveness' marked the breakdown of the populist unity that had once been embodied in the by now defunct ICU. As this unity fractured more along class lines, the proletariat developed increasingly critical and resentful attitudes towards the African élite – the small-scale entrepreneurs, the shacklords, the advisory board members.¹⁰¹ Some members of the élite in turn made attempts to organise themselves. In the late 1940s the Bantu National Congress was formed, 'a pro-apartheid and anti-Indian body which pictured itself as being the successor

to the tradition of politics started by Dr J.L. Dube'. This movement gained little support and was short-lived. Another élite grouping formed themselves into a literary and cultural club, based at the Bantu Social Centre, in an effort to distance themselves both from political militancy and from the working class itself.¹⁰²

In the 1950s the struggle for space in Durban was to become more and more an uphill battle. Industrial expansion, the formalisation and entrenchment of residential segregation, and an assault on informal settlements, were the main forces that served to close down spaces that had once been accessible to the underclasses in the more central areas of Durban. Private industrial or commercial compounds, often centrally located, came to be closed down from the 1950s as owners needed the space to expand their plants.

More significant, in terms of the regulation of space, was the Group Areas Act of 1950. This is often seen as a key component of apartheid social engineering. It is also viewed as the handiwork of a Nationalist government foisting segregationism on all municipalities, whether they supported the group areas principle or not. The Durban City Council was not controlled by the National Party in the 1950s, but it would be a serious mistake to assume that the Durban municipality was therefore an opponent of the Group Areas Act. Indeed the measure rather endorsed and formalised much of the segregationist thinking and practice that had deep roots in Durban's history. Racial segregation had been very much on the agenda of Durban's dominant class in the early twentieth century. It gained increasing white support and a degree of implementation in the 1930s. In the 1940s many whites agitated against 'Indian penetration'. In 1943 the city council's Post-War Development Committee, believing that it was in the interests of each racial group to be housed in separate areas, recommended that a system of racial zoning be introduced in Durban. Indeed a detailed zoning plan was produced, a plan which is remarkable for the way in which it prefigured the eventual group areas map of Durban. So when the Group Areas Act was passed it met with an enthusiastic response from Durban's authorities. In November 1950 the city council appointed a technical sub-committee to consider the racial zoning of the city according to the group areas principle. The sub-committee reported firmly in favour of racial residential segregation, the necessity for this arising 'primarily from the desire of persons of the same group to live in the same neighbourhood'.¹⁰³

The combined impact of the Group Areas Act, the state's assault on 'illegal squatting', and urban relocation, devastated the lives of thousands of Durban's residents from the 1950s. About 80 000 Indians were forced to move from their homes, often in stable, long-established communities, as a result of group areas proclamations issued between 1958 and 1963. During the same period 120 000 Africans were removed from the Cato Manor shack settlement under the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act. From 1959 Durban's oldest African township, Baumannville, was gradually closed down, involving the removal of

about 120 families. It was also during the late 1950s and early 1960s that over 8 000 African migrant workers were relocated from Durban's central hostels in Bell Street, Ordnance Road and Sontseu Road. All were moved to hostels in the new township of KwaMashu.¹⁰⁴

The removals involved vast numbers of people and represented a devastating assault on the underclasses. Until this time there had still been people able to resist the forces of proletarianisation: among them one could include market gardeners, and the petty entrepreneurs or informal sector operators in Cato Manor and elsewhere. Their precarious access to physical space and markets was largely destroyed by the removals. The new townships, the reception depots for relocated communities, were situated far from central Durban. Access to informal sector markets was largely closed down, by distance and by the raised transport costs that township residents would now have to bear. Moreover, these peripheral townships lacked any proper urban infrastructure. Educational, recreational and health services were sparse, making for a bleak, alienating, deprived daily existence.

During the 1960s it appeared that the efforts of the central and local state to regulate access to physical space, and to close down political space, were becoming increasingly successful. The racial geography of Durban was gaining definition along group areas lines. The political militancy and cultural resilience of the underclasses was seemingly cowed. The post-Sharpeville decade of repression provided the appearance of quiescence and gave confidence to apartheid-planners that their social engineering could work. But the 1960s were to represent only an intermediate lull between the struggles of the 1950s and a renewed surge of militancy in the 1970s.

