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Edwards, Iain; Nuttall, Tim

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STRUCTURE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE MAKING OF APARTHEID

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AUTHOR: Iain Edwards and Tim Nuttall

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INTRODUCTION

In January 1949 Durban experienced a weekend of public violence in which 142 people died and at least 1 087 were injured. Mobs of Africans rampaged through areas within the city attacking Indians and looting and destroying Indian-owned property. During the conflict 87 Africans, 50 Indians, one white and four 'unidentified' people died. One factory, 58 stores and 247 dwellings were destroyed; two factories, 652 stores and 1 285 dwellings were damaged.[1] What caused the violence? Why did it take an apparently racial form? What was the role of the state?

There were those who made political mileage from the riots. Others grappled with the tragedy. The government commission of enquiry appointed to examine the causes of the violence concluded that there had been 'race riots'. A contradictory argument was made. The riots arose from primordial antagonism between Africans and Indians. Yet the state could not bear responsibility as the outbreak of the riots was 'unforeseen.' It was believed that a neutral state had intervened to restore control and keep the combatants apart.[2] The apartheid state drew ideological ammunition from the riots. The 1950 Group Areas Act, in particular, was justified as necessary to prevent future endemic conflict between 'races'. For municipal officials the riots justified the future destruction of African shantytowns and the rezoning of Indian residential and trading property for use by whites.

Advocates of the emerging multi-racial political alliance between the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Indian Congress (SAIC) realized the deep damage the riots meant for their cause. Not only was the conflict between Indians and Africans, but it had erupted just as plans were being made for mass black action against the state. For the Congresses the riots were fuelled by the depressed socio-economic circumstances in which black people lived, and by the racially discriminatory policies of the state.[3] The same point was made by leading Durban liberals.[4] Some political leaders went further than sketching in the broader circumstances. The Natal Indian Organization (NIO) was the only black political body publicly to state the widely held worry that the riots were organized. Others avoided this sensitive question. Causal links were drawn between the riots and perceived inadequacies within local black political organizations. Local members of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) members attributed the riots to the anti-Indianism of Durban ANC leaders such as George Champion, and to the illegitimacy of such leaders in the eyes of the African proletariat. Through Champion's machinations the African masses had no political home.[5] Moses Kotane, privately at least, saw the riots as an indictment of political leadership in general.[6] At issue here were the crucial questions of differing strategies and the political distance between formal organizations and the masses. Although sensing the importance of such questions,

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1. Union of South Africa, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Riots in Durban, UG 36-49 (hereafter cited as Riots Commission Report 1949), p.5. The injured were listed as 541 Africans, 503 Indians, 32 whites and 11 coloureds.
2. Riot Commission Report 1949, pp.6, 21-22.
3. T. Karis and G.M. Carter, From Protest to Challenge, Vol.2 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), pp.285-88.
4. M. Webb, 'The Riots and After' and K Kirkwood, 'Failure of a Report' in Race Relations 16, 4 (1949) pp.85-106.
5. Interview with Mr R Arenstein, 29 May 1985.
6. Interview with Mrs J Arenstein, 18 July 1985.

the problem of the riots was never fully addressed.

The riots of 1949 have cast a long shadow. Chief Buthelezi has often implied a 'repeat of 1949' in his calls for Zulu-led black unity, in his demands for legitimate 'Zulu' aspirations, and in his castigation of Indian meddling in African politics.[7] For many in Natal the killing of Indians and destruction of Indian property in Inanda during 1985 seemed to fulfil such warnings.[8] In the current Natal violence the African-Indian idiom has taken on many meanings. For example, Lindelani squatters have recently characterized the African township dwellers of neighbouring Ntuzuma as 'Indians'. This racial language signifies squatter perceptions of the better living conditions in Ntuzuma, and it helps justify violent attacks from Lindelani on the adjacent township.[9] The questions of 1949 were raised afresh at the national level by the tri-cameral elections and the country-wide revolt of the mid 1980s. At stake was the nature of black political alliances amidst evident grassroots militancy, at a time when a defensive state sought to legitimate itself through ambiguous reform policies.

Given the profound political impact and continued relevance of the riots it is surprising that they have not received more academic attention. A handful of studies have simply treated the riots as an 'event', doing little more than describe what happened.[10] By contrast Meer, Kuper and Webster have put forward many suggestive perspectives, some of which were developed a long time ago.[11] Writing twenty years after the riots, Meer stressed two main themes: the role of the state and the appropriateness of the inter-racial alliance politics of the later 1940s. For Meer the search for the role of the state remained as central as it had been for congress politicians immediately after the riots. But Meer developed a virtually conspiratorial view of the state's role.[12] Whites manipulated African frustrations for uniquely white goals. This perspective draws on 'common sense' memories which have survived to this day. During the riots whites painted themselves black and led attacks on Indians.[13] White madams gave their

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7. R. Southall, 'Buthelezi, Inkatha and the Politics of Compromise', African Affairs 80 (1981); G. Mare and G. Hamilton, An Appetite for Power (Johannesburg, 1987), p.152.
8. A. Sitas, 'Inanda, August 1985: "Where Wealth and Power and Blood Reign Worshipped Gods"', South African Labour Bulletin 11, 4 (1986), p.109.
9. South 20 December 1989.
10. S.L. Kirk, 'The 1949 Durban Riots: A Community in Conflict', MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1983; L.K. Ladlau, 'The January 1949 Riots', BA Honours essay, University of Natal, Durban, 1974; S.B. Maraj, 'Faces of a Dark Tragedy: the 1949 Durban Riots', BA Honours essay, University of Durban-Westville, 1985.
11. F. Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans (Durban: Avon House, 1969); F. Meer, 'African Nationalism - Some Inhibiting Factors', in H. Adam (ed.) South Africa: Sociological Perspectives (London: O.U.P., 1971); L. Kuper, An African Bourgeoisie (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965); E. Webster, 'The 1949 Durban Riots - A Case Study in Race and Class' in P. Bonner (ed.), Working Papers in Southern African Studies (Johannesburg, African Studies Institute, 1978).
12. Meer, Portrait, p.36.
13. Interview with Mr S S L Mtolo, 10 June 1983.

'cookboys' time off to join the fight.[14] White observers shouted: 'I am all for the coons, whatever they do to the bloody coolies.'[15] Such often factually correct memories offered grist to the mill of those searching for the role of the state and the nature of white racism.

Meer's second concern was the way the riots highlighted the failings of the black alliance politics of the period. The later 1940s seemed to offer so much politically, yet the riots cut right across attempts to build mass-based organizational unity against the apartheid state. In a particularly trenchant critique of these attempts Meer wrote:

> African nationalism became confused with racialism and African leaders were prematurely pushed by non-African democrats into making a choice between ... international humanism and ... parochial nationalism based on the idea that each group has its own permanently distinct historical tradition. ... The new generation [of African] leaders were never given an opportunity to work out their own intermediate nationalism and through it to reach out to ... other groups. ... There was a premature insistence on international, inter-racial cooperation - a superficial sharing of platforms and a disproportionate representation of non-African democrats on bodies which planned essentially African political action ... at a stage when many real and very large chasms existed between the life chances of Africans and those of the other 'races' to whom Africans were expected to extend equality in the future.[16]

This reveals a keen sense of the politics of the period, but Meer's analysis of the riots is fundamentally flawed by a simplified notion of the state [17] and through her characterization of the African participants as 'disembodied abstract thing[s]'.[18]

In a seminal earlier study of Durban's African bourgeoisie, Kuper highlighted the role of the nascent African trading class in the politics of the late 1940s.[19] Kuper saw clearly how African traders had expanded their operations immediately after the riots, but failed to see wider entrepreneurial activities, their social origins and how these interests led into the riots. Kuper focused merely on leadership and not on supporters. Webster developed many of these themes in a path-breaking materialist analysis of the riots: an event which loomed large over the 'race-class' debate of the 1970s.[20] Webster outlined the processes of racially differential incorporation into the structures of Durban society during the 1940s. Concerned with the interaction of structure, agency and mass behaviour, Webster lacked much crucial evidence. He correctly rejected the concept of

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14. Interview with Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985.
15. R. St John, Through Malan's Africa (London, 1954), p.293.
16. Meer, 'African Nationalism', p.132.
17. In analyzing the Inanda conflict of 1985 Meer again reached for a conspiratorial view of the state. F. Meer (ed.) Institute for Black Research Special Report: Unrest in Natal, August 1985 (Durban: Institute for Black Research, 1985). For an important criticism of this work, see H. Hughes, 'The August 1985 Violence in Inanda', Journal of Southern African Studies 13, 3 (1987).
18. Webster, 'Riots', p.22.
19. Kuper, African Bourgeoisie, Chapter 17.
20. Webster, 'Riots'.

'race riots', seeing instead an 'economically based class conflict with a profoundly racial dimension'.[21] Webster stressed the partial and embryonic character of class formation during the period and isolated key actors and their motives within the riots, but noted that the whole area of popular politics required further research.

There is increasing recognition that South African historians have skirted the problems of ethnicity and racism amongst the oppressed and exploited.[22] As ethnic mobilization and conflict assume a greater role worldwide, so there is a new awareness of the need to address these issues.[23] The riots of January 1949 require revisiting.[24] Yet the conflict must not be seen simply as a race riot, nor as a spontaneous or isolated event. The January 1949 riots must be viewed as an integral feature of African proletarian militancy during the late 1940s.[25] Such was hinted at by Hemson but in a way which suggested too stark a distinction between progressive worker politics, populism, the racial conflict of January 1949, and the possibility of a general strike in May 1949.[26] The riots grew from a diverse political experience with potentially different trajectories to that played out in January 1949. What did the riots reveal about the character of black politics in Durban during the late 1940s? What were the structures of power within the city? How did the imperatives of survival in an industrializing city both inform and constrain proletarian political practices? How did the proletariat perceive the power of the state and capital? Did proletarian politics embrace notions of social transformation? What were the goals and how were they to be achieved? How did anti-Indianism relate to and form a part of the African proletariat's experience of survival and visions of transformation?

THE CHARACTER OF PROLETARIAN POLITICS

The period from the mid 1930s to the late 1940s was a time of rapid growth for Durban. The local economy expanded and diversified, particularly in its industrial sectors. Between 1936 and 1951 the census recorded a doubling of Durban's total population, from around a quarter of a million people to just under half a million. During this time the number of Africans in the city increased from 71 000 to 151 000, the figures for Indians rose from 89 000 to 161 000, and the total for whites climbed from 97 000 to 151 000.[27] The local and central state responded indecisively to these dramatic developments, failing to provide for or control the growing population. During the late 1940s there was considerable public debate over just how post-war Durban society

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21. Webster, 'Riots', pp. 30 and 48.
22. P. Bonner et al., Holding Their Ground (Johannesburg, 1989), p.13.
23. S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds.), The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa (London, 1987), p.35; C. Young, 'Ethnicity, Class and Nationalism in Africa', Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines 26, 3 (1986); L. Vail (ed.), The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa (London, 1989).
24. T.A. Nuttall, "'It Seems Like Peace But It Can Be War": The Durban "Riots" of 1949 and the Struggle for the City', paper to the South African Historical Society conference, Pietermaritzburg, 1989.
25. I.L. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane Our Home. A History of African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor Farm, 1946-1960', PhD, University of Natal, 1989.
26. D. Hemson, 'Dock Workers, Labour Circulation, and Class Struggles in Durban, 1940-1959', Journal of Southern African Studies 4, 2 (1978), p.107.
27. J.R. Burrows, The Population and Labour Resources of Natal (Pietermaritzburg, Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission, 1959.), pp.24-25.

should look. It was a debate informed by the relative weakness of the state, by the desire of segments of local capital to restructure the urban workforce, by the increasingly vociferous racial demands of Durban's white ratepayers, and by the assertiveness of ever larger numbers of proletarianised Africans and Indians. Key issues were political power within the city, employment, wages, land, housing, education and the appalling state of other amenities and infrastructure. Living conditions for the mass of the population, and - crucially - the unresolved future of the city, provided the central arena of conflict between dominant and dominated. During the later 1940s, mostly in response to challenges 'from below', state and capital attempted to effect short-term remedies, deflect public anxiety, and gain fuller control over the city. Reacting to these initiatives, and seeking to seize opportunities for advance in a situation of flux, the underclasses fashioned an aggressive politics of their own.

