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Transition to Confrontation in Duduza, 1978 - 1985

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BROKEN PROMISES: DISCONTENT, PROTEST, AND THE TRANSITION  
TO CONFRONTATION IN DUDUZA, 1978-1985

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Introduction

During 1984-85 the East Rand township of Duduza, like many other black townships in South Africa, became the scene of chronic confrontation between township residents and the security forces. The violence of, and scale of popular participation in, these confrontations stood in sharp contrast to the apparent 'quiescence' which had previously characterised the township. This paper examines the development of township politics in Duduza, as a case-study of the process of transition to confrontation during the early 1980s.

The geographical extent of township conflict during the mid 1980s might suggest a common set of causes and experiences. In many different townships, residents did organise and protest, in similar ways, within much the same broad structural context. But - as is becoming clear in the emerging literature of township studies - locally specific factors and experiences were of considerable importance in shaping the timing, direction and pace at which township politics changed.<sup>1</sup>

The broad context for popular political mobilisation in Duduza comprised general factors. These included (in the early 1980s) the

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Josette Cole, Crossroads: the Politics of Reform and Repression (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987); Heather Hughes, 'Violence in Inanda, August 1985', Journal of Southern African Studies 13,3 (April 1987); Nkosingathi Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence and the Struggle for Control in Pietermaritzburg', Journal of Southern African Studies (1989); my own 'Political Mobilisation in Tumanole, 1984-1985', Africa Perspective, new series vol 1 nos 7&8 (1989), and 'Township politics, urban development, and the political economy of Soweto 1978-1984' (unpublished seminar paper, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, May 1988).

resurgence of nationalist and trade union organisation, and a deepening recession, and (more chronically) diverse state policies. These state policies, comprising key pillars of apartheid in the 1970s, generated grievances that were to be at the heart of popular protest. The state's urban policies involved not only the notorious influx control, but also the insistence that township administration and development be funded from within townships (primarily from rents and service charges). State educational policies starved township schools of resources, and later involved the imposition of age limits on attendance in particular classes. The state's political policy denied township residents democratic and genuinely accountable representation at either national or local levels.<sup>2</sup>

This context was, however, mediated through locally-specific factors, which profoundly shaped the way in which general factors informed township politics. In Duduza, the key locally specific factor was another product of apartheid: the sense of injustice that had resulted from the circumstances of forced removal in the 1960s and 1970s.

### Broken Promises: The Legacy of Urban Resettlement

Underlying the transition to confrontation in Duduza was residents' involvement in new forms of political action, in response to the chronic failure of the state to provide promised township development on terms acceptable to the residents. The promises at issue had been made at the time of urban resettlement.

The geography of East Rand townships was for the most part laid out in the period 1954-61 in response to the Mentz Commission and the work of the Group Areas Board. These bodies recommended major township consolidation, including the concentration of 'coloureds' and Indians into former African locations, and the concentration of Africans into large regional townships on the periphery of the East Rand.

Atypically, the Mentz Commission and Group Areas Board do not seem to have made major recommendations with regard to the area around Nigel (on the south-east of the Witwatersrand), including its existing African township, Charterston. But by the early 1960s, local developments prompted the removal of Charterston. On the one hand, major house-building was necessary as the shortage was admitted to be

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2 The general background to popular protest in Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) townships is discussed in Seekings, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in PWV Townships, 1980-1984', in Cobbett and Cohen (eds) Popular Struggles in South Africa (London: James Currey, 1998).

up to one thousand houses (compared to an existing stock of only 1400 houses). From the early 1950s there had been a proliferation of shacks, especially in an area known as Masakeni.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, township residents were lobbying for township development, presumably along the lines of the development that had very visibly been undertaken in townships such as KwaThema and Daveyton. Secondly, the central state seems to have recognised the impracticalities and disadvantages of trying to concentrate all 'coloureds' on the East Rand into one township (Reigers Park, in Boksburg) and decided to develop further townships for 'coloureds'. In 1957-8 the forthcoming rezoning of Charterston was announced. Its African residents were to be removed to a new African township, Duduza, in the KwaThema/Tsakane complex, and Charterston was to be developed as a 'coloured' township.

The circumstances of removal to Duduza were to be a decisive factor in shaping the character of subsequent township politics. Residents remember that they were promised that Duduza would be:

... a new township, which will be built according to the new structures and the new system, which will have all the facilities required for a human being. Firstly, well-built houses; secondly, the sewerage system; thirdly, water supply; [and] electrification and all other requirements [of] a community living in a township.<sup>5</sup>

When we left Charterston we were promised that we will be taken to Duduza where all the improvements will be made because we were complaining about sewerage, electricity and the tarring of streets in Charterston. So they said we should move to Duduza.<sup>6</sup>

Kebana Moloi, who was Chairman of the Community Council in 1983-84 and was again elected Mayor in late 1988, confirmed that these promises were made. But, as he bemoaned, it was Charterston which was developed (almost immediately), not Duduza.<sup>7</sup> The principal 'coloured' leader in Nigel at the time recalls that he was instrumental in mediating between the Nigel Council and the Charterston Advisory Board, and that he, in good faith, relayed the Council's promises that Duduza would be a model township.<sup>8</sup> Accepting the promises, Charterston residents did not resist removal.

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- 3 South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), Race Relations Survey 1959-60.
  - 4 Interview with Teddy Kleinveid, former chairman of the ('coloured') Nigel management Committee; Alra Park, Nigel, 17 September 1989.
  - 5 Evidence of Mrs Z.L.Thobela, in State vs Baleka and 21 others, Supreme Court of South Africa, Transvaal Provincial Division (henceforth Baleka trial), court transcript pp 21,051-2.
  - 6 Evidence of E.M.Tsagane, Baleka Trial, pp 22,093-4.
  - 7 Sowetan, 6 June 1983, p6; interview with Moloi, Duduza, 18 September 1989.
  - 8 Kleinveid, interview.