Spatial restructuring had not gone ahead without resistance in the 1950s. During this decade the black underclasses of Durban organised and acted in various ways. They engaged in overt forms of political action, such as the 1952 defiance campaign, even though the level of participation in this campaign in Durban was relatively small compared to some other parts of the country.¹⁰⁵ Members of the underclasses also organised and acted as workers. The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was active in Durban during the 1950s.¹⁰⁶

Opposition and resistance could also be community-based, directed primarily against spatial restructuring and relocation. A number of organisations, including black neighbourhood ratepayers' associations, voiced their opposition to group areas. In June 1958 the Minister of the Interior issued Durban's first group areas proclamation. Mobilisation against the proclamation was led by Indian residents, who held three mass protest meetings within three weeks of the proclamation. At the largest meeting, on 26 June, ten thousand Indians gathered at Curries Fountain. But this campaign seems never to have risen above the level of verbal protest. There was no attempt at action or defiance.¹⁰⁷ In this respect it differed significantly from the resistance offered by the residents of Cato Manor against their forced relocation.

In March 1958 the Durban corporation began the removal of Cato Manor's inhabitants to KwaMashu. In June 1959 rioting broke out in Cato Manor. The resistance was initiated by women, particularly the liquor-brewers whose very livelihood was threatened by the destruction of Cato Manor. The women vented their anger by attacking the municipal beerhall in Cato Manor, overturning vats and destroying equipment. For two weeks Cato Manor was the scene of overt resistance, expressed in demonstrations and clashes with police. And again, at the end of March in the following year in the immediate aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre, Cato Manor residents were once more at the forefront of resistance in Durban. On 31 March and 1 April 1960, a large crowd tried to march from Cato Manor into central Durban. Most were blocked by police cordons, but about a thousand people managed to march through the city to the central gaol where they demanded the release of ANC detainees. For some days the authorities and employers were ill at ease as workers and activists tried to confront the local state by organising a general strike in the city.¹⁰⁸

In 1959 and 1960 African protest and resistance in Durban reached a high level of militancy. Such a pitch of activity was not to be attained again in the city for another thirteen years. The year 1973 brought the Durban strikes. They began in January at the Coronation Brick and Tile factory, where workers demanded an increase in the minimum weekly wage rate from R8.97 to R20. The entire African work-force of two thousand came out. They were followed later in the month by about seven thousand workers at the Frame Group of textile factories where wages were among the lowest paid by industrial employers in Durban, being approximately 20 per cent lower than those paid in manufacturing as a whole. The Frame management refused to negotiate and called in the police. Eventually workers returned to work under the threat of dismissal.

The Durban strikes seem to have been characterised by spontaneous mass action. No formal leadership or organisational structures emerged, except in the case of the textile industry where a trade union actively negotiated on behalf of the workers. For the most part leadership and organisation were structured informally. The strikes were not particularly significant in terms of immediate gains won by workers. Indeed, the few wage increases that were conceded tended to be small. Rather were the strikes significant as a catalyst for further action and organisation. Strike activity spread around the city, so that by the end of 1973 about a hundred thousand workers in Durban had gone on strike; and Durban continued to be the centre of industrial militancy until 1976. In the longer term the strikes gave an enormous impetus to the dramatic nationwide growth of the black labour movement in the 1970s.¹⁰⁹

During the 1980s Durban became ever more a site of popular struggle. Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of this struggle was the appropriation of living space. It is estimated that between 1973 and 1988 the population of greater Durban more than trebled. This estimated population was about 3.5

million in 1988. Almost half of this population, about 1.7 million people, were reckoned to be living in shack settlements in the outlying regions of greater Durban. The settlements mushroomed on land falling under the KwaZulu government which permitted such informal settlement to occur largely unimpeded. The rapid growth of the settlements is usually put down to the impoverished state of rural areas in KwaZulu, to evictions from white-owned farms in Natal, and to the abolition of influx control in 1986. Against this, however, it should be noted that one survey revealed that 46 per cent of shack-dwellers had been born in the greater Durban area.