Amongst Durban's Africans the struggles over basic requirements for urban living often assumed a class character. During the late 1940s the lines of class differentiation grew more varied and marked. Material conditions and daily experiences differed between 'educated' Africans in the lower middle class and the mass of wage labourers. Amongst the latter there were important differences between domestic workers, weekly or monthly paid industrial workers, and daily-paid (togt) dock workers. Class antagonisms provided at least part of the motivation for the almost weekly battles at soccer matches or ingoma dance competitions between industrial and togt compound-dwellers, on the one hand, and gangs of domestic servants on the other.[28] Further differences were experienced between municipal township residents, compound-dwellers, and squatters in the growing shacklands. There were also signs of an increasingly self-conscious 'urban' African component, calling for state intervention to protect and advance city-dweller interests against migrant workers and the masses streaming into Durban.[29] Hostel dwellers spoke vehemently about the need to allow further migrant workers into the city. The interests of established residents were challenged by the thousands of new arrivals who sought a foothold on the peripheries of the labour market and shack settlements.

Yet contacts with the rural areas were still too close, experience of the city and wage labour too new, and class differentiation amongst Africans in Durban still too unformed to give rise to specifically class-based politics. Real and potential class antagonisms amongst Africans jostled with collective experiences of hardship in the city. These experiences were pervasive, affecting Africans in racially and ethnically distinct ways. From this grew a form of proletarian populism that was to assume an ever more central role within African urban politics during the late 1940s. This was a populism which attempted to counter class animosity, gain improved access to basic essentials, and provide for those denied formal employment. The geographical focus of this populism was the large and rapidly growing Cato Manor shack area, less than ten kilometres from Durban's city hall. As increasing numbers of women and children settled in the city, the difficulties of sustaining a permanent household became more pressing. Formal employment amongst Africans, including domestic work, was largely restricted to men,

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28. For example, Killie Campbell Audio-Visual (KCAV): Interview with T. Dlamini, 14 June 1981.
29. For example, Durban Native Administration Commission (hereafter Broome Commission), verbatim evidence: 14 November 1947, Baumannville African Women's Association, pp.34-44, and 21 November 1947, Chesterville Location Tenants Association, pp.36-49.

and was further limited by the nature of capital accumulation and racial workplace division in Durban. Wages earned in the formal sector were crucial but not sufficient. It became essential to gain other means for household survival. From this flowed a growing sense of the broad material and political position of Africans within the city.

Central to African proletarian experience was a growing understanding of the structures, imbalances and contradictions in Durban's post-war economy. Demanding a living from the industrializing city, ordinary Africans became increasingly aware of how money, goods and services were produced and distributed. Proletarian perspectives sometimes coincided and sometimes conflicted with those of other interest groups and classes, striving to achieve their own specific aims. According to a popular African slogan of the time, it was important to examine 'economics' rather than simply speak of the benefits of different political perspectives.[30] Four inter-related but conflicting cycles of accumulation and distribution were commonly identified.[31]

Firstly, there were the dominant structures of industrial and commercial activity. Industry was controlled by 'white' capital while both whites and Indians held considerable commercial power. African participation in large-scale industry and commerce was effectively restricted to the roles of consumer and unskilled labourer. During the late 1940s, industrialists sensed an imbalance between the industrial and commercial sectors, while white commercial interests reflected different concerns. Durban's market area was small and included vast African reserve areas where trade was minimal. Within Durban many felt that there was too much commercial competition. White commercial interests called for restrictions on the Indian traders who had cornered key African custom.

Secondly, there were the municipality's profiteering networks. Profits came from a municipal monopoly over sorghum beer sales and from renting stalls to African traders in official beerhalls and eating houses. Aside from a general resentment against the municipality, Africans were struck by a particular irony. African custom provided the means whereby the municipality could strike against its major competitor, illicit African trading.

Long-standing market networks of African petty commodity production, services and exchange represented a third commercial cycle. These informal networks had, by the early 1950s, almost completely ousted a fourth cycle, the barter exchange of basic goods. The scale and profitability of informal trading varied considerably. These activities were pivotal to proletarian household life, particularly in the shacklands. The informal networks, which relied exclusively on the custom of employed African workers, had the potential to sustain non-waged dependents and enable others to resist low-paid employment. Organized commerce and the municipality had long been hostile to informal trade and continually sought to stamp it out as an illegal threat to their interests. Employers expressed concern over the implications of illegal trade: drunkenness and low productivity, and the relative ease with which many seemed to escape the full rigours of continuous waged employment. But the ability of the municipality to curb these practices in the growing shantytowns was very limited.

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30. C D S Mbutho, 'A History of Clermont', n.d. See also Ilanga 16 August 1947.
31. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.36-38.

The new market ambitions and imperatives of survival amongst African households highlighted and exploited the political and economic space created by the contradictions of the Durban economy. Expanded informal trading networks, 'fertilized' by wage earnings, were perceived as a major vehicle for increasing the economic stake of Africans in Durban. Amidst attempts to reduce the marginality of Africans came far-reaching demands and aspirations. Rejecting the prevalent notion of Africans as mere unskilled labourers working for others, came calls for African ownership, not just of land and housing, but also of businesses. These included buses, shops and factories. African working class consciousness was overlaid with proletarian aspirations that reflected a very different understanding of African status in the city. African demands introduced a new element, making existing racially defined struggles over access to and control of material resources that much more volatile. Africans were newcomers in a long-standing battle between whites and Indians.

There was also a new grassroots awareness of the relationship between ethnicity, economic power and an emerging sense of nationalist politics. Post-war Durban had seen an influx of Mediterranean immigrants who had used their whiteness to heave Indian traders out of central Durban. The economic movement had been crucial to the rise of Afrikaner power. Could the success of Indian and immigrant traders be traced to the use of kinship relations in business? High prices and social pressures pushed African customers away from white shops towards the Indian areas of the city. Surely Africans should keep their money for themselves? Could this be the way through which ordinary Africans and their families could survive? This was surely what people meant by 'self-help' and 'African upliftment'.

Such perceptions were central in the forming of a vibrant African proletarian consciousness. The interaction of structure and experience gave rise to new ideas of ethnicity, social transformation, urban belonging, communal accountability and the dignity of ordinary Africans. Proletarian ideas of 'New Africa' only partially resonated with petty bourgeois uses of the concept.[32] Spanning a range of endeavours, from coping with daily life to the more optimistic visions of social change, the African proletariat generated its own leadership. A host of parochial leaders emerged, each representing the atomized interests of a highly fluid society. The most important leaders were those in the shantytowns who spoke primarily for the interests of newly established and prospective households. They were an articulate source of popular African intervention in public debate about the future of Durban society.

The distinctly grassroots assertiveness failed to develop organizational coherency. This was a form of mass politics that was often inchoate, only partly focussed and comprised of diverse trends. The potential for populist unity was strongest when directed against external targets. The structural position of Indians, particularly in the spheres of land, housing, and trade, provided a consistently fertile and unifying negative focus in African politics. When directed against the state, this politics was far more ambiguous and led to considerable disunity amongst the proletariat. Some saw benefit in pressurizing the central state to curb the oppressive power of the municipality or to force the provision of houses and urban services. Others resisted an increased role for the state, rejecting

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32. For one study of the latter see T. Couzens, The New African. A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1985); Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.11-12.

any form of governmental authority. Others believed that through its weakness, state intervention would be coupled with a quest for legitimacy that could be exploited.

To the proletariat, however, it was not simply a question of state presence or absence. Individuals and groupings did take advantage of state absence but it also seemed that in its testiness and brutality state presence revealed brittleness. When, for example, a white couple was harassed by two African men, police moved into the hostels taking many thousands for questioning. Africans responded not just with alarm, but with amusement. Police over-reaction and brutality was seen as a sign of weakness which often encouraged confrontation. For example, when police attempted to arrest a liquor brewer a mob forced them to retreat, and rescued the victim. Petty conflicts often attracted crowds, whose activities were often unchallenged as the police increasingly replaced foot patrols with forays in Scorpion vehicles. Proletarian life in the city had for long been brutal. State-initiated brutality simply enforced such experiences, but in a way which produced a profound disrespect for state power. This was a highly ambiguous tendency within African politics. It was one thing to be cocky against state officials; but quite another task to articulate a more substantial understanding of the role of the state.

State officials were aware of a buoyant and aggressive mood amongst Africans in post-war Durban. However they were unable to pinpoint accurately the actors or the interests involved. A similar unease was felt by established political and trade union organizations operating amongst Africans. From the Congress Youth Leaguers, the Communist Party members to George Champion himself, all recognized the vibrancy and potential force of proletarian politics. Many would try and tap into the groundswell. Others attempted to control or refashion aspects of the militancy. But the mass populism had a highly ambivalent relationship with such leaders and organizations.

The structural position of Africans in Durban society during the late 1940s, and the vigorous politics which flowed from this, provide a broad context for understanding the 1949 riots. The character of African politics during this period gave particular shape to the racial violence. But this conflict was not simply inevitable. There were a number of struggles and specific campaigns waged during the period in the areas of trade, transport and housing which illustrated the various directions and forms which proletarian politics could take. Although accepting the crucial importance of wages earned at the shop and factory floor, the main thrust of political activity lay away from the workplace.

POPULAR STRUGGLES

Wage labour became ever more central during the 1940s for the large number of Africans who settled in the city. A transforming countryside forced migrants to stay for longer and longer periods in the Durban labour market. One might therefore have expected heightened conflict between African workers and capital over wages during the late 1940s. During the war years African workers, particularly those at the docks, had engaged in militant strike action. War-time strikes indicated a growing awareness amongst African workers of conflicting interests with capital. The war years had also seen the early unionization of African workers. These unions included a number of pioneering attempts, initiated by the CPSA, to organize African and Indian unskilled

workers in the same structures.[33] Neither the strikes nor the union initiatives, with a few exceptions, survived the war. The seeds of unionism and collective workplace militancy amongst Africans fell on hard ground. The prospects of united mobilization of African and Indian workers were even harder to realize.

During the 1940s African workers were effectively confined to unskilled jobs in the bottom rungs of a double colour bar, which remained substantially intact during the rapid industrialization of that decade.[34] White workers monopolized skilled posts; white, Indian and coloured workers competed for semi-skilled labour; and Africans joined large segments of the newly settled Indian proletariat in the search for low-pay jobs. The double colour bar was maintained through the defensive tactics of registered unions, to which only white, Indian and coloured workers could legally belong; through the widespread demand of employers for ultra-cheap African labour; and through the migrancy and high job turnover of African workers.

Once the favourable strike conditions of the early war years had passed, African workers fell back on the well-developed tactic of job-hopping.[35] This widescale practice reflected the weak bargaining position of Africans as unskilled workers. The high job-turnover rate bedeviled industrial union organization. Prospects of jointly organizing African and Indian workers were further hindered by the growth of a specifically 'African' worker consciousness. This was rooted in racially differential experiences in the labour market and beyond. Competition for jobs joined other social processes which had the potential effect of defining ethnic boundaries between Africans and Indians. A widespread view amongst Africans during the late 1940s was that Indians had far better prospects of moving into higher-paid semi-skilled jobs.[36]

There was a general cutback in real wage levels in the Durban economy after 1947.[37] African workers were the least able to resist the wage cuts. They did not come out on strike, but increased the tempo of job-hopping, and looked to the co-operatives and other ways of supplementing family incomes. One of the ways in which African workers perceived declining wages during the late 1940s was through the worsening of their position relative to Indian workers.[38] Prospects of black working class unity were subject to countervailing forces, which caused Africans to perceive themselves exploited in unique ways. Deepening proletarianisation of African workers during the 1940s did not result in a linear development of worker organization and workplace consciousness. During the late 1940s the identity of African workers was informed more by broader struggles over survival and social reproduction in the city than by organizational advance on the factory floor.