The first Charterston residents to move to Duduza were the Masakeni shack dwellers, in about April 1964. In the late 1960s there was a second wave of removals, this time of the residents of backyard shacks in Charterston. Finally, in 1974, people living in (and often owning) houses in Charterston were moved.<sup>9</sup> The last families were moved in January 1975, and the local Area Director of the East Rand Administration Board was commended 'for the tact and devotion with which the peaceful and efficient removal and resettlement ... was effected'.<sup>10</sup>

Conditions in Duduza were not what was promised. There was no electricity, internal water supply, or sewerage system. Even the houses provided were inadequate:

The house into which I moved at Duduza did not have a floor, instead one would find grass. The walls were not plastered, it did not have a ceiling. [There were] no inside doors. All that was done by me.<sup>11</sup>

There was considerable discontent: "We were not pleased at all; it was bad", remembers one elderly man. Furthermore, he recalls, the rents in Duduza were high: R7.30 per month, compared to 16/6 (ie under R2) in Charterston.<sup>12</sup> Through the 1960s and 1970s, according to residents, rents in Duduza were no lower than in other East Rand townships where sewerage had been installed, and residents had not been made to pay for that installation.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that Charterston was provided with tarred roads, electricity and sewerage within two years of the removal of its African population seems to have emphasised the sense of fraud felt by Duduza's residents. Alex Montoedi, who was later to be the chairman of the Duduza Civic Association, asked:

If they could upgrade that area within such a short time, one wonders why ERAB [the East Rand Administration Board] has failed to do the same in our township in the past twenty

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- 9 Interviews with Civic Association leaders, Duduza, 5 and 10 September 1989.
  - 10 East Rand Administration Board, 1975-1976 Budget Speech, by SJ van der Merwe (ERAB chairman), 12 March 1975, pp 10-11.
  - 11 Evidence of M.P. Mazibuko, Baleka Trial, p 22.627; also cf Thobela, Baleka Trial, pp 21.053-4.
  - 12 Thobela, Baleka Trial, pp 21.053-4.
  - 13 Interviews with Civic Association leaders, Duduza, April 1986. Residents were probably correct; certainly from the late 1970s rents were broadly the same in different East Rand townships despite very uneven development and service provision [see Government notice 1,701, Government Gazette 6,613 (10 Aug 1979): GN 1,408, GG 7,118 (11 Jul 1980); GN 605-19, GG 7,501 (27 Mar 1981); etc].

years. We were told Duduza was to going to be turned into the most beautiful township on the East Rand. None of ERAB's promises have materialised.<sup>14</sup>

Residents who arrived in Duduza later received similar promises, i.e. that the township would soon be developed. But there was still no development in the township.

The Deputy-Minister of Cooperation later denied in Parliament that any promises had been made.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that promises were made by local state officials, without the knowledge of the central state. But it is likely that promises were made by someone, given the range of residents who believed this to be the case. Furthermore, it is the belief that promises were made rather than whether they were made or not or who did so which was important in the development of township politics. Why these promises were so important by residents is a question explored in the concluding section of this paper.

Residents' most pressing grievance concerned the bucket-system for sewerage. People complained that council trucks did not empty the buckets often enough, and they would have to (illegally) dig holes and empty their buckets out themselves. Indeed, many people felt that the position was worse than it had been in Charterston:

In Charterston there had been a lot of space between the houses, So a truck had been able to drive between the houses to collect the night soil buckets. In Duduza, the houses are much closer together... Residents had to carry their buckets out to the road each night.<sup>16</sup>

Other grievances concerned the water supply, with thirty houses sharing one street tap; the absence of street lighting; roads, which were so muddy that after rains they became impassable; and overcrowding caused by the housing shortage.<sup>17</sup>

Initially, Duduza's residents believed that the state would fulfil its promises. Indeed, the fact that the houses in Duduza were too close together to drive a truck between led people to believe that it was 'not back to square one', and that sewerage would be installed. But in the late 1960s Duduza's residents began to get suspicious, because the new section of the township was not even provided with street

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14 Quoted in Sowetan, 7 June 1983, p6.

15 Hansard, Questions and replies (henceforth, Q&R), 17 June 1983 col 1,599-1,601.

16 Interviews, DuCA leaders, April 1986.

17 Baleka trial: Thobela, pp 21,054-5; and S.H. Mhlambi, pp 21,694-5. Interviews, April 1986, September 1989.

lighting.<sup>18</sup> Disillusionment set in.

#### Rent increases under the Community Council, 1978-82

Between 1977 and March 1980, 224 Community Councils were elected in African townships in South Africa. The Department of Cooperation and Development claimed an average poll of 42% in contested wards.<sup>19</sup> Community Councillors across South Africa generally presented their role in public as one of securing the maximum benefits to their constituents that were possible within the constraints imposed by the central state, and to a lesser extent to gradually chip away at those constraints.<sup>20</sup> Many councils therefore sought to embark on long-delayed development plans. In this they were usually enthusiastically supported by the central state, which from about 1975 increasingly recognised the importance of urban development. But, the existing financial constraints imposed on the councils by the central state compelled the cost of development to be immediately passed on to township residents in the form of rent increases. If a council tried to prevent this, it could be over-ruled by the local Administration Board.<sup>21</sup>

A Community Council was elected in Duduza in May 1978. As elsewhere, candidates solicited votes with the promise that residents' grievances would be met. There would be township development, they promised, but neither evictions nor rent increases.<sup>22</sup> These promises could not be realised. Between 1978 and 1983 the Duduza Community Council was caught in the contradictory position of trying to promote development whilst controlling increases in rents.