The same survey showed that most shack-dwellers had jobs and that destitution was not the norm. But the overriding picture of life in the settlements was a grim one. The basic urban infrastructure of roads, sanitation, water and lighting was almost entirely absent. Health and educational services barely existed. Unemployment was rife. The massive growth of these settlements was in many ways a repetition of the scenario of the 1940s and 1950s, albeit on a very much larger scale.¹¹⁰

The struggle for living space was not confined to the peripheral zones of greater Durban. In some central residential areas of the city, particularly in the high density zones where apartment blocks predominate, there was growing defiance of the Group Areas Act. So-called 'grey areas' emerged where blacks occupied flats in areas that were demarcated as white group areas. This trend can perhaps be seen as part of a larger struggle to make Durban a non-racial city. The 1989 defiance campaign, organised by the mass democratic movement to protest against the tricameral elections, highlighted the discriminatory basis that ordered the provision of services and facilities in Durban. Hospital segregation was targeted when a number of blacks presented themselves for treatment at the city's 'whites only' Addington Hospital on one day in August. And three days before the tricameral elections about five thousand picnicked and swam at Addington Beach which the city council still maintained as a segregated white preserve.

During the second half of the 1980s, greater Durban increasingly became an arena of violent conflict. Occasionally this would flare up into a major explosion, as occurred in Inanda in August 1985.¹¹¹ For the most part, though, the violence simmered, with political killings occurring with frightening regularity. The 1984-87 township uprising accentuated the division between those aligned with the Congress tradition of mass struggle and defiance and those who supported Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha organisation with its narrowly ethnic support base and its strategy of working within and through apartheid institutions. The conflict, in which thousands of people were killed, was more complex than a straightforward clash between contrasting political ideologies and strategies. It also has to be viewed within the context of the changing political economy of Durban. Large areas on the periphery of the city came to be colonised by shack-dwellers. These settlements grew in something of a

power vacuum, where no clear-cut authority structures existed. In this vacuum there emerged informal power structures which strove to impose their will on particular communities. In some cases power was assumed by warlords aligned to Inkatha. These, the most notorious of whom was Tshabalala of Lindelani, exercised a quasi-feudal sway over their communities, exacting a variety of dues and obligations from squatters in return for residence 'rights'. This autocratic, intimidatory and often violent 'warlordism' must be contrasted with efforts to establish a more participatory style of informal local government in the shape of street committees. These were set up around the country during the township uprising of the mid-1980s. They represented an attempt by those supporting popular mass struggle to introduce a measure of democracy and discipline to specific urban communities. The street committees emerged as a counter to the official black local authorities, which lacked any popular legitimacy, and to the authoritarian warlords.

Today, Durban, in terms of population size, is reckoned to be the second fastest growing city in the world behind Mexico City. This growth is placing enormous strain on both the city's economy and its infrastructure, neither of which is keeping pace with population growth. In this situation the struggle for space takes on new proportions. As this book tries to show, much of the history of Durban in the twentieth century has been about the contesting of space. The local state consistently tried to control space in the service of the city's predominantly white middle class. Residential space has been manipulated through various mechanisms with a view to banishing the black underclasses to the city's periphery and so insulating and immunising whites from the supposed dangers that accompanied the black urban presence. The closing down of physical space for the underclasses also served to limit their access to other forms of space, economic, cultural and political.

However, this regulation and manipulation of space has rarely proceeded smoothly in Durban. It came up against the resilience of those determined to retain the spaces that they carved for themselves. In the history of twentieth-century Durban there are certain episodes and images that best capture this resilience. One thinks of the ricksha-pullers, struggling to remain part of the city's transport infrastructure and resisting exploitation and exclusion in 1918 and 1930. Musicians and entertainers giving vibrant expression to an emergent working-class culture in the shebeens and dance-halls. Migrant hostel-dwellers initiating and sustaining the 1929 boycott of the municipal beerhalls. Johannes Nkosi leading the pass-burning campaign of 1930. Workers rallying behind Zulu Phungula's strike campaigns in the 1940s. Women brewers defending their livelihood and territory in Cato Manor in 1959. The spontaneous upsurge of worker militancy in Durban in 1973. In the post-apartheid era these are the events and personalities that will move to the forefront of Durban's collective historical memory.

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7. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness', p. 59.
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9. See below, essay by Paul la Hausse, p. 47.
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16. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
17. *Ibid.*
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37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 202–6.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 200–2; La Hausse, 'Struggle for the City', pp. 147–8; Marks, *Ambiguities*, pp. 76–7.
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Part One

City Life