A recurring feature of the violence of January 1949 was the looting and destruction of Indian shops by Africans. In a number of ways during the 1940s the identity of Africans

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33. T.A. Nuttall, 'African Workers, Strike Action, and Early Trade Unions in Durban, 1937-1949', unpublished paper, 1989.
34. Nuttall, 'African Workers', pp.4-5.
35. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', Chapter 4.
36. Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.144-150, 169-175, 344.
37. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', Chapter 4.
38. M. Katzen, Industry in Greater Durban, Part I: its growth and structure (Pietermaritzburg, Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission, 1961), p.25.

as consumers was bound up with that of Indians as sellers. In addition, the Indian trading class was seen as a direct competitor by African petty traders and general dealers, and by the thousands of Africans who belonged to co-operatives. At one level the 1949 conflict saw dissatisfied customers and frustrated competitors targeting a source of class oppression and exclusion. But it is not immediately obvious why there should have been such friction between Africans and Indians in the commercial sector. How did white traders fit into the picture? Surely the urban poor, whether African or Indian, must have had similar experiences as customers? A number of the political struggles which developed in the commercial field had the potential to become far more than 'African-Indian' conflict. The failure to achieve this potential was a complex amalgam of historical precedents, organizational weakness amongst the oppressed, state intervention, and the powerful influences of everyday experiences on political choices.

Since the late 19th century, backed by capital imported from India, Indians had dominated 'non-European' trade in Durban. White traders were concentrated in the larger scale commerce of the port, municipality and industry. Apart from a handful of 'general dealers' in the townships of Lamont and Chesterville, and in the Indian quarter, African traders had historically been confined to stalls in the municipal beer halls. Municipal licensing policy and restrictions on property ownership had effectively strangled the ability of African traders to raise capital and establish themselves in mainstream commerce. Durban's licensing policies had been more lenient on Indian traders, but had consciously restricted them to the Victoria-Grey Streets area of central Durban, and pushed them out to the peri-urban districts that were later to become occupied by both African and Indian shackdwellers. Assisted by the location of the main black commuter termini in Victoria Street, the 'Indian' quarter was a key focal point of black consumer activity. Africans and Indians were effectively excluded from white shops, with their racist shopkeepers and customers, and their relatively high prices.[39]

The historical patterns of trading activity set important parameters for the anti-'black marketeer' campaign of 1946. The late war years and the immediate post-war period saw shortages of food and other essentials. Scarcity drove prices up; traders were tempted to stockpile goods and make high profits on the 'black market'. In 1944 the local Communist Party of South Africa had established a People's Food Committee: food shortages provided an opportunity for a single-issue campaign with the potential to unite workers and the urban poor of all races.[40] The demands of Party activists for state rationing were a practical expression of an alternative, socialist way of organizing the distributive economy to the benefit of the poor. The People's Food Committee failed to develop into much. The state refused to implement rationing, while various welfare bodies ran soup kitchens to alleviate the crisis.

In 1946, however, the food campaign gained unprecedented new momentum.[41] Popular anger at long queues, scarcity, and the enhanced power of shopkeepers found expression in direct action. A pattern was set when African customers raided an Indian store in the Duffs Road peri-urban area north of Durban. Communist Party and Housewives League activists provided an organizational focus to this new phase in the food campaign. The organizers repeated earlier demands for state rationing, but the target of protest now

39. Riots Commission 1949, evidence, p.234.
40. See correspondence in Natal Archives (NA) 3/DBN 4/1/3/324, 47sj, 1.
41. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.18-24.

became more immediate: the 'black marketeer'. White traders were also no doubt engaging in 'black market' activities, but for three main reasons the campaign focused on Indian traders in the city centre. Firstly, the state was more likely to suppress the campaign if white shopowners were targeted; rampant anti-Indianism amongst Durban's whites meant that suppression was less likely if Indian traders were involved. Secondly, if the campaign was to develop a following it had to relate directly to the experiences of African and Indian customers, who shopped mainly in Indian stores. Thirdly, some of the Communist Party members, who were also leaders of the recently radicalized Natal Indian Congress, had their own agenda of targeting selected wealthy traders who supported reactionary Indian politicians.

Mass rallies were held in various parts of the city. Both Africans and Indians attended, and the crowds ran into thousands. Speaker after speaker was applauded for castigating black marketeering, state neglect of the poor, and the corruption of municipal price inspectors. At one such meeting in Red Square a coffin symbolizing the death of black marketeering was ritually buried.[42] A pattern developed in which anti-profiteering crowds marched in columns into the 'Indian quarter' where they seized stockpiled goods at known 'black market' shops. The goods were then sold to the waiting queues at prices set by CPSA activists. For Party members this was an exciting experiment in popular socialism, with all the makings of a "peoples' revolt". [43] The crowds were non-racial in character; popular anger was being directed at the worst excesses of capitalism in carefully selected Indian stores; stockpiled goods were being redistributed at controlled prices and in orderly manner.

The generalized looting of Indian stores three years later, in 1949, suggests that many African participants of the 1946 food campaign were drawing different conclusions to those reached by Party activists. For many participants in the campaign the chief benefit was the obtaining of scarce goods, a short-term gain. A key element in the success of direct action had been the threatened use of violence. The marching crowds threatened to smash shop windows, forcing recalcitrant Indian storeowners to release goods for sale. The most common weapon used for making such threats was the innocuous but sturdy Coca Cola bottle. If many drew the lesson that threats of collective violence were vital to achieving short-term goals, others would have been influenced by the rejection of legality implicit in the food campaign. Direct action by ordinary people went beyond constitutional protest politics and overturned legally entrenched property relations. A further lesson could hardly have been missed: repressive state forces had not intervened because the campaign had targeted Indian rather than white shops. In January 1949 these 'lessons' were, as we shall see, to be applied with uncanny similarity, but on a far greater scale and without the disciplined organizational focus of the 1946 food campaign.

The consequences of the food campaign were, at least indirectly, to have further implications for the 1949 conflict. The popularity of the campaign pushed the municipality into providing food wagons. This response, together with the limited organizational resources of the small CPSA, effectively dissipated the food protests. It was also highly likely that Indian profiteers soon made alternative arrangements to stockpiling goods in their shops, taking away a key focus of the campaign. The municipal food wagons were intent on supplying more than food. The wagons were a form of

42. Interview with Mr B Nair, 27 June 1985.
43. Ibid.

influx control, issuing food only to employed African men - those who could produce their service contracts. The municipality's intention - that women and unemployed men would leave the city to seek sustenance with country families - was roundly resisted. An increasingly proletarianised African working class and squatter population demanded a living from the city, not the countryside. Under popular pressure, the municipality began distributing food to unemployed men, but still excluded women. It was not surprising then that women became the backbone of the co-operative movement which had been gaining popularity in Durban's shantytowns since about 1945.

Production, marketing and savings co-operatives had long been a force within the rural and to a lesser extent the urban areas of Natal. During the late 1940s a distinctively new and potentially militant co-operative movement burgeoned in Durban, providing an important organizational and ideological thrust.[44] Distributive and savings co-operatives caught the popular imagination as a means of appropriating sections of the market and so increasing the material resilience and power of Africans. Historically Durban had forced Africans to the margins of the city's political economy; co-operatives provided a way of resisting this, providing a stake in the city. The geographical locus of the co-operative movement was in the shantytowns, those areas of space being settled by increasing numbers of Africans in defiance of official policies.

Ordinary women and men were attracted by the co-operative training courses run by 'educated' Africans such as William Mseleku of NABANTUKOP, the Natal Bantu Co-operative. Mseleku and his ilk, and the emerging African shack leaders, saw co-operatives as a means of launching themselves on the entrepreneurial road. The mass of shackdwellers saw co-operatives as a means of survival. They enabled the bulk purchase of essentials, which were then distributed or re-sold. They pooled savings for larger projects, such as building, which could not be paid for by single households. The co-operatives offered shackdwellers the prospect of taking control of some aspects of daily life, particularly who they bought essential goods from, and for what price. Co-operatives provided one means of collectively co-ordinating diverse informal sector activities.

Some political activists, particularly those connected to the Communist Party, saw in the national co-operative movement a means of transforming property relations in the city through collective ownership.[45] In Durban the proletarian consciousness inspired by co-operative activities was more that of ethnic populism rather than proto-socialist transformation. The co-operatives offered a chance to increase African participation in the existing commercial system, not to transform it. From its inception in the mid 1940s the popular co-operative movement had been a distinctively 'African', and even more narrowly a 'Zulu' phenomenon, drawing racial, national, and ethnic boundaries to advance material interests.

Perhaps the most innovative and bold scheme was that launched by Victor Mallie in 1946. Mallie probably saw the growth of individual African businesses arising through the co-operatives as inevitable and also wanted to focus on manufacture; an area ignored within the co-operatives. He envisaged an industrial school for the training of African artisans. Since there were no state training schemes and African urban

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44. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', Chapter 2.
45. M Kotane, Let's Do It Together (Cape Town, 1946).

educational facilities were so few, Africans should develop their own initiatives. As a way of paying their debts to African society, African capitalists should invest in the school which would teach the virtues of sobriety, hard labour and personal dignity. Trained workers would then be available for work in African-owned factories and businesses. Mallie also called for an African boycott of non-African traders, and the isolating of white and Indian domestic or commercial employers who either treated their labourers badly or who did not employ sufficient Africans. Africans should withdraw their labour from such employers.[46] Here Mallie tapped into a generalized grievance against conditions of domestic employment and Indian refusal to employ Africans in their shops. The ANC Women's League also constantly stressed this point.

In the racial structures of Durban's market relations, the most immediate obstacles to African economic advance were commonly seen to be Indians. Indian traders continually 'extracted' money from African consumers. Indian workers appeared to keep Africans out of better jobs, restricting the income African men brought into households. The co-operatives sought to redirect African buying power; they were explicitly anti-Indian in sentiment.[47] From 1947 the real wages of African workers dropped sharply.[48] For African consumers the prices of goods in Indian stores were tangible indices of declining living standards.

During the late 1940s, then, when the few established African traders, such as those represented on the Locations Advisory Board, articulated their long-standing hostility towards the Indian trading class, their nationalist language struck a chord that ran deep. When the few licensed African traders called for the literal implementation of segregation, for African-only trade in African areas, this was echoed in the popular co-operatives. White power and domination were long-range targets of the grassroots and communal 'economic movement' amongst Durban's Africans during the late 1940s; in the short-term it was generally agreed that 'Indian' power was a central obstacle to 'African' advancement.

Indian-owned buses were to be a target of violent attacks by African commuters during and after the 1949 conflict. Unlike the case of Indian traders, this was not an immediately obvious terrain of African-Indian tension. There were no precedents earlier in the decade of collective action by Africans on the issue of public transport. This was interesting, because during the 1940s bus transport became a volatile and explosive issue in many urban centres, particularly on the Rand.[49] The transport question had the potential to unite various class interests and frustrations within black society.

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46. Correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1700-1702: 6-8; Ilanga 26 January 1946 and 14 September 1946; Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', Chapter 2.
47. Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.163-9, 304-305.
48. Katzen, Industry, p.25.
49. See for example, T. Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (London, Longman, 1983), pp.13-15.

Durban had a distinctive history of public transport for black commuters.[50] The municipality was notorious for its neglect of black transport, earning censure from a provincial commission of enquiry in 1946. In the aftermath of the commission certain local officials and city councillors began to toy with the idea of a municipal monopoly over all public transport in the city. At one level this was part of the new post-war commitment to thorough-going urban planning. At another level this suggestion was part of a white ratepayers' campaign to roll back Indian economic interests, in conjunction with Group Areas agitation. Since the 1920s Indian busowners had pioneered black public transport in the Added Areas, organizing themselves into the Bus Owners Association.[51] The 1930 Motor Transportation Act had the ironic effect in Durban of strengthening the hand of existing Indian licensees.