Soon after its formation, the Community Council announced a R4 rent increase at a public meeting. Residents were told that the increase was:

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18 Interview with RJ, Duduza, 10 September 1989.

19 SAIRR, Race Relations Survey 1980, p 312.

20 See especially Richard Humphries, 'Life after Death: Legitimacy and Black Local Government', working document, Department of Development Administration and Politics, University of South Africa (1985).

21 For a general discussion, see Simon Bekker and Richard Humphries, From Control and Confusion: The changing role of Administration Boards in South Africa, 1973-1983 (Pietermaritzburg, 1985).

22 Mhlambi, Baleka Trial, pp 21.695-6. Moloi confirms this (interview, 18 September 1989). He suggests that the Community Councillors were more committed and dynamic than their predecessors on the Urban Bantu Council, who were 'very old, and some could not even speak English or Afrikaans'. Moloi himself had briefly been a member of the South African Students Organisation (SASO) whilst at the University of the North in 1973.

... for a master plan to bring about some improvements in Oduza. Well, I was present in that meeting. People wanted to reject that increase because of the promises of 1974, but ultimately after some discussions it was resolved, OK, the rent could be increased and the people would be prepared to pay because they needed those improvements in the township.

The improvements discussed at the meeting included the installation of a water-born sewerage system, electrification, and road-surfacing. Rents were duly raised. But nothing was done about these "improvements", and it was suspected that the rent went to pay for the development of Charterston (which was renamed Alra Park).<sup>23</sup>

Scepticism about incumbent councillors abounded. Residents believed that councillors were not affected by many of their grievances: "...for instance [councillors'] houses were electrified and they had water on the premises". And it was believed they got preferential treatment in other respects:

My husband wanted to start a business [as] a funeral undertaker because there was none in the township. When he went to the offices to apply for a license, he was asked whether he was a councillor. He was not a councillor, which then resulted in him not being issued with the license.<sup>24</sup>

Residents were not impressed with councillors' responsiveness:

Another grievance was that the Community Council should by all means try to call as many public meetings as possible where people could air their views and their grievances, because it had been apparent that the Community Council was not calling meetings frequently or they took a long time to call a meeting, except when they wanted to increase rent.<sup>25</sup>

In many townships residents' attitudes to councillors changed during the early 1980s. The Community Councils Act provided for little genuine accountability by councillors to their constituents. As councillors demanded bribes or favoured themselves in the allocation of sites and licenses, and repeatedly increased rents despite their constituents' protests, so they lost whatever legitimacy or support they had earlier enjoyed.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Tsagane, Baleka Trial, pp 22,094-5; also cf Mazibuko, p 22,628; interviews, 10 September 1989. The date of these events is unclear: in evidence in court, residents gave 1978 as the date, but press reports indicate a R3.90 rent increase (in two stages) announced in July 1979 - Rand Daily Mail, 18 Jul 1979.

24 Thobela, Baleka trial, pp 21,056-7. There is little other existing evidence of corruption or allegations thereof; whether this is indicative of anything other than the limits of the evidence is unclear.

25 Tsagane, Baleka trial, p 22,097.

26 See Seekings. 'Origins'.

The inadequate finances available to the ERAB and Community Council led to further rent increases in Duduza. The five budgets from 1978-79 through to 1982-83 provided for a combined deficit of R2.1m. Rents in Duduza were thus an average R10 per month per house lower than the 'economic' rent which would require no extra-township subsidisation.<sup>27</sup> In 1979 the Duduza Community Council resolved that: 'It is an accepted principle that all Community Councils have to administer their townships on an economical basis and a positive approach in this regard is necessary'.<sup>28</sup> A series of rent increases were implemented to prevent the above deficits being even larger. In September 1981 rents were increased by a further R4, from R18.45 to R22.45 per month. The Community Council was reportedly opposed to this increase, but was overruled by ERAB.<sup>29</sup>

Councillors explain the rent increases in terms of the intransigence of ERAB and the Government. Among their criticisms were the following: Funds from the sale of houses in Charterston to 'coloureds' after 1975 were supposed to be transferred to Duduza, but allegedly were not; and the Government only offered the Duduza Council expensive loans - whilst cheaper loans were allegedly available to other townships, including nearby Tsakane. According to Kebana Moloi, the Community Council system was regressive because it shifted responsibility from the Administration Board to the Council.<sup>30</sup>

On other issues, councillors were more in tune with popular feeling. Councillor Moloi seems to have been particularly active. In 1980 he led opposition to a proposed 40% fare increase on the buses run by the Nigel Town Council. The Council rejected the increase, and Moloi convened a public meeting where residents also rejected the increase.<sup>31</sup> Councillors were also involved in opposition to rent increases through the East Rand Urban Councils Association (ERUCA).

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- 27 Rents and service charges were subsidised through the profits on the sale of beer and liquor through municipal outlets; 'economic rentals' required no extra-township subsidisation.
- 28 The budget figures and resolution are from ERAB's Budget estimates for the financial years 1979-80 to 1982-83.
- 29 Sowetan, 11 Feb 1982, p7. It is unclear why township informants, both in interviews and court testimony, do not refer to this rent increase.
- 30 Interview, 18 September 1989.
- 31 Rand Daily Mail, 20/26 Aug 1980. The meeting was intended to correct the widely-held belief that the Council was party to the decision to increase the busfares - Moloi interview, 18 September 1989.

The one development that did take place was the construction of c400 new houses by ERAB in 1982 and 1983.<sup>32</sup> In line with other Administration Boards at the time, ERAB was initiating housing schemes in several of its townships in an attempt to mitigate severe housing shortages. In the East Rand, a special concern was the proliferation of shacks, in both backyards and on township boundaries. Shack-demolition without some corresponding housing provision was widely opposed by employers (including the Department of Education and Training) and councillors. This put pressure on ERAB to build some housing as a prerequisite for shack-demolition.

When the Community Council was elected in 1978 the waiting list for houses in Duduza comprised almost 1,000 families (compared to an existing stock of about 3,500 houses). Moloi helped residents defy the ERAB by building shacks.<sup>33</sup> By February 1982 there were 250 shacks in the township. The Council, like most others on the P.W.V., stated it would not tolerate illegal residents, but could not come up with any policy on "legals".<sup>34</sup>

New houses were built by ERAB with loans through the Department of Community Development. These loans had to be subsequently repaid in full. The result was that rents on new houses were considerably higher than on existing township housing. In Duduza, rents on the new houses which were occupied in June 1982 were set at between R30 and R75, according to the tenant's income. This sparked off protests from September 1982.

Residents in the new houses initially demanded uniform rents of R30. The Council was reported to have sent a memorandum to this effect to ERAB. A Residents Action Committee was formed. The Council agreed to meet the Committee to discuss reducing rents to a uniform R35, but residents were now demanding that rents should be R22, as in the rest of the township (although the Committee were still prepared to accept R35). Residents insisted that ERAB must provide sinks, taps, fences, and toilets; ERAB insisted that the residents must pay. The planned meeting between Council and Committee never materialised: the Council said the Committee failed to turn up on the agreed date of 6 October; the Committee chairman said they did not know the meeting was to be then.<sup>35</sup> Before the issue was apparently resolved, however, rent increases were announced for the whole of Duduza.

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 32 235 houses were reportedly built in 1982, and 156 in 1983. There might, however, be some overlap between these figures, i.e. the total might therefore be less than 391. Hansard, Q&R, 24 May 1983, col 1,356-63, and 16 May 1984, col 1,364.

33 Moloi interview. See also Rand Daily Mail, 6 Feb 1982.

34 Sowetan, 26 Feb 1982, p3.

35 Sowetan, 1 Sep 1982. p2; 6 Oct, p2; 11 Oct, p4.

In October 1982 the Community Council announced a three stage rent increase. In November, rents were to be increased by R9, followed by a R6 increase in April 1983, and a further R7 increase in April 1984.<sup>36</sup> The three stages would, together, increase rents by R22 or 100%. As in 1978, the rent increase was ostensibly to finance the much desired development. The Council had approved a R1.4m plan in March.<sup>37</sup> According to one concerned resident, councillors said:

... it was for the improvement of the township, repeating what was said before. I was not happy about that [and] later when I discussed it with my neighbours, I discovered that they were also not happy about that.<sup>38</sup>

Many residents would have been happy to pay for whatever they consumed in the way of public services, but were opposed to paying for any capital costs.

#### The Formation of the Duduza Civic Association

During 1982 a group of residents had been drawn in to discussions on civic matters. The key figure in this group was Alex Montoedi, a former professional footballer who knew Dr Motlana of the Soweto Civic Association (Motlana was a director of Benoni United, where Montoedi had played). The group had discussions with Motlana and the Johannesburg Legal Resources Centre about organising a civic association.<sup>39</sup> On the 19 November, 1982, the Duduza Civic Association (DuCA) was launched at a meeting at the township's Lutheran Church.

One of the residents involved in DuCA was Elijah Tsagane, who became the Civic Association's secretary. According to Tsagane:

Since we realised that the Community Council was not calling meetings where people could air their grievances, we felt that the Duduza Civic Association should act as a bridge between the residents and the Community Council, so that whatever comes up in the community we can take over to the Community Council.<sup>40</sup>

Residents presented their grievances at this public meeting. Tsagane then wrote to the Community Council to request a meeting. The Council responded "favourably and quite quickly". The Civic Association leaders, the Council, and officials of the East Rand Administration Board met three times over the following months to discuss residents'

36 Sowetan, 18 October 1982, p2.

37 Hansard, Q&A, 17 Jun 1983, col 1,599-1,601.

38 Mazibuko, Baleka Trial, p 22,628.

39 Interview with Civic Association leaders, 10 September 1989.

40 Tsagane, Baleka trial, pp 22,095-7.

grievances. The first meeting was deadlocked because (according to Alex Montoedi, the chairman of the Civic Association) "the Council was adamant that they were going ahead with the [rent] increase in order to pay back the loan for the installation". The Council probably thought its options to be limited because installation had already commenced. The Civic considered urgent legal action, but this was to be unnecessary because the Council announced at a public meeting at the end of October that the immanent first stage of the rent increase would be suspended. The Civic held regular report-back meetings.<sup>41</sup> In December the Council further suspended the increases.<sup>42</sup>

In January 1983, the Community Council chairman, Mokoto, announced a new and much lower rent increase. In April, rents would be rise by R1.60 per month. R1 would go towards the provision of services, and R0.60 for the construction of a library. The earlier debates over rent increases, however, had aroused complete opposition to increases. Montoedi, when interviewed, said that no increases were warranted until services were improved, and this view was clearly widely held. At an "emotionally-charged" public meeting called by the Council, about 300 residents insisted that sewerage and taps must be installed before there was any rent increase. The Council itself decided to reject the increase. Mokoto himself told the press that:

We are not prepared to pay the R1.60 until living conditions in the area have been improved. Residents are against the increases and there is nothing the council can do about that.