It was into this situation of municipal neglect, policy flux, and Indian dominance that a handful of aspirant African busowners entered during the late 1940s. Hopes had been raised after 1945 by the granting of African-only licences on the routes to Clermont township near Pinetown and parts of the Inanda district north of Durban. Rising African business hopes were channelled into a racial discourse, identifying Indian bus operators in the burgeoning African shack areas as 'foreigners' whose licences should be transferred to Africans in the name of segregation. The major channels by which African traders sought to secure bus licences were the Native Advisory Board and the support of local Native Affairs officials. In the expanding Durban transport market, however, segregation principles ran up against the established interests of the existing busowners, whether municipal or Indian, who used a sympathetic local Transportation Board to block a number of African applications during the 1940s. The most publicized example was the failure of African operators to gain licences to Lamont township in 1948.[52] By 1949 there were seven municipal, no African, and 33 Indian buses on the populous Wiggins/Booth Road route into the heart of Cato Manor.[53]

If there were material reasons for frustrated African entrepreneurs to articulate anti-Indian sentiments, this was less so for the thousands of African commuters who travelled on Indian-run buses. Durban had experienced no bus boycotts or comparable action during the 1940s. Due to the hilly topography of the city the shantytowns were relatively close to the main commercial and industrial areas. Many African commuters did not face the prospect of lengthy journeys to faraway townships. A second important point was the stability of fares on Indian buses throughout the 1940s: a remarkable phenomenon amidst inflation and war-time shortages of parts and fuel. The most obvious source of popular frustration - amongst both Africans and Indians - was the

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50. Unless stated, the details for this section are from Natal Provincial Administration, Report ... Durban Passenger Transport (1946) (hereafter Scott/Baldwin report); Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.317-330, 348, 351. See also L. Torr, 'A Ticket to Drive: The Struggle over African Bus Services in Durban, 1930-1960', paper presented to the Conference on the History of Natal and Zululand, University of Natal, Durban, July 1985.
51. L. Torr, 'The Social History of an Urban African Community: Lamont 1930-1960', MA, University of Natal, 1985, pp.144-156; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Bus Owners Association memo to Riots Commission.
52. Torr, 'Ticket', p.8.
53. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Durban transportation board hearing, 25 February 1949.

segregation of municipal buses operating in the city centre and white suburbs. A few seats were demarcated for black passengers. Once these were full no more blacks were allowed to board, even if the rest of the bus was empty. On the Durban North route, operated by a private white company, black passengers were only allowed to travel if they possessed a certificate from their white madams.[54]

Indian-run buses did not segregate on racial grounds, but they generated their own forms of customer dissatisfaction.[55] Indian buses were few and infrequent. The sparse roads of the shack areas necessitated long walks to bus stops, followed by tedious queues. Only a handful of Indian buses operated ticket systems; none of the conductors wore uniforms. In the jam-packed buses, many of which had both front and rear doors, the payment and charging of fares was often a disputed business. This was especially so during weekends at Cato Manor when thousands of shebeen patrons from the hostels rode back to the city centre. Physical violence on the buses was common. Such conditions affected African and Indian passengers alike. To understand why Indian buses became a distinct target of massed African anger and boycott action during and after the riots we need to await examination of how the riots started and progressed, and how racially defined 'situational identities' were generated through the conflict.[56]

The 1949 conflict is still remembered by some as the 'War of Cato Manor'. This is not surprising. For a key theme of January 1949 was the African struggle for land and residential rights in the city. The violence was at one level a mass rejection of state housing policy as it had developed by the late 1940s. This rejection took an explosive form: the destruction of an Indian residential presence in the squatter districts of the city, especially Cato Manor.

From the late 19th century onwards the Durban municipal area was effectively closed to Indian landownership, with the exception of the 'Indian quarter' around Grey Street. Aspirant Indian property owners were forced to look beyond the municipal boundaries where, without state hindrance, they bought up substantial land north of the Umgeni river, south of the Umbilo river, and west of the Berea ridge.[57] Much of the land was originally used for market gardening, but plots became residential as population density increased. Many thousands of Indian families began paying off small plots on instalment.[58] These districts became known as the Added Areas when they were brought under municipal control in 1933. The central concern of the municipality, and the central state when it began to intervene during the 1940s, was not to exclude Indians from property ownership in the city, but to restrict this ownership to defined areas.

If state policy discriminated against Indians relative to whites, Africans were even worse

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54. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', Chapter 1.
55. Torr, 'Ticket', p.11.
56. For a useful discussion of this concept see E. Boonzaier and J. Sharp (eds.), South African Keywords: The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), pp.96-99.
57. H.C. Brookfield and M.A. Tatham, 'The Distribution of Racial Groups in Durban: the Background of Apartheid in a South African City', The Geographical Review 47, 1 (1957), pp.57-58.
58. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Natal Indian Organization (NIO) memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949.

off. Durban had been notoriously reluctant to accept permanent African residence, let alone property ownership. By the 1940s the city's native policy was still geared around a migrant labour system, based on service contract passes and single-sex hostels situated in the city centre. Durban effectively rejected the principle of large scale township housing embodied in the 1923 Urban Areas Act. By 1949 two thousand township houses and flats had been built, designed to accommodate around 10 000 of the estimated 150 000 Africans in Durban. Municipal hostels packed in at least 15 000 residents. Government, railway and private hostels accounted for a further 30 000 people.[59] A handful of African traders, professionals and clerics had obtained the elusive permission of the governor general to buy land in the city. Africans owned only 0.1% of the value of Durban's immovable property.[60]

Durban's highly restrictive African housing policy made little impression on the scale of African settlement in the city. Starting in the 1920s, but escalating sharply from the late 1930s, thousands of rural immigrants began to rent shack sites. Landlords varied from the South African Railways, to white and Indian absentee smallholders, to Indian householders in the more densely settled districts of the Added Areas. A focal point of shack settlement became the predominantly Indian-owned Cato Manor area just west of the Berea ridge. In 1939 there were an estimated 2 500 African squatters in this district. By 1949, aided by the inauguration of a bus service to the nearby township of Chesterville, over 50 000 squatters had made their home in Cato Manor.[61]

One observer described Cato Manor in 1947 as 'a recently disturbed anthill'.[62] The area was far more than a demographic phenomenon, however. It was a contested urban space, the main focus of a specifically African struggle for land and urban rights in a city which had consistently denied these. The small Mkhumbane area of Cato Manor Farm became a territorial and ideological symbol central to the squatter populism of the late 1940s.[63] Influential Zionist preachers in the shantytowns called Mkhumbane the 'promised land'. Through both the co-operative movement and the emergence of new forms of squatter leadership, Cato Manor embodied alternative structures of economic and political power in the hostile city.

For state and capital, shacks cheapened the social reproduction of African labour but posed threats of health and political control. The response of the municipality was characteristically ambivalent, a local manifestation of the indecisive state of the 1940s. Using the Slums Act, police raids, and squatter surveys the Corporation sought to

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59. University of Natal, Department of Economics, The Durban Housing Survey (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1952), p.335-338; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1504, 290P, 1: Durban City Council memo to Broome Commission 1947, p. 6/1. Municipal compounds were heavily overcrowded. Officially, Somtseu Road hostel, for example, had 4 500 beds in 1949; unofficially, 8 000 people resided there. See Natal Mercury, 4 February 1949.
60. L. Kuper, H. Watts and R. Davies, Durban: a study in racial ecology (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958), p.31.
61. University of Natal, Durban Housing Survey, p.303; G. Maasdorp and A.S.B. Humphreys, From Shantytown to Township: an economic study of African poverty in a South African city (Cape Town, Juta, 1975), p.15.
62. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', p.57.
63. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', Chapter 3.

contain the shantytowns within specified areas. Municipal officials became increasingly concerned that people would set up shacks on state and municipal land, as was happening on the Rand. Municipal officials thus increasingly turned a blind eye to shack settlement in Indian-owned Mkhumbane. The city council refused to invest in the infrastructure of these supposedly 'temporary' residential areas. From 1944 onwards officials embarked on a strategy of legally forcing shack landowners, the majority of whom were Indians, to provide tapped water and pit latrines for their tenants. From 1947 the municipality began to fine recalcitrant landowners, starting a boiling pot of displaced squatters, evicted by Indian landlords, and staying one step ahead of police and corporation harassment.[64]

A constant refrain of the municipality during the late 1940s was that the African squatting 'problem', especially that at Cato Manor, could only be resolved if Durban was granted land at Umlazi for a huge new township. This argument had first been articulated by Natal's provincial administration during the war years: the haphazard control of squatter settlements and property relations in Durban needed replacing with a post-war blueprint of racial zoning and regional planning.[65] The threat of the shantytowns had to be destroyed through physical removal to areas of formally controlled housing. The city was to be divided up into broad zones of white, African and Indian settlement.

This post-war commitment to bold regional planning by the local and provincial authorities was inspired not only by the African shantytowns but by white ratepayers' anti-Indian agitation and a desire to increase the rateable value of land in central Durban. During the early 1940s there had been considerable white mobilization against supposed Indian 'penetration' of the lower reaches of 'white' Berea. The Smuts government brought the central state into the fray with the 1946 Indian Land Tenure Act, which gave the regional zoning proposals legislative force. In conjunction with the Land Act the Indian Representation Act of the same year sought to woo and co-opt moderate Indian leaders at a time when local and national Indian politics was being radicalized by the Anti-Segregation Council (ASC). The moderate, merchant-based interests had regrouped into the Natal Indian Organization after being ousted from the leadership of the Natal Indian Congress in 1945. The 1946 legislation offered the NIO leadership a say in the administration of the zoning proposals, and dangled the carrot of Indian communal representation in parliament.[66]

Designated 'Indian' legislation, the 1946 statutes had far-reaching implications for Africans in Durban, both in their practical implementation and in their ambivalent political consequences. The Cato Manor district and other African shack areas were zoned for Indian residence: Indians owned the land so Indians must live there in future. But even the municipally-owned Chesterville township, only completed the year before,

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64. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1504, 290P, 1: Durban City Council memo to Broome Commission 1947, p.7/5-7/9; for details of stepped up police liquor and pass raids see Natal Daily News, 25 June 1948 and Natal Mercury, 30 June 1948; Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.140-141.
65. Ninth Interim Report of the Post-War Works and Reconstruction Commission, January 1945.
66. M. Palmer, The History of Indians in Natal (Cape Town, O.U.P., 1957), pp.131-139.

was zoned 'Indian'. The Indian Land Tenure Act did not say it, but the message from the various levels of state was clear: Africans were to be removed from the immediate city on a mass scale and relocated faraway, probably at Umlazi. This axe hung over Africans of all classes: the wealthy few who had bought small sites in greater Cato Manor, the new African shacklords who had sprung up as intermediaries between landowners and tenants, the newly secure occupants of Chesterville township, the thousands of squatters who were struggling to make 'Mkhumbane our home'. In the long-term thousands of city hostel residents were also threatened by the authorities' talk of 'whitening' the city centre and beachfront.

The squatters' populism was in part a direct response to these various developments in state policy. The state's attempts to contain and ultimately remove African squatter settlements grew from the squatters' militant assertiveness, geographically so close to the centre of white power in the city. As with other aspects of black politics in Durban during the late 1940s there was a fluid and volatile mix of tactics and targets, of short-term imperatives and long-term goals.

The protest over squatter evictions in the Haviland Road area in 1947 provides an example of how, under certain kinds of leadership, white authority was targeted. Accompanied by ANC Youth League, Communist Party and Civil Rights League activists, a non-racial deputation, consisting mostly of women, marched through central Durban to the Native Administration offices.[67] The marchers vowed to resist eviction until alternative municipal housing was provided. Dissatisfied with the reception it received, the deputation marched to the city hall gardens, declaring its intent to squat there until demands were met. The protesters dispersed when told they would be allowed to rebuild their demolished shacks at Haviland Road.[68]

The Haviland Road evictees identified municipal policy as the source of their oppression, and through their protest action won a victory. But this kind of politics was the exception rather than the rule. The Natal African Tenants and Peasants Association, which operated in the shantytowns during the late 1940s, also targeted the municipality, but was weakly organized, and concentrated on taking up individual squatter complaints in para-legal fashion. Durban did not see the growth of large-scale squatter movements, defiantly occupying vacant municipal land, as occurred on the Rand during the 1940s.[69] Struggles by Durban's African squatters were more localized and informal. In most cases not the municipality but more immediate targets of resistance and struggle were identified: the new sub-class of African rackrenters, and Indian landowners.