Elsewhere, and in the past in Duduza, Administration Boards had overruled Community Councils. ERAB decided not to in this case.<sup>43</sup>

### The Nature of Resistance to Rent Increases

Rent increases were a central feature of state urban policy during this period, as the pronouncements of state officials made quite clear. The state sought to promote township development, not least because the link between poor conditions in the townships and urban protest had been repeatedly made by state officials themselves<sup>44</sup>. Yet the state's fiscal crisis and concern to "depoliticise" issues through state non-intervention pushed it to an insistence on residents paying, up front, for any development. Over this, the state was unwilling to

41 Ibid; Hansard, Q&R, 17 Jun 1983; Sowetan, 21 Oct 1982, p2; 1 Nov, p4; 2 Nov, p2; 8 Dec, p4; interviews, op cit.

42 Hansard, Q&R, 17 Jun 1983.

43 Sowetan, 28 Jan 1983, p2; 1 Feb, p5; 18 Feb, p2.

44 And in official commission reports, including the Cillie Report.

compromise<sup>45</sup>. In the case of Duduza, the Community Council's eventual rejection of rent increases, under popular pressure, led ERAB to cut Duduza out of its capital budget. In ERAB's 1983/84 budget, Duduza received none of the R38m allocated to East Rand townships,<sup>46</sup> and no new houses were built in 1984.<sup>47</sup>

The Civic Association and the residents themselves objected to the rent increase not through any explicit opposition to state urban policy, however, but rather because of historically-rooted perceptions concerning rents and development. These perceptions were embodied in notions of promise and justice, and in particular in the argument that the state's attempts to increase rents to finance development involved broken promises and were therefore unjust.

Opposition to rent increases was not programmatic. There does not seem to have been any explicitly formulated call for state subsidisation. The residents' demand was clearly stated at a public meeting:

We do not agree to the increase of the rent. Instead, we want all the money that we have been paying to the authorities, that they must take that money and then do the project from that money.<sup>48</sup>

This demand was not derived from a general view of the nature of the South African state's obligations to township residents. It was based on residents' view of the historical relationship, specific to Duduza, between resettlement and rents (reluctantly paid), on the one hand, and township development, on the other. Thus residents demanded development financed out of the rents they had paid in the past. The argument for this demand comprised three related factors. First, council tenants (and only 8% of the houses in Duduza were not rented as late as December 1983<sup>49</sup>) argued they could not be expected to pay for improvements on properties they did not own. They were vulnerable to eviction, and even to removal (as had happened before in Charterston). Secondly, they suspected that, even if they paid the

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<sup>45</sup> Soweto was, to some extent, an exception to this. Cf my 'Township politics, urban development, and the political economy of Soweto 1978-1984'.

<sup>46</sup> Sowetan, 15 Apr 1983, p7.

<sup>47</sup> Hansard, Q&R, 19 Jun 1985 col 1444. The official township population during 1983-84 was just over 30,000 (Hansard, Q&R, 5 Jun 1984 col 1448, and 21 Apr 1985 col 1264); the official average occupancy rate was therefore 8 per house. The unofficial population and occupancy rates would have been much higher.

<sup>48</sup> This was the text of a message sent to councillors after the January 1983 public meeting: Thobela, Baleka trial, pp 21,058-62; Mhlambi, pp 21,699-700.

<sup>49</sup> Hansard, Q&R, May? 1984.

increase. sewerage would not be installed (as after 1978). Thirdly, they felt that the state (and council) should honour their promises to turn Duduza into a model township, without imposing rent increases.

Popular concern over the rents and development issue was rooted in material factors. Household incomes in Duduza were primarily dependent on manufacturing employment in Nigel, which in 1976 had comprised about four and a half thousand jobs for black workers.<sup>50</sup> Almost all of these lived in Duduza, with just over one thousand resident in hostels. During 1982 the first signs of the impending recession were becoming apparent. The largest employer, Union Carriage, laid off about 200 workers who went on strike in February 1982. Later, when the recession deepened, employment plummeted.<sup>51</sup> The importance attached to the rents issue also reflected the tensions in councillor-'community' relations.

The Civic Association's position on rents was in practice contradictory with state urban policy - as was the case in many other townships in this period.<sup>52</sup> But it was not intended to be confrontational. Indeed, the general character of political action and organisation in Duduza was essentially non-confrontational. The Civic did not seek to supplant the Community Council, but rather acted as a public watchdog body. It was established as an explicit alternative to the Council only in the sense that it resulted from the perception that the Council was failing in its responsibility to residents. But it intended to operate, and did so, in conjunction with the Council, acting as a bridge between the residents and it. As one Civic leader said in an interview in June 1983:

Our local Community Council is praised by the East Rand Administration Board as the most "obediant" of all under the Board's jurisdiction. But we cannot allow this to continue at the expense of our community... ERAB thinks we are anti-Community Council, but this is not so. We are fighting for the improvement of the township, which has been neglected for so long.<sup>53</sup>

50 1976 Census of Manufacturing.

51 Interview with SK, a dismissed Union Carriage shop steward, 29 December 1989.

52 See for example the discussion of negotiations over rents in the Vaal Triangle, in Chaskalson, Jochelson and Seekings, 'Rent Boycotts and the Urban Political Economy', in South African Review Four (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987).

53 Sowetan, 7 June 1983, p6. Leo Kuper cites an informant in Durban in c1960 who wryly observed that the state regarded the quiet (i.e. obedient) councillor as the true representative of the African people [An African Bourgeoisie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965)].

The Civic would watch over the Council to ensure that the Council adhered to residents' views concerning the relationship between rents and development. The Civic did not, therefore, organise any campaign to boycott the Community Council elections in November 1983. Indeed, some members of the Civic actually encouraged voting.<sup>54</sup> Civic organisation in Duduza was not only non-confrontational, but also maintained some distance from the growing nationalist movement. The Civic declined to affiliate to the nation-wide United Democratic Front (U.D.F.), not because its leaders were opposed to national organisation, but because they identified the civic's concerns as exclusively local.<sup>55</sup>

#### Towards Confrontation: 1984-85

During 1983 and early 1984 the Civic lapsed into inactivity. In late 1984, following protests and organisation in the schools and factories, the Civic was revived. In February 1985 it called a meeting over the bucket issue, where it was resolved to take direct action in protest against the state's failure to develop the township as promised. One youth was shot and injured by the police when residents marched to the administration offices after the meeting. This began a period of violent and chronic confrontation in Duduza. Such an outcome, however, was certainly not intended by most of the residents, or even of the participants in the February meeting.

The emergence of the independent trade unions in Nigel and Duduza during 1983-85 was in part the result of the devastating effect on local employment of the deepening recession from 1982-83. Several major employers were producers of agricultural equipment, the market for which dried up as the drought came on top of the general recession. Union Carriage, the largest local employer, was said to have been retrenching about fifty workers a month from 1983; at the beginning of the decade it had employed over 900 workers, but by the end it employed about 100 only. Another large employer, Powerlines, was said to have retrenched almost half of its 700 workers in late 1983/early 1984.<sup>56</sup> Besides the retrenchments, white workers were very conservative, and there were frequent racial incidents. In this

54 Tsagane, Baleka Trial, pp 22,103-4. The Community Council was not upgraded in terms of the Black Local Authorities Act. Interestingly, the former Community Council chairman and the chairman of the Housing Committee were both defeated in the election.

55 Tsagane, Baleka Trial, pp 22,112. The Civic later affiliated to the UDF, after clarifying what their respective roles were.

56 Statement by Enoch Godongwana, NUMSA organiser, early 1986; interview with Union Carriage worker, 29 December 1989.

context the independent unions received considerable support. The Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) had begun organising at Union Carriage in 1981, but support faltered when it failed to effectively respond to the dismissal of striking workers in February 1982. In late 1983, after the appointment of Enoch Godongwana as a full-time organiser for the region, MAWU began building up support once more. In October 1983 there was a short strike at Union Carriage, and a second strike lasted two weeks in June 1984. This second strike, which lasted two weeks, had a mobilising effect on the community: not only were many households involved because they included striking workers, but also many non-strikers attended the daily union meetings. The National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) also organised in Nigel.<sup>57</sup>

The experience of unionisation at Union Carriage and other firms, and in particular the experience of strike action, mobilised and radicalised many of Duduza's residents. Leading local unionists, and Godongwana himself, did not believe that unions or unionists should distance themselves from township issues (and when MAWU split in mid 1984, the Duduza/Nigel membership followed Godongwana into UMMAWUSA). Several leading unionists became involved in the discussions which led to the revival of DuCA.

As in many other townships, however, the development of civic organisation was influenced by the mobilisation of secondary students. In Duduza, as in many other townships, the first school protests in mid 1984 were short-lived, concerned locally specific complaints, and involved little contact, or even knowledge, of the nation-wide Congress of South African Students (COSAS). Contact with students from outside Duduza led to involvement with regional student politics and secondary school boycotts in line with students elsewhere on the East Rand in October. As one student put it, the 'age-limit fever' spread to Duduza. The October boycott was not formally organised: 'There were no structures, no COSAS in our schools'. But the links with COSAS developed, and in mid November a Duduza COSAS steering committee was elected.<sup>58</sup> Regional and local dynamics had become enmeshed: a broader struggle against the Department of Education and Training (D.E.T.) and 'Bantu Education' combined with existing desperate and localised grievances concerning individual schools.

Organisation in the township was given an impetus by the funeral, on 3 November, of a very prominent trade unionist in Duduza. Douglas

57 Interviews, Union Carriage workers and shop stewards, 18 December 1989, 22 December 1989, 29 December 1989.

58 Interviews with student activists, 22 December 1989 and 5 January 1990.

Mchunu had been a key figure in the organisation of Union Carriage by MAWU/UMMAWUSA. He died at the UMMWAUSA congress, and his funeral was organised by UMMWAUSA officials. 'The funeral was an inspiration', recalls one unionist: Speeches were rousing political, mourners wore organisational t-shirts not jackets and ties, 'the whole community was involved', and (particularly memorably) the coffin was carried shoulder high. Emotions were high, and when, after the funeral, a nervous policeman fired at passing mourners who were returning home, he was set upon and killed. Over the following two days there was wholesale observance of the regional stayaway. Soon after, the Mayor (Moloi) and deputy-mayor resigned from the council.<sup>59</sup>

These events precipitated organisational development almost immediately. Besides the COSAS branch, the Civic was revived with a new steering committee (most of the previous executive was no longer available or interested), and a Parent-Student Committee was elected. Both committees included residents whose prominence in the township was primarily due to their involvement in workplace organisation.

The immediate impetus for the Parent-Student Committee came from local student organisers, who sought their parents' help in mediating between them and the school principals and D.F.T. inspectors. Parents also believed, however, that the formation of parents committees was encouraged by the state.<sup>60</sup> The leading members of the Parent-Student Committee were elderly, and concerned primarily with finding an acceptable solution to the boycotts. The Committee was clearly sympathetic to the students' educational grievances - the chairman of the committee was the father of two COSAS activists. The Committee organised a public meeting, where the students presented their grievances and gave the impression that they would return to school if they were met.<sup>61</sup> The Committee later arranged to meet the Minister for Education and Training, Gerrit Viljoen, in Pretoria.<sup>62</sup>

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59 Various interviews; Thobela and Mhlambi, Baleka trial, under cross-examination, pp 21,075-6 and 21,706-7. On councillors' resignations, see the astonishing evidence of Councillor Namane in State vs Montoedi and others, especially pp 491 ff: Other councillors announced their resignations but did not resign.

60 Interview with DuCA leader on the Parent-Student Committee member, 10 September 1989; Mrs Z.L.Thobela, Baleka trial, pp 21,063-75. The Committee did not have a formal constitution. The basis of the belief that the state welcomed parents committees was the belief that the Minister of Education and Training had called for them in a newspaper article: cf Statement by Joseph Thobela, chairman of the Parents Committee.