Relationships among Africans living in the Mkhumbane shack settlements were based around highly complex ownership and tenancy arrangements. An individual shack cluster was often owned by a number of people, both Indian and African. Some of the African part-owners lived in this cluster, others not. Both owners and tenants sub-let rooms. By the late 1940s a process of differentiation had emerged between tenants and those now known as shacklords. As the shack clusters spread in the Mkhumbane area

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67. Ilanga, 20 September 1947; Natal Mercury, 12 and 13 September 1947.
68. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.72-74.
69. A.W. Stadler, 'Birds in the Cornfields: Squatter Movements in Johannesburg, 1944-1947', in B. Bozzoli (ed.), Labour, Townships and Protest (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1979), pp.19-48.

there was considerable pressure on land and material resources, provoking increased conflict among the shack dwellers. Shacklords, the more established and wealthy of whom became the self-styled 'mayors of Mkhumbane', formed 'civilian guards'.[70] These were composed of lumpenproletarians and employed shack residents who fell under the shacklord's patronage. The guards, identical to those at the call of shebeen queens, maintained the territorial power of the shacklord. This power grew from the overt use of force and the provision of sites, services and protection. In the socially turbulent world of the squatter camps shacklords' leadership tended to be autocratic and fractious, the basis for sectarian conflict between competing shacklords and their followers.[71]

Social pressures within the shantytowns made the need to obtain more land ever more pressing. Both shacklords and tenants aspired to own whole shacks; part-ownership was invidious and hardly remunerative. Indian landowners and rackrenters were easily identifiable obstacles to the drive for more property. African material interests in the shacklands found common ground with those of the more established African elite who had long sought to advance their interests through segregationist rhetoric and anti-Indianism. 'African' areas 'belonged' to Africans, and should be an exclusive preserve for 'African' accumulation. There were linkages between parochial squatter politics, 'New Africa' and central aspects of city-wide proletarian politics.

Municipal and state policy during the later 1940s had a crucial impact on anti-Indianism in African society. The municipality's legal campaigns against Indian landowners, and especially the 1946 legislation, thrust Indians into the no-man's-land between squatters and the authorities. Aspirant African landowners expressed their material interests, and stood to gain political mileage, by attacking specifically 'Indian' interests. African political and clerical leaders popularised the view that the 1946 Acts divided the city between whites and Indians, and cast Africans out.[72] Here were the classic tactics of moulding ethnicity and building parochial nationalism. Both Africans and Indians were being crafted into distinct 'communities'. The state's policies of racial zoning enhanced the ideological homogenization of 'Africans', 'Indians' and 'whites'. In a very real sense, to Africans whose class positions ranged from those of aspirant landowners to lumpen squatters, Indians generally seemed to be favoured by the 1946 legislation: they had been 'given' Cato Manor and some form of franchise. The mass of Durban's Africans developed at least some material interest in anti-Indianism. It was common for African intellectuals at the time to talk of 'the African' and 'the Indian', and it was highly likely that similar racial concepts held increasing sway amongst ordinary Africans. Ethnic and racial social labels were reinforced by the exclusivity of many religious and cultural Indian practices.[73] Ironically the radicalized NIC's spirited resistance against the 1946 legislation further enhanced a view of Indians as a distinct community with distinct

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70. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.74-80.
71. For a useful comparative study, see P. Bonner, 'The Politics of Black Squatter Movements on the Rand, 1944-1952', paper given to the South African Historical Society conference, January 1988.
72. Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp. 224-242.
73. These points need further research. For an example of limited social interaction, even within the same household, see A. Sitas, 'Accommodation and resistance: industrial discipline, mass production and conflict in a rubber manufacturing plant', unpublished paper, Sociology Department, University of Natal, Durban, 1986, pp.11-16.

interests.

During the late 1940s various forces interacted to foster and generalize anti-Indianism amongst Africans: the daily experiences of Africans as squatters, consumers and commuters; the tenor of African political rhetoric; and the state's differential policies towards Indians and Africans. But the impact of state policy was more complex than so far suggested.

The state's crucial intervention through the 1946 legislation was followed by indecision over implementation. Key Native Affairs officials in Pretoria dug their heels in against the urbanisation of the Umlazi Mission Reserve. Conflicting interests within the state and local bureaucracies had not been resolved by 1949: the future of Cato Manor and other Indian-zoned areas hung in the balance. If this was one indication that the state was not siding wholly with Indians against Africans, continuing white anti-Indianism in the city was another. During 1947-48 white politicians in Durban, including the mayor and parliamentarians, publically called for large-scale and compulsory expulsion of Indians to India. Amidst threats of violence Indians were branded as 'foreigners' who should be given 'Boats not Votes'.[74] Anti-Indianism reached new heights with the general election victory of the Nationalists in 1948. The weak reformism of Smuts's 1946 Indian Representation Act was swept aside. Afrikaner nationalists had been engaged in a boycott movement of Indian stores on the Transvaal platteland during the late 1940s. Nationalist cabinet ministers used the public platform to denounce Indians as 'aliens' without rights and without a future in South Africa.[75]

The Nationalists nevertheless retained the 1946 zoning proposals. These developments combined to produce a combustible consciousness amongst Durban's Africans who saw themselves excluded from a city 'divided' between whites and Indians. But Indians as a group were increasingly vulnerable politically. African politics in this period was sufficiently volatile to incorporate these disparate and apparently contradictory viewpoints. Here was a melting pot of ideas from which Africans could draw for particular purposes. Establishment politicians such as the Natal ANC president, George Champion, continued to fire broadsides against the narrow target of Indian traders, landowners and bus operators who frustrated their ambitions.[76] In the shantytowns, squatters and shacklords took advantage of state indecision and Indian vulnerability to take the law into their own hands against Indian landowners. Squatters refused to heed eviction notices, and settled illegally on 'Indian' land.[77] Local ANC Youth Leaguer, Jordan Ngubane, suggested that normally 'arrogant' Indians should swallow their political pride and join as junior partners an African-led mass resistance movement. Ngubane observed that the Indian-only Passive Resistance campaigns against the 1946 'Ghetto Act' were bound to fail unless they gained African backing.[78] This was an acute observation of trends within Indian politics. In taking over control of the NIC, radical

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74. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: NIO memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949; Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.194-196; Guardian 13 May 1948.
75. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: South African Indian Organization to Prime Minister, 10 November 1948.
76. For example, Riots Commission 1949, evidence, p.240.
77. Guardian, 10 July 1947, 18 September 1947, 2 October 1947; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: NIO memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949.
78. Inkundla 1st fortnight, March 1946, and 1st and 2nd fortnights, April 1946.

democrats had explicitly rejected collaboration with and indeed access to state structures. Recognizing their isolated political position they realized the importance of gaining a mass base. This made the need for an alliance with African political organizations imperative. Numerous abortive attempts were made to link up with both the Congress Youth League and Champion in a bid to plan joint campaigns.

The housing and land question, more than any other in Durban's black politics of the 1940s, brought African-Indian relations to the fore. This flowed from Durban's historical policies, from racial patterns of settlement, from state intervention during the 1940s, and from distinctly communal mobilization by Africans and Indians. It might be tempting to stress a continuum of African-Indian tension running though the workplace, the food shortages, co-operatives and trading, public transport, and housing. From this it would be easy to develop a scenario of cumulative racial conflict that only needed a 'spark' to break into flame. This method must be rejected. The riots were not inevitable. There was no primordial antagonism; ethnic competition was a feature of a modern industrialized society. The structural features of Indian-African tension did not necessarily lead to organize, violent conflict. The massed violence of 1949 did lay bare important social fissures within Durban's black society. Important structural conditions, social forces, state policies, and political precedents had the potential to bring Africans and Indians into conflict in particular arenas. Each arena had its own distinctive racial dynamic; each was contextualized in its own way. Each arena contained, from the perspectives of the Africans involved, anti-state as well as anti-Indian aspects. Violent racial conflict was not necessarily inherent to proletarian political discourse.

During the two or so years prior to the riots there was a sense in many quarters of the black proletariat 'on the move', assertively demanding a living from the city and seeking to influence the politics of the city. This groundswell of militancy did not take a clear organizational or ideological form, making it difficult for the state to defuse it or contain it. Extensive police raiding was a pertinent indication of this. Political activists also struggled to 'tap into' the ferment, capture it, or draw it into city-wide or national campaigns. Popular and proletarian struggles were very much alive in Durban during the late 1940s, but most occurred outside the ambit of the political organizations. This severely constrained the activities and potential within formal black politics.

During 1947, after representation from the local Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, the Smuts government appointed judge F N Broome to investigate African grievances in Durban and propose socio-economic measures for defusing a volatile situation. After taking exhaustive evidence Broome candidly admitted that Durban was 'sitting on a volcano', but he was not quite sure what the 'volcano' consisted of.[79] The militant mood was difficult to categorise and pinpoint. A few months before, the normally uneventful advisory board elections at the huge Somtseu Road hostel had turned into a political fiasco. ANC Youth League members organised large public meetings of hostel residents and had the corrupt election results annulled in court. But when the Youth Leaguers failed to secure election or the removal of the discredited Native Administration hostel officials, the residents lost interest and the advisory board campaign fizzled out.[80] From this disillusionment came public calls for direct African

79. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1502, 290P, 1: Broome Commission report, p.3.
80. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', pp.26-28.

representation on the city council.[81] During 1947, a letter in the local African press hinted at the ominous possibility of 'underground movements' plotting violence against an intransigent state.[82] Early in 1948 a squatter deputation informed the police that widespread and brutal raids were causing 'intense hatred in the African people'. They threatened attacks on the police.[83] At this time, the police file 'daily reports' of 'minor disturbances'.[84] In mid 1948 there was a total beer hall boycott, in protest at the introduction of smaller tin drinking mugs.[85] An African policeman complained about the difficulty of isolating the ringleaders of the boycott: 'We cannot distinguish between the ordinary boycotters, the pickets or the leaders. Every African is a boycotter, every boycotter a picket, and every picket a leader.'[86] The boycott revealed the reservoir of militancy that could be tapped in struggles against municipal authority. During 1947-48 Champion made a number of abortive attempts to direct this militancy into general unionism, in the name of a revived Industrial and Commercial Workers Union.[87] At the docks, Zulu Phungula, the worker leader banished from Durban for five years after the 1942 strike, had arrived back in town and was remobilizing the dockworkers around wage demands. Consciousness and political culture amongst Durban's Africans during the late 1940s had many strands, many targets, and many choices.

In January 1949 a downtown street scuffle between an Indian shopowner and an African teenager was an incident which had many precedents. But this incident initiated a city-wide conflict whose scale and horror was unprecedented in Durban's history.

THE RIOTS, PUBLIC VIOLENCE, AND AUTHORITY CHALLENGED

The riots began on Thursday 13 January 1949. No organization or individual planned racial violence for that day. African-Indian conflict was not totally unforeseen, but hardly inevitable. The riots began with a common incident which did not in itself contain the seeds of conflagration, but which opened up new possibilities in the subsequent turmoil of events.