61 Mhlambi, Baleka trial, pp 21,704-6.

62 Thobela, Baleka trial, pp 21,067-75.

The events of November were dramatic, but they were not immediately followed by further confrontations. During December and January the township remained tense, apparently almost expectant, but there was very little that actually happened which was out of the ordinary. Organisational development continued, with local-regional links being built, both by students and older residents. A COSAS branch was formally launched in January.

It was only in February 1985 <sup>that</sup> Duduza politics underwent a transformation from isolated protest to general confrontation. The events of that day represented the convergence of a number of trends in township politics in Duduza: popular discontent of the development issue, student protests, the rising favour for direct action, and the increasing nervousness and consequent brutality of the police.

The revived DuCA was accused by the increasingly militant student activists of being passive, despite its decision to affiliate to the U.D.F.. This criticism encouraged the Civic to take up the bucket issue again.<sup>63</sup>

On Sunday 17 February the Civic Association held a public meeting over the bucket issue<sup>64</sup>. For the first time, there were outside as well as local speakers. A Civic leader related the saga of 'negotiations' with the ERAB over the bucket issue. Members of the audience then expressed their grievances, and said that it was good to have a meeting where they could do so. Many said that they were tired of just talking about their grievances. One woman in the audience proposed that they should take their buckets to the administration offices the next day, so that the township manager 'would feel the smell'. The Civic leaders were opposed to this idea. Nonetheless, residents were enthusiastic, and decided that it should be done that same day. According to one resident: 'On arrival at the offices, finding the buckets there, that would make them [ie the officials] realise that there was something happening and will make them understand that we do not want the buckets anymore'.

The meeting was clearly already quite chaotic. It then became completely so. Before the meeting was properly closed, and against the wishes of the Civic Association leaders, 'people just left, they were no longer interested in listening to what was being said'. A lot of middle-aged residents collected buckets and took them to the

63 Interviews with Civic leaders, September 1989; and with student leaders, 5 January 1990.

64 This and the following paragraphs drawn from: interviews, April 1986 and September 1989; the evidence of Thobela and Mazibuko, Baleka trial, pp 21,099-21,104 and 22,629-34.

administration offices. They found that some buckets had already been left there, probably by younger residents who had impatiently left the meeting first. According to one middle-aged man:

... the idea was to leave the buckets there and not empty them there... [But] it did not end up that way. What happened was that people arrived at the offices to put away the buckets there. A police officer started shooting from inside, as a result of which the people had to run away and in running away they dropped the buckets, which resulted in the contents of the buckets being spilled over.

Nobody had been attacking the offices when the policeman opened fire, as the police later claimed. But it is not surprising that a policeman, only a few months after one of his colleagues had been killed, was trigger-happy.

One 'youth' was shot in the leg. In response, 'youths' burnt down two municipal policemen's houses, and a third's clothing was taken from the room he rented and burnt. The following day a thirteen year-old was shot dead by police. In response, another five policemen's houses were burnt. That night the police began detaining and arresting people. Over the following days most of the leadership of the Civic Association and Parents Committee were picked up. With intensifying violence, perpetrated by police and township residents, and the immobilisation of disciplined township organisation, Duduza slid into an anarchic civil-war.

#### The Nature of 'Quiescence' and Protest

Township politics in Duduza conforms with the general pattern that is emerging from studies of townships across South Africa during this period.<sup>65</sup> New grievances within townships emerged, or at least existing grievances became more intense, and the existing patterns of political action seemed incapable of redressing them. It was the perceived bankruptcy or inefficacy of previous forms of political action which constituted the initial dynamic of the transition to more active protest and confrontation. Popular grievances concerned: rent increases, evictions, and township development; busfare increases; education; and, partly as a result of these, the role of township councillors. These grievances were generally taken up initially through dissident township councillors and/or watchdog civic associations. These bodies generally lobbied, without or with few large-scale public demonstrations. In Duduza such lobbying achieved

65 See, for example, Chaskalson and Seekings, 'Vaal Triangle/Oranges Free State' and 'Pretoria/Witwatersrand', in Political Conflict in South Africa (Durban: Indicator Project South Africa, 1988).

its immediate objectives in 1982-83, and the Civic Association then lapsed into passivity. However, as organisations such as DuCA failed to redress key or recurring grievances, they either transformed themselves or gave way to more assertive organisations. These were increasingly linked with the resurgent nationalist movement, and increasingly understood their local grievances as bound up with the question of access to formal political power at both national and local levels.

In Duduza, grievances over rents and development were directly taken up through a Civic Association that, in its operating style and its relations with other bodies, exhibited conservative features. Indirectly, the council (and especially members such as Moloi, the Mayor during most of 1984) fell in behind township opinion.

In so far as Duduza in the period before 1984-85 can be regarded as 'quiescent', this cannot be understood as contentment, but rather needs to be seen in terms of the manner of political action. Township residents generally had more to lose than their chains, and their very powerlessness involved a vulnerability to retribution. When the realistic prospects of substantial change arising from confrontation were low, but the risks of retribution were high, then most township residents understandably preferred to avoid such action. Often, they avoided all political action. Increasing numbers, however, engaged in non-confrontational struggles, including 'hidden forms' of resistance, attempts to keep or remove power from the state, and engagement with the state through channels that the state accepts, at least tacitly. The essence of 'quiescence' in South African townships during c1973-84 lay in the prevalence of such non-confrontational forms of political action.<sup>66</sup>

The transition from 'quiescence' to confrontation comprised a shift of popular participation away from existing patterns of political action (and inaction) into new patterns. In Duduza, this involved the growth in late 1984 of new organisations - independent trade unions, the revived DuCA, the Parents-Students Committee, and COSAS. In the cases of the first three, and some of the membership of the fourth, this transition was for the most part neither revolutionary nor even

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 66 For further discussion, see my 'Powerlessness and Politics' (unpublished seminar paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, January 1989). This analysis is informed by John Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley (Oxford, 1980). I am unaware of any substantial discussions of the contemporary importance of religion and culture as a site of struggle in the manner explored historically by Jean Comaroff, Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance (Chicago, 1985).

confrontational in intent. However, the transition from previous patterns of political action involved transformations in consciousness and context which led to an unintentionally confrontational end.<sup>67</sup> Residents' radicalised understanding of the causes of their grievances promoted greater assertiveness. More importantly, the coincidence of active protest in townships nationwide made residents more self-confident, and the security forces more repressive (which generated considerable popular hostility).