The first phase occurred during late Thursday afternoon.[88] It began when an Indian shopkeeper assaulted an African youth, whose head was gashed by a broken window.[89] The wound was not serious, but bystanders on the pavement saw much blood. The scuffle happened at the end of the day amidst the crowds of Victoria Street, near the central bus depot where thousands of Africans and Indians queued for a bus home. In addition to the bus passengers, thousands of central city hostel dwellers had converged

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81. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', p.26.
82. Ilanga, 16 August 1947.
83. Guardian 22 January 1948.
84. Riots Commission Evidence, p.32.
85. Guardian, 24 June 1948.
86. Guardian 24 June 1948.
87. For example, Correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1702, 467C, 8.
88. Unless stated, the account of the first phase is drawn from: Natal Mercury, 14 January 1949; Natal Daily News, 14 January 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: NIO memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949; KCAV interviews 305, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981; Riot Commission 1949, evidence, G Bestford, pp.31-54; Kirk, 'Durban Riots', p.48-54.
89. It seems highly likely that Madondo was a street ruffian.

on the area, as they did every day, to buy food and drink after work. The nearby beer hall, Durban's largest, was packed with male domestic workers, enjoying their traditional Thursday afternoon off.[90]

The bloodied George Madondo would have attracted curious spectators. The presence of domestic servants in the crowd might have been the key factor triggering collective violence. Domestic servants, characteristically young men and often newly arrived from the countryside, were the core members of the amalaita gangs which ruled the streets and parks at night. They were well known for their stick fights and assaults on unsuspecting victims.[91] It was possible that amalaitas responded to the assault on Madondo with their practised methods of violence. The violence seems to have been prompted by women egging men to take revenge. The original incident became lost in a wider anger focused on Indian shops and buses in the immediate vicinity.

Stones began to fly, glass shattered. Within minutes Victoria Street became a battleground of hostile crowds, flying missiles, damaged buses, and broken glass. Indians hurled objects on to Africans from balconies above the street. Looting began through broken shop windows. Motives of personal gain mingled with anger at post-war food shortages and inflation. Both African and Indian bystanders exploited a chance for recompense.[92] All the signs were that state power would not intervene to protect Indian property.

If white anti-Indianism provided a general licence for stoning and looting in Victoria Street, the actions of the police provided further encouragement. Taken by surprise, and totally unprepared for 'riot control', the small numbers of baton-wielding police sent to the scene acted with uncertainty and made little impact on the milling crowds. The police argued afterwards that the large numbers of innocent bystanders precluded the use of bullets to disperse the mass. This did not explain why other forms of crowd control, such as teargas, were not used.[93] The fact that only Indian people and property were being attacked, and that the rioting remained confined to a small locality, no doubt influenced the police reaction. Sporadic looting continued in the city centre till around 11 pm, and there were isolated incidents in Mayville and Sydenham. Forty eight Indians and four Africans received hospital treatment for riot injuries.

By midnight the streets were quiet. White Durban was only to read of the rioting in the next morning's papers, where it received less prominence than storms in Mossel Bay. But the events of the previous few hours had been the topic of excited conversation in hostel dormitories, backyard khayas, and shack courtyards. The news was spiced with rumour and informed by racial stereotypes. Madondo had gone to hospital, and been discharged after minor treatment. The stories about the attack on Madondo, however,

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90. There were around 20 000 male domestic workers in Durban. Burrows, Population, pp.150-152, 164.
91. KCAV interviews 305, T. Dlamini, 14 June 1981; Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.267-8; P. la Hausse, 'Mayihlome! : Towards an Understanding of amalaita gangs in Durban, c.1900-1930', African Studies Institute seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 April 1987.
92. For a useful overview of theories of looting, see Webster, 'Riots', pp.26-29.
93. During the riots of 1929 Durban gained notoriety as the place where teargas was first used in South Africa.

were embellished with each telling. Perhaps the most extreme version was that Indians had cut Madondo's head off and placed it in a mosque. These rumours blended with other pertinent ones: that the diluted 'European' liquor sold by Indians caused tuberculosis, and that widespread venereal disease amongst Africans was the result of Indian lust for African women.[94] The talk went beyond Madondo to the items that had been looted, the powerlessness of the Indian storeowners to stop it, and the weakness of the thinly spread police force. White news reporters had eagerly photographed Africans smashing and looting.[95]

It began to dawn that the events of Victoria Street had unfolded so fast, and in such an unpredictable way, that they had not been fully taken advantage of. It was as if in the collective taking of breath, Durban's Africans realised that the morrow held out prospects of more looting and further defiance of authority. The Victoria Street battle had opened up an unprecedented moment of opportunity.

As the riots died down, it was in the larger hostels, such as Somtseu Road (8 000 residents) and Bell Street (1 500 residents), that the flames of rumour and excitement burned most fiercely.[96] That Thursday night a central city hostel manager reported that he had never seen the residents in such an angry and excited mood. Life in these single-sex institutions was hard and regimented, masculine and violent.[97] During 1948 the state had progressively whittled unemployment insurance for African workers. This was an attempt to push marginally employed migrants out of the city on to the sugar farms and into the mines. This came at the same time when some local politicians were calling for rigid new controls over migrant labour. The hostels were highly vulnerable to mass police raids. For those who engaged in constant job-hopping, avoided full permanent waged employment and relied on unemployment insurance, these developments were an absolute threat to their continued life in the city. Under these circumstances the central strands of proletarian populism, which seemed to speak only for those who had already establishing nuclear households, seemed to offer little.

The opportunities opened up by the events of Thursday evening encouraged migrants to assert their power within the city. They sensed that the scale and volatility of the conflict offered possibilities that had not developed in earlier scuffles. Collective, organised street fighting was part of migrant experience: whether at soccer matches, jasbaadjie and dance competitions, beerhalls, and Sunday clashes between gangs and mobs.[98] A pertinent example was the confrontation on Christmas Day 1948 between stone-throwing residents of the Somtseu Road and South African Railways hostels.[99] As the migrants well knew, the police kept their distance. There were too many instances where street combatants had united to turn against police intervention. The migrants were fully aware of police ineffectiveness during the evening of Thursday 13 January. Further, the racially defined conflict of that evening did three things. It brought out migrant hostility towards Indians, perceptions which had often been brought into the city

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94. Riots Commission 1949, evidence, pp.277-278, 305-306.
95. See for example, Natal Daily News, 15 January 1949, pp.1&3.
96. For hostel sizes see NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1504, 290P, 1: Durban City Council memo to Broome Commission 1947, p. 6/1, and Natal Mercury, 4 February 1949.
97. A. Sitas, 'Accommodation and resistance', pp.12-13.
98. KCAV interviews, T. Dlamini, 14 June 1981.
99. Ilanga 1 January 1949.

from the countryside. Within a pervasive sense of Zuluism, anti-Indianism offered possibilities of transcending parochial and territorial divisions within African migrant life. Violent attacks on Indians would also assert the migrants' power within proletarian politics.

It was in the hostels that plans circulated for another attack on the Indian shopping centre during the lunch hour of Friday 14 January. It was claimed after the riots that 'runners' spread these plans to all the hostels, as far north as the Coronation Brick and Tile compound on the banks of the Umgeni.[100] There was no formal organisation, only the informal social networks in the vicinity of hostels and workplaces. One participant in the riots recalls that he gathered with others at the place where 'the boys urinate at the Point.'[101] Another remembers being 'recruited' through his boxing club.[102]

From Friday morning the riots entered a second phase. Although there had been isolated attacks on Indians earlier in the day, notably in the Jacobs hostel area, it was during the lunch hour of Friday that large numbers of Africans - one newspaper report estimated 2 000 - converged on the 'Indian quarter'. The police had heard the rumours and were now more prepared; they had enrolled white civilians, arming them with batons. The nature of the looting, however, made it difficult to police in this manner. There was no solid phalanx of rioters, but small dispersed groups followed by crowds. One lunch hour photograph of Pine Street, where looting was occurring, shows Indians, whites and Africans walking unalarmed. Pedestrians helped themselves to goods through broken windows. An eye witness observed a ricksha puller loading up his vehicle with armloads of women's shoes.

The unreality of it all provoked laughter and heckling. Individual Indians were jostled on the pavements; some were robbed of their Friday pay. White bystanders gathered; their very passivity was interpreted as approval. Some whites joined the looting. Nearby white shops remained unscathed. The 'rules of the riot', developed the day before, had been rapidly learnt: confine assaults to Indians to avoid the full deployment of white power. Only in one or two cases were the rules broken, for example in lower Florida Road where all passing cars, including those driven by whites, were pelted with stones.

During the early afternoon the looting of Indian shops fanned out, along Umgeni and South Coast roads, and groups of dockworkers moved up Berea Road. Groups of varying sizes marched in loose formation, armed with sticks and periodically clashing with baton-wielding police. Press photographs of the rioters reveal interesting details. Africans other than migrants had been drawn in. They were mainly young men, although in one example a ululating woman was at the head. Many were relatively well dressed, wearing the clothes of employed workers and petty traders.[103] In another photograph, the

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100. Similar ways of organising operated just as effectively during the initial stages of the 1959 riots, the 1973 strikes, and migrants' attacks on the residential area of Kwa Mashu during the 1980 school boycott in Durban.
101. KCAV interviews, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981.
102. Sitas, 'Accommodation', p.11-16.
103. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: DCC memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949.

red-trimmed calico uniforms of domestic servants were prominent.[104] In one case the marchers were singing in rhythm; perhaps they belonged to an ingoma dance troupe. Personal recollections remember the driving force of crowd psychosis. Dlamini recalls that, amidst cries of 'Usuthu':

> 'we joined in [the riots] by Maheshe's at the bottom, coming along with it. We came with it to Maheshe's ... we pointed it towards Umgeni Road ... we were finishing them, but not destroying everything as we went. When they tried to jump up you would catch them and throw them down with a knobkerrie.'[105]

This was war, the Indian-African war, where perceptions of power were clear. The fighting spread 'like a wind because there was no place where the Indians were not hit. ... The Indians are not a nation that fights, they are a nation that runs away.'[106]

A major power vacuum had opened up in a strategic area of the city centre, the focus of African trading and commuter life. At 4.00 pm on Friday a crowd of Somtseu Road hostel residents, estimated at 1 000 strong, marched from the hostel towards the city centre. This throng was very different from the dispersed groups which had looted during the afternoon. As it left the hostel, stones rained down on the nearby Magazine Barracks, a dilapidated municipal hostel housing Indian families. The marchers were making for the Indian shopping area, but from the authorities' point of view they were an ominous portent, threatening an overspill of violence into white Durban. The riots were beginning to escalate from assaults on Indian property into a broader challenge. Police met the crowd on the edge of the Indian shopping area. When warning shots to halt were not heeded, they opened fire into the mass. At least four people died instantly, and the crowd scattered in panic.

The shootings were intended as a dramatic use of force against the rioters. During the afternoon, as the rioting had spread, local police chiefs realised they lacked the personnel to mount the city-wide display of force that seemed to be increasingly necessary if the state's authority was to be restored. Urgent telephone calls were made from Durban for police and military reinforcements. News of the police confrontation with the Somtseu Road crowd travelled fast, thanks to the special municipal buses which had been laid on to remove commuters quickly from the city centre. Africans spoke of the successful looting and the police action; Indians carried fearful news of rampaging crowds that seemed unstoppable. The police action introduced a new form of state violence into the rioting, and helped to deflect it from the city centre to the shack areas.

The mass killings in Cato Manor and to a lesser extent in the Jacobs area, signified a

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104. Domestic workers had been prominent in the events of the preceding day. There was no need for white madams to launch their domestics into town as passive projectiles. They may have, and this reveals the level of white racism. The point nevertheless needs to be stripped of its instrumentality.
105. KCAV interviews, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981.
106. Ibid.

third phase of the riots.[107] The late afternoon buses going into Mkhumbane were packed as usual. But the mood of the commuters verged on hysteria as accounts and rumours of the day's conflict mixed with panic and heightened anticipation. For the buses were not simply carrying Mkhumbane residents or those seeking weekend entertainment in the shacklands. There many who had been involved in the street brawls of the day and they spoke of coming to attack the Indians in Mkhumbane. The looting and attacking of Indians had largely spent itself in the Grey Street area. Police had used firearms against the Somtseu Road crowd and cordoned the Indian quarter off. But there was more involved. Migrants on the buses were coming to gain land and housing. Many had for long frequented the shack settlements and knew their way around. Migrants' aspirations threatened the African residents of Mkhumbane, most particularly those renting shacks on Indian-owned land. Squatter uncertainties and the assertive attitude of the migrants fused into a general desire to seize land. Everyone wanted to own their own house.