The radicalisation of township politics in Duduza during 1984-85 cannot be understood in terms of a single incident or new grievance (material or otherwise). Rather, it needs to be understood in three stages. First, the watchdog role of the Civic, and its negotiations with the state, during 1982-83 had not resolved the bucket question. Meanwhile, other townships (already better developed than Duduza in many cases) were being further developed, admittedly at the expense of residents whose rents were being increased. Secondly, the schools crisis, the parents' organisational response, and the resignation of the more popular councillors, seem to have emphasised that Duduza's experiences were not unlike those of many other townships both regionally and nationally. Local activists were brought into increased contact with national or regional activists. Former leaders were also put under increasing pressure by more confrontational militants. The time had come for new, and assertive, initiatives on the old question of the bucket system. Thirdly, the particular events of 17-18 February 1985, and subsequent detentions, recast township politics into a new and starkly polarised framework, with the state and the 'community' lined up against each other in overt confrontation.

#### Promises and Perceptions of Injustice: Powerlessness or Paternalism?

The case-study of Duduza raises an apparent paradox: why it was that Duduza residents put such an emphasis on the promises which they claimed the state had made, concerning township development, whilst there was generally (i.e. in black townships) little sense of a paternalistic state? The last section of this paper assesses the significance and sociological basis of notions of such injustice as a factor in township politics.

The importance of ideological or cultural factors in protest have been widely acknowledged in studies of popular protest. For example, EP

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67 In mid 1985 township politics in Duduza, Tsakane and Kwaikhema came to be dominated by extreme violence. Cf Glenn Moss, 'Duduza's Civil War', Work in Progress 47 (April 1987) pp 28-33.

Thompson wrote of legitimising notions and 'a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices', whilst Barrington Moore has emphasised moral outrage or notions of injustice.<sup>68</sup> Such moral factors were apparent in protests in South African townships in the period 1978-85. 'Moral outrage' followed both broad changes and specific incidents. The former included especially township councillors' abrogation of their perceived responsibilities to the 'community'; the latter included especially specific incidents of repression that were widely seen as unwarranted, for example the suppression of peaceful anti-rent protests (such as in July 1984 in Tumahole, September 1984 in the Vaal Triangle, and November 1985 in Mamelodi).

In each of these cases moral outrage was bound up with material and political factors: Political culture, as well as organisation, need to be understood within the structural context of the political economy. Two key features (in this regard) of the township political economy were, first, the state's fiscal policy requiring township development and service provision to be financed from within the township, and secondly, the power relations between state and township residents.

In many townships there was considerable opposition to rent increases, generally on the grounds that either (1) residents could ill afford them, or (2) past rent increases had not led to the promised development. In Duduza, unusually, a central theme in protest politics during this period concerned the township's residents' reluctance to pay rent increases for development which they believed the state had promised to provide (and which, furthermore, residents had already paid for).

Despite extensive interviewing I have been unable to reach a conclusive 'explanation' of the prominence of these beliefs. My interpretation is that it resulted from, and thereby reflected, the very powerlessness of the township's residents. In a situation in which they had very few political resources, but in which 'justice' (in a moral and not institutional sense) was surely 'on their side', the state's promises were an important resource. Residents' vulnerability to, and hence partial dependence on, the state led to their emphasising resources offered by the state. An emphasis on state promises reflected neither deference to the state nor (necessarily) a particular view of distributive justice.

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68 E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 50 (February 1971); Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

Whilst a popular emphasis on state promises was unusual in P.W.V. townships, it was not confined to Duduza. A close parallel was the case of the Silvertown 'section' of Tsakane, where residents' struggles revolved around their demand that the state implement the promises it had made when removing people from the Old Location in Brakpan. More frequently, state promises have been emphasised by freeholders in rural 'black spots' facing dispossession.

Such an emphasis on the state's promises did not reflect any belief in a paternalistic state, i.e. a state bound in some way to provide developmental services. In South America, urban protests have sometimes explicitly reflected such a belief, probably the result of the experience of Peronist regimes which have, more in their rhetoric than their actions, emphasised redistributive and developmental policies. In South Africa, township residents had neither historical experience nor reason for future expectations of state beneficence. The state was something to avoid or evade.

If the state made promises it offered residents a political resource, albeit a resource of uncertain strength or utility. How long residents would emphasise state promises would depend on a range of factors: their own powerlessness, whether the issue enabled them to succeed in a defensive struggle, and how important it was to develop an assertive struggle. In this last respect, the assertion of state promises was clearly limited, as they were an object and a focus for defensive struggles only. Avoiding rent increases was the most that could be achieved in the short term. Powerlessness generally both generated grievances and severely curtailed possible political responses; in terms of political culture in Duduza, powerlessness led to the importance attached to the state's promises, but also underlay the incapacity of residents to do anything about it. Unless the state was faced by very widespread resistance of this type, or township residents resorted to more assertive tactics, a policy change by the state was unlikely. Thus Duduza was radicalised during 1984-85, with the evident bankruptcy of 'talking', as one woman put it at the meeting of February 1985, and the examples of assertiveness by local students (and by township residents across the East Rand and elsewhere), so more assertive tactics (bucket-dumping) were taken up.