The territorial aspect gave a distinctiveness to the rioting in Cato Manor. As buses unloaded commuters other forces were also at work. Gangs of migrants moved in, ordinary residents of Mkhumbane grouped together and the shack leaders led their impis into battle. The violence went beyond looting, beating and breaking to include murder, rape and burning. As people acquired property it was guarded against others. The killings and burnings in Cato Manor amounted to a pogrom: the organized extermination and expulsion of all Indians. Mkhumbane 'our home' was to be liberated. Mkhumbane was the epicentre of a killing ground stretching over the wider Cato Manor Farm area and lasting the whole night.

Those Indian traders who had guns tried to fight off their attackers; many Indians fled into the bush to hide, while the fortunate ones were rescued in police vans and taken to the Cato Manor police station. The vans were pelted with stones as they drove around looking for survivors. The 'war of Cato Manor' violently appropriated an area which the authorities had zoned 'Indian'. The Cato Manor post office was also destroyed, and if there had been other state buildings in the district they would probably have met the same fate.[108] The Cato Manor police station was effectively surrounded, and initial police attempts to quell the violence were hampered by the dense shack clusters and difficult terrain, especially in the dark. It was the militant defiance of the rioters, rather than the attacks on Indian people and property, which prompted the police to embark on a 'shoot to kill' policy. Around 500 soldiers began heavy-handed 'mopping up' operations that night. For a local news reporter it seemed the clock had turned back to the Second World War. Machine guns were set up, and sometimes fired 'for five minutes at a time' in the direction of groups looting and burning buildings.[109] In some instances, military patrols were attacked with sticks and stones, and replied with rifle fire.

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107. Unless stated the account of this phase is drawn from: Natal Mercury, 15-18 January 1949; Natal Daily News, 15-18 January 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: NIO memo to Riots Commission, 11 March 1949; KCAV interviews 305, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981; Riot Commission 1949, evidence, G Bestford, pp.31-54; Kirk, 'Durban riots', pp.54-57.
108. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1702, 467C, 8: M.A. Bhengu to TC, 3 March 1949.
109. Natal Daily News, 15 January 1949.

By Saturday morning the storm had spent itself, although there were sporadic incidents during the weekend. A tense equilibrium had been reached between state power and the rioters; both had achieved short-term objectives. The military units had shown their capacity to suppress rioting by force.[110] A few hundred more soldiers arrived in Durban during Saturday, and armoured cars patrolled the city and its outskirts. At least eleven Africans were shot dead on Saturday and Sunday, some by soldiers, and some by Indians from motor car windows. The rioters had won their own victory: they had dramatically defied the authorities; they had looted shops and homes; and through popular force had driven Indian residents from the shantytowns and neighbouring districts. By midday on Saturday 15 January there were an estimated 25 000 Indian refugees in the city.[111] A photograph taken in Booth Road, Cato Manor, on the Monday after the riots aptly captures the tense aftermath: a small group of soldiers was gathered behind a machine gun on the side of the road; in front of them passed a steady stream of residents returning from work, their raised fists punching the air.[112]

THE AFTERMATH

For the rest of 1949 the strong currents unleashed by the riots surged and eddied. The national leaders of the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Indian Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa met in Durban, hoping to heal the African-Indian breach.[113] On the morning after the riots began the Natal Indian Congress and Natal ANC leaders, G M Naicker and A W G Champion, had issued a public statement condemning the violence and calling for 'greater calm and understanding."[114] Later that day they toured the city centre on official trucks and used loudspeakers to urge crowds to disperse. In one instance, Champion was physically assaulted by a crowd of Africans and had to beat a hasty retreat. Even if the national Congresses had had the ideological disposition and organisational capacity to channel the militancy of the Durban rioters, they would have struggled to do so. For the very diversity, ebullience and indiscipline of the 'city mob' made it difficult to absorb into formally organised resistance politics.[115]

If the national Congresses had been concerned with damage limitation, there were other interests in African politics which sought to exploit the opportunities opened up by the riots. They included marginal and established traders, local squatter leaders and political activists, and ordinary workers and shack residents. Popular attempts to consolidate the gains of the riots were focused in Cato Manor, especially the Booth Road area adjoining Chesterville township. After two weeks most Indian refugees had returned to their homes, but none dared go back to Booth Road. Civilian guards formed to protect the new land and property acquisitions and to counter-attack the 'Indian army' rumoured

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110. KCAV interviews 305, T. Dlamini, 17 June 1981.
111. There were also 2 000 African refugees. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Manager, Native Administration to Native Administration Committee, 25 January 1949.
112. Natal Mercury, 17 January 1949.
113. Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, Vol.2, pp.285-88; Webster, 'Riots', pp.17-20.
114. Ibid.
115. E. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1959), pp.7, 110, 123-4.

to be massing for a reprisal. Large stockpiles of shack material appeared as people extended and built new shacks. New residents swarmed into Mkhumbane from both shack settlements on Indian-owned land in other parts of the city and from the hostels.

Within days of the riots hundreds of petty traders had set up stalls along the road, selling goods no longer available from Indian stores. There was a flood of applications for pedlars' licences, and many more traded without applying.[116] Responding to the massive growth of informal trading a group of leading traders formed the Zulu Hlanganani Co-operative and Buying Club. The organization was specifically anti-Indian and pro-Apartheid and aimed to restrict African trading in Mkhumbane to the district's own residents and, further, gain a monopoly over such trading for their own members only. In the early 1950s the Zulu Hlanganani was to form part of the Bantu National Congress, a body set up by the Nationalist government to oppose militant African nationalism.

Indian buses were boycotted at Booth Road, the main Cato Manor terminus. African commuters used the emergency municipal buses, or packed into African-driven cars and small lorries which flourished as pirate taxis.[117] Buses were also boycotted elsewhere. The Point dock workers insisted they would never use Indian buses again, and savings funds were started at the Bell Street hostel and elsewhere for residents to buy their own buses.[118] There was a partial boycott on the Lamont route.[119]

Initially the bus boycott was a spontaneous consequence of the riots. By the end of February it had fizzled out, except at Booth Road where Indian buses were only carrying around 25% of their pre-riot traffic.[120] Here small groups of khaki-clad pickets, organized by taxi operators and aspirant bus owners, policed the boycott.[121] The pickets used violence but this alone could not have ensured their success. The commuters who booed the Indian buses when they arrived at the terminus, or stoned them along the route, provided a groundswell of support.[122] The temporary municipal bus certificates for Booth Road were due to expire at the end of February, leaving only Indian buses running on the route. As the end of the month approached, rumours circulated that

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116. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Secretary, Cato Manor Ratepayers Association to TC, 9 February 1949, and NAD Manager's Report, 22 February 1949; Natal Mercury, 24 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Assistant Licensing Officer to TC, 15 February 1949.
117. Initially the municipality laid on 210 special buses, to clear the central city of crowds as quickly as possible. The Indian bus owners challenged the legality of this, and by the end of February there were 30 municipal buses on the Booth Road route. Torr, 'Lamont', 155; Natal Mercury, 21 January 1949, 22 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Liaison Officer report, 24 February 1949; Sunday Tribune, 20 February 1949; Ilanga, 28 January 1949.
118. Riots Commission 1949, evidence, p.346; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1582, 323B, 4: Z. Phungula to TC, 17 February 1949.
119. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Native Locations Combined Advisory Board minutes, 8 March 1949.
120. Details in this paragraph are from NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Durban transportation board hearing, 25 February 1949.
121. Guardian 3 February 1949.
122. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: H.G. Stone's memo to mayor, 30 May 1949.

Africans would rise up against Indians again and destroy all Indian buses. These rumours spread like wild fire, driving over 500 Indians to seek safety in refugee camps, and signalling the continuing receptiveness of ordinary people to the spirit of the riots.[123] Increased police patrols and the last minute renewal of the municipal bus certificates deflated the rumours, however, and the weekend was quiet.

Conservatives in the Durban ANC and Native Advisory Board agreed to set up a joint council with the Natal Indian Congress to 'promote mutual understanding'.[124] With the other hand they used the riots to increase their bargaining power with the municipality, seeking specifically to advance the interests of an aspirant commercial middle class through segregation policies which excluded Indian interests from 'Native' areas.[125] Unlike the less 'established' squatter leaders, who made similar demands but needed the backing of popular agitation to be heard by the authorities, the Advisory Board politicians already had influence with officials.[126] They were supported by the NAD manager, E Havemann, who saw the political advantages of the controlled growth of larger scale African entrepreneurs.[127] He was hostile to the uncontrolled petty trading at Booth Road, but initiated basic market facilities at Lamont and Chesterville, set up a wholesale trade for supplying African retailers, and supported African trade licences for Cato Manor and elsewhere. These initiatives yielded increased fees for Native Administration coffers, and enabled the riots to be remembered as an 'act of God' which launched a more prosperous African trading class.[128]

The Native Administration Department invited the Zulu paramount chief to address hostel and shack dwellers, a move designed to invoke respect for the municipal authorities and warn against further rioting.[129] The major short-term concern of the municipality, however, was not political co-option and control but financing and managing the refugee camps and emergency buses.[130] It was left to the police to consolidate the state's counter-attack against the rioters. All public meetings were banned until mid February. At least 100 Africans were charged with public violence and given to hard labour sentences. Liquor raids were stepped up; police searched widely for looted goods and prosecuted pirate taxis and illegal street traders.[131] Armoured cars continued to patrol the city, and military units remained on standby. On numerous occasions the police dispersed African crowds which gathered outside Indian refugee

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123. Natal Mercury, 24-26 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Liaison Officer report, 24 February 1949 and 1 March 1949.
124. Karis and Carter, Protest, p.287.
125. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: S Ngcobo to TC, 4 March 1949; Natal Mercury, 17 January 1949.
126. Natal Mercury, 21 January 1949.
127. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: Native Administration manager's report to Native Administration Committee, 16 June 1949.
128. UNISA, Champion papers, AAS1, Box 1, 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. A W G Champion interview by M W Swanson, 1 January 1973; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Native Administration manager to TC, 28 March 1949; L. Kuper, Bourgeoisie, pp.289-309.
129. Natal Mercury, 26 February 1949; Ilanga, 22 January 1949 and 5 March 1949.
130. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Town Clerk's diary, 30 January 1949.
131. Natal Mercury, 26 January 1949 and 19 February 1949; Ilanga, 12 February 1949.

camps or threatened to stone Indian buses.[132] Any African crowd was seen to embody further rioting; the police called for the relocation of central city beer halls and bus depots, and insisted that emergency municipal buses should continue to run on the Booth Road route to minimise volatile commuter crowds.[133] Between February and May there were four incidents of African-Indian scuffles in the centre of town, one of which disrupted the whole of the Warwick Avenue market area. The role of the police was far from unambiguous in these clashes.[134]

During April 1949 the aftermath of the riots took a new turn with plans for a general strike of African workers. The architect was the Dock Workers Union leader, Zulu Phungula. Aiming to direct the popular energy of the riots against capital, Phungula proposed a general strike to secure wage demands of one pound five shillings per day or thirty two pounds ten shillings per month.[135] These amounted to increases of around 500%, a radical challenge to Durban's ultra-low African wage levels.

The Point dock workers were well known for their militancy. They were heirs to a long tradition of strike action; they had been prominent in the 1948 beer hall boycott and the January riots. Soon after the riots Dock Workers Union was renamed the Natal Zulu National Workers Union (NZNWU) and a large public meeting was held.[136] This gathering was dispersed by the police and heavy patrols traversed the Point area. Under the shadow of this police action, the NZNWU launched an intriguing campaign which linked general strike plans to a co-operative scheme to buy buses. A widely distributed pamphlet called on all 'Zulu workers' to strike indefinitely on May Day 1949. Strikers were urged to gather at the Point, to boycott the beer halls and municipal buses, to 'divorce themselves from everything European', and to bring their money for the bus company. Native Administration officials believed that the workers were 'not sufficiently well organised' for a widescale strike. The police nevertheless arrested Phungula on 30 April, and heavily armed convoys of police roamed the city during the weekend. During 2-3 May an estimated 800 dock workers struck work; they were joined by pockets of workers in firms around the harbour. The strike was weakened, however, by poor organisation and over-reliance on Phungula's leadership, by the aggressive police presence, and by employer threats of prosecution or offers of concessions. By the third day it had fizzled out. The authorities nevertheless regarded the strike agitation as

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132. Natal Mercury, 19 January 1949, 31 January 1949, 21 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Liaison officer report, 8 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Liaison officer report, 6 March 1949.
133. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Deputy Town Clerk to Registrar, Natal Supreme Court, 25 January 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1580, 323B, 2: Durban transportation board hearing, 25 February 1949, and South African Police to TC, 12 March 1949 and 17 March 1949.
134. Guardian 24 February 1949, 3 March 1949, 17 April 1949, and 19 May 1949.
135. The following account is based on D. Hemson, 'Class consciousness and migrant workers: dock workers of Durban', PhD, University of Warwick, 1979; correspondence in Central Archives Depot (CAD), NTS 2222, 416/280, 2; CAD Industrial Legislation Commission K18, 34, NK3, file 37, evidence of Zulu Phungula, Durban, 21 April 1949, paras. 2950-2964; Guardian, 5 and 12 May 1949; Ilanga, 7 May 1949.
136. Phungula claimed that 20 000 attended, including workers 'from across the Umgeni'. Evidence has not been found to support this.

sufficiently threatening to re-banish Phungula from Durban, this time for ten years.

If the local state had been able to find the head of the strike and chop it off, this task was far more difficult in Booth Road where there was little explicit organisation. The bus boycott dragged on into the second half of 1949. Employers in industry and commerce began to complain that the continuing disruption of Cato Manor commuter traffic was affecting work attendance and productivity of African employees. The boycott had been seen by some members of the Durban Corporation as a useful pretext for introducing a municipal monopoly or utility company to run black bus transport.[137] However when the central government refused to subsidise losses on the emergency buses these schemes were dropped. In May 1949 the National Transport Commission ruled that the emergency buses be withdrawn, and eleven certificates be given to African operators. Established African business interests, linked to the Native Advisory Board, jumped at this opportunity, excluding the more marginal squatter entrepreneurs, such as those gathered around the Zulu Hlanganani Association. The first African buses began running in July 1949.[138] In the meantime the resilience of the illegal traders, pirate taxi drivers and bus boycotters had forced the police to take drastic action. In May 1949 the police tried to shut down street trading and illegal taxi transport at Booth Road. This provoked widespread stoning of Indian buses, and running battles between police and residents in the area, with the police using 'frequent shows of armed force'.[139]

During the second half of 1949 the municipality grappled with longer-term policy responses to the riots. A common reaction of Durban's white citizens to the riots was that there were 'too many Natives' in the city. In December 1949 the city council instructed the Native Administration Department to tighten influx controls drastically.[140] The focus of municipal concern during late 1949 was the future of Cato Manor.[141] Apart from questions of health and housing control, Cato Manor was - as the riots and their aftermath had graphically shown - a volatile political threat to the rulers of the city. The municipality was at odds with itself over Cato Manor; some argued that all shack residents should be forcibly removed, while others proposed controlled site and service schemes on expropriated land in the district. The future of Cato Manor was to be a major policy issue during the 1950s.

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137. Natal Provincial Administration, Report ... Durban Passenger Transport (1946) (hereafter Scott/Baldwin report), pp. 2-3, 47-50; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: E. Havemann to TC, 18 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: Deputy Town Clerk to Chair, Electricity Committee, 19 May 1949.
138. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1579, 323B, 1: Secretary for Transport to TC, 28 February 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1582, 323B, 4: TC to Secretary for Transport, 7 July 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: Electricity Committee minutes, 27 May 1949; Natal Mercury, 2 July 1949.
139. NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1582, 323B, 4: Secretary, Cato Manor Ratepayers Association to Mayor, 11 July 1949; Ilanga, 21 May 1949; Natal Daily News, 12 May 1949; NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1581, 323B, 3: Mayor's telegram to Prime minister's secretary, 17 May 1949, and H.G. Stone's memo to mayor, 7 June 1949.
140. See correspondence in NA 3/DBN 4/1/3/1694, 467, 6.
141. I. Edwards, 'The Durban City Council, M'Kumbane and the Cato Manor Emergency Camp, 1949-1952', in Natal 1909-1961 (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg: Department of Historical and Political Studies, 1983).

The 'liberation' of Mkhumbane created enormous dilemmas for alliance politics. The shack dwellers wanted to keep the land. This view was supported and explained by Congress Youth League journalist H I E Dhlomo:

> 'The African mass-man agrees with the authorities that the races should be separated. Cato Manor is a predominantly African area these days. The mass-man argues that here the Africans should live by himself and cater for his own interests...Let Indians and Europeans confine themselves to their own areas.' [142]

But the issue was not so clearcut. In order to tap into squatter militancy the restructured ANC under Luthuli recognized the need to articulate grassroots demands. This meant supporting a call for taking land away from Indians. This was one of the major constraints on alliance politics in Natal. The Cato Manor branch of the NIC resisted all calls for expropriation of their land. The Durban NIC argued that Africans should be given land in Umlazi and areas north of the city.[143] The ANC never fully confronted this dilemma.

CONCLUSION

The 1949 riots raised searching questions about structure and experience in the making of African political practices in the period immediately prior to the massive state interventions of the 1950s. During the 1940s Durban had grown rapidly, generating new struggles for urban space and power. Racially differential access to and control over resources and power within the city had long been a central feature of life within Durban. Wartime growth revealed the incomplete and often highly contradictory features of this process. New social forces intensified the crises of a racially-ordered industrialising society. During the late 1940s as both state and capital searched for ways of resolving these crises, the dominated and exploited sensed a new terrain for advancing their interests. The future of Durban society seemed very much open to debate.

To a very limited extent elements within the dominant classes explored paternalist multi-racialism as one means of reducing conflict in South African society during the late 1940s. At the same time a more far-reaching multi-racialism was being embraced within organised oppositional politics. In a racial society multi-racial ideas had a moral appeal, offering the basis for a more equitable and just post-war order. Multi-racial alliance politics had many facets. It provided a means of exploiting the weaknesses and crises of segregation during the 1940s. It searched for a mass base against the state's resort to new racial policies during that decade, especially in relation to Indians. It was a politics which saw possibilities for unity in the common material experiences of Indian and African workers and squatters. By the late 1940s organised alliance politics had become increasingly confrontationist, but it did not exclude co-operation with a reforming state in implementing social change.

Alongside the developing discourse and politics of multi-racialism, elements within the state and white politics were developing an intensely racial response to the rapid social

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142. Guardian 28 July 1949.
143. Guardian 11 August 1949.

changes of the period. Durban was a pioneer in this regard. Local white ratepayers, sections of local capital, the Natal Provincial Administration and the central state found common ground in racial zoning policies, with far-reaching proposals for restructuring working and living space. Intensifying conflict over urban resources was played out within a profoundly racial political discourse. This was the crucible for the narrow nationalism of Champion's ANC, the Africanist politics of the local Congress Youth League, and the distinctly proletarian politics of 'New Africa'. The African proletariat had an ambiguous, and often conflicting, relationship with organised politics across the spectrum, from multi-racialism to parochial ethnicity.

Political choices within the African proletariat flowed from the daily experiences of sustaining urban life, and from an awareness of fluidity in the rapidly changing city. The transformation of proletarian interests into political practices was shaped by the structural features of Durban, and by the material and ideological resources available at particular points in time. African proletarians wanted an increased stake in the city and market-based populism held out the hope of rapid change, indeed of short-circuiting other forms of struggle. In its essence the proletarian populism of the later 1940s spoke for those who desired to make a permanent home in Durban, a city which did so little to facilitate African settlement. Proletarian desires to gain greater control within an industrialising city were most commonly advanced through ethnic mobilization, a profound racism, and ambivalent challenges to state authority. Such political practices were aggressive and they commonly subverted established notions of legality, property-ownership and formal politics. Mass violence was not inherent to these practices, but popular struggles in a violent society indicated that violence, or at least public threats of violence, could have its benefits. The riots of 1949 were a dramatic outworking of this experience.

The resort to violence, often with racial dimensions, was not unique to Durban. Within South Africa there were a number of other incidences of massed violence during this period, often with a racial dimension. These included clashes in Newclare in 1949-50, and racial violence in Benoni in 1952.[144] Elsewhere in Africa similar conflicts occurred during the 1940s. Patterns in East Africa came closest to those of Durban. The Kampala riots of April 1949, for example, were largely directed against Indian trade monopolies.[145] In West Africa there were riots against Lebanese traders and the colonial authorities in Senegal, and in Ghana crowds took to the streets in Accra in 1948.[146]

In its scale and ferocity the 1949 conflict in Durban was unparalleled. The riots were a violent proletarian intervention in a large, industrialising city. Amidst the chaos were a number of organized African initiatives, creating a political vacuum in which specific goals could be attained. The massed violence was born not just from singular ambition, or the experiences of earlier struggles, or the general harshness of proletarian life. It arose from intense frustration at the limits of proletarian political practices. It was the fruit of organisational weaknesses on a city-wide basis. It bore the marks of competition

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144. Lodge, Black Politics, pp.38 and 99-100.
145. T V Sathyamurthy, The Political Development of Uganda, 1900-1986 (Aldershot: Gower, 1986) pp.318-319.
146. R Cruise O'Brien (ed.), The Political Economy of Development: Dependence in Senegal (Sage, 1979); W.M. Freund, The Making of Contemporary Africa (London, Macmillan, 1984), pp.202-209.

and tension within the African proletariat. The proletarian preoccupation with cornering sections of the market, and so resisting marginality and transforming the city, had been only partially successful. The bargaining position of African workers was weak; collective struggles at the factory floor had been largely foregone. Proletarians had kept their distance from the established political leaders, but had not sustained alternative organisations. The promises of rapid gain which inspired the proletarian populism of the late 1940s had not been achieved.

The riots developed through a number of phases, gathering momentum and scale, and fresh objectives. By Friday evening the mass violence threatened to spread way beyond the localized conflict in the city centre. With the killings in Cato Manor and elsewhere came anarchy and new momentum, threatening established power relations in the city. Large numbers of Africans sensed a moment of opportunity to use popular force in challenging the state and its designs, not directly but through communal assault on a vulnerable racially defined target. Short-term objectives were interwoven with a broader challenge. The rules of the riots had a logic of their own. Conflict was largely confined to African attacks on Indians, but included also attacks on the security forces. There were African elements who saw the possibilities for a wider urban insurrection.[147] The authorities resorted to a dramatic display of violence to put down the challenge. After the riots the commissioner recognized the crucial importance of the state's violent response: 'Public disorders break out, run their course like fevers and come to an end by being overcome or by destroying their host, the state.'[148]

The riots of 1949 drew the state and capital together in a determined quest to develop a broad policy arrangement for the introduction of urban apartheid. Countering the violence of the riots, the state imposed its authority over areas of the city that it had not effectively controlled previously. The Cato Manor area however remained an area of volatile conflict. In 1953 further rioting occurred in Mkhumbane. Again the targets were the Indian traders and residents who had returned to the area after the riots. It was then that the state established the Cato Manor Emergency Camp in the Mkhumbane area: what had been struggled for, what people believed they had gained through 'liberating' Mkhumbane during the riots slipped away. Although not without struggle the state was never to give up control of these areas. The poignant lesson of the riots was that the city would need to be dramatically reshaped and mass urban African political activity crushed.

As the state and capital grappled with the contradictory structural features of urban life, popular resistance to state and capital failed to acquire a broader unity in the aftermath of the riots. The 1949 conflict imposed a harsh legacy on black politics. The success story of the riots was the manner in which shacklords and traders gained a new foothold in the city: in due course they became the state-recognised urban African leaders of the 1960s and 1970s. The riots both dissipated the thrust of proletarian politics and made the potential for mass based organizational advance and alliance politics that much more difficult to sustain. The riots of January 1949 have cast a large shadow indeed.

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147. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane', p.48.
148. Riots Commission Report, p.122.