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TRADITIONS AND TRANSITIONS:
AFRICAN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PORT ELIZABETH

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TRADITIONS AND TRANSITIONS: AFRICAN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PORT ELIZABETH

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Abstract:

The paper focuses on the political consciousness and political participation of residents of the African townships of Port Elizabeth. It draws on historical research on political traditions and political culture in the 1940s and 1950s, and compares these with the period of 'peoples power' in the mid-1980s. It examines the changes in political participation in the transition period from 1990 to the present, and the continuities or discontinuities in peoples' understanding of democracy. Some tentative conclusions are reached about hegemony, civil society, and participatory or representative democracy.

I. Introduction

While guests at the inauguration of the new president, Nelson Mandela, sat down to a celebratory meal of fine food and wines in Pretoria on May 10 1994, members of the street committees of Kwazakele dealt out portions of cabbage stew to supporters of the African National Congress. How did the residents of Kwazakele, Port Elizabeth, feel about this 'day of liberation' following the historic elections of 26-28 April?

Mike Mabusela wrote that in Kwazakele,

> ...election celebrations rolled on through the night and into the morning. Some shed tears of joy; others danced, jived and toyi-toyied. Some took to the streets in their cars and drove around with hooters blaring and music playing. (EP Herald 4 May 1994)

Voters in the impoverished township of Kwazakele expressed how they felt about participation in the historic elections of 26-28 April variously as 'very happy', 'excited', 'proud', 'confident'

and 'strong'.[1] These emotions are unsurprising in a 'liberation election', and were expressed by most of the new electorate around the country; what is more interesting than the general enthusiasm for a new experience was the sense of historical destiny expressed by residents; the sense of very personal involvement in contributing to the realisation of democracy - expressed in quotes such as "My dream of voting for the government I want had finally come true" or "I have been waiting for that day all my life" and "It was not a surprise because it was what I have fought for".[2]

90% or more of the residents of Kwazakele voted for the ANC.[3] The hegemony of the ANC among Africans in the Eastern Cape is not in dispute; the election results merely confirm what historians and political analysts have long believed to be the case. In this paper, I explore not only the reasons for this hegemony and the political traditions upon which it is based, but also raise some questions about how ordinary people in the region understand the 'new politics'. Does the new South Africa conform to their understanding of democracy, and how will they participate politically in the future?

While there is overwhelming support for the ANC, this is not unconditional, and expectations of 'delivery' are high. These expectations are not only material, expressed primarily in terms of access to jobs, housing, and education, but are also political in the broader sense: expressing a desire for empowerment, as in

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[1] This information is from a random survey of fifty residents of Kwazakele, conducted between April 29 and May 6. I am grateful to Feya Njokweni, a resident of Kwazakele who conducted this survey and the previous survey in 1993. The survey was not designed primarily to produce quantitative data, and included many 'open questions' to ascertain how residents felt about various issues.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid. This statistic is based on the same survey; a detailed breakdown of election results by township or by voting or counting station had not been made available by the IEC at the time of writing.

the following examples where residents were asked how they thought South Africa will be different after the election: "Since we are going to be ruled by the government we have elected everything will be different"; and "I'll be able to voice out my views, there will be free political activities and respect of human dignity";[4]"Under the ANC government I hope people will be equal and sovereignty will rest on the will of the people, and that law will be the expression of the general will"[5]

Reinforcing these expectations is, on the one hand, a spirit of reconciliation - "I appeal to all blacks to forget the past and think about the future and contribute to the building of the new South Africa"[6] - together with a strong loyalty to the government - expressed as "The party we have elected knows the struggle of the people, they also know what we need" or, in this quote from a resident asked what he can do if the new government does not meet expectations: "Honestly I don't think it will do such a thing because it has sacrificed a lot for the oppressed people of SA. I will be shocked and I won't vote for any party next time".[7] On the other hand, there is a commitment to ensuring their expectations are met through pressurising of, government structures: to the same question, residents responded with "We will strike, making sit-ins and boycotts";"There will be strikes, boycotts and mass actions against it."[8]

This tension between the empowerment of ordinary people and their sometimes unquestioning loyalty is also reflected in the contradictory statements of their leaders; so while Cyril Ramaphosa calls for the "deepening of democracy" in the "new

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Noxolo Dlabantu, resident of Kwazakele, quoted in the EP Herald 4 May 1994.

[6] Nelson Bopani, resident of Block 4A, Kwazakele Single Mens' Quarters, quoted in EP Herald 4 May 1994.

[7] 1994 Kwazakele survey.

[8] Ibid.

period of struggle"[9] and the RDP proclaims that the "collective heritage of struggle...is our greatest strength",[10] Raymond Mhlaba and Nelson Mandela are warning that "the time for mass action is over".[11]

I argue below that there are two traditions of political participation, going back many decades, and arising from this experience there are two understandings of democracy which are being taken into the future and which are in tension. I do this through focusing on the African townships of Port Elizabeth in general, and Kwazakele in particular, where recent research has been conducted. In the process, the story of the residents of a particular locality is woven together with the traditions and conditions of the wider region; and the general structural conditions under which these conditions flourished are woven together with the specific experience of ordinary people. Methodologies of conventional political and structural history are used together with 'history from below' and the use of oral testimony, and these are combined with the survey techniques of political sociology and, it could be argued, the methods of cultural anthropology in an attempt to understand the 'discourse' or language of struggle used by ordinary people.

II: The Context

The Eastern Cape, along with the Northern Transvaal, heads the poverty stakes in South Africa. Its per capita income is second lowest of the nine new provinces (Fox p 8); its unemployment rate is highest; and more than half the adult population had no formal

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[9] Cyril Ramaphose addressing the press before the opening of the ANC's Regional General Council in the Eastern Cape, quoted in Eastern Province Herald 13 June 1994.

[10] ANC, 1994, Reconstruction and Development Programme, p 3.

[11] Nelson Mandela quoted in EP Herald of 21 April 1994, addressing an election rally in Graaff-Reinnett, Eastern Cape; Raymond Mhlaba quoted in EP Herald 8 June 1994.

income at all in 1991. Levels of literacy and life expectancy are lower than in any province except the Northern Transvaal.(DBSA 1994) The overwhelming majority of the population of the region is African, with 6% of the population being white and 6.7% coloured; the Xhosa-speaking African population is almost entirely ethnically homogeneous.(Fox 1994 p 8) With levels of poverty increasing steadily in the formerly 'independent' homelands of Ciskei and Transkei, there has been a steady stream of urbanization since the 1930s to the two poles of industrial development, East London and Port Elizabeth.

The African sector of Port Elizabeth's population grew from 27% in 1921 to 43% in 1960, and stands now at over 60%. From the beginning of commercial activity in the city, Africans gained employment as unskilled labourers, initially loading boats on the beach before the harbour was built. The growth of industrial activity - initially footwear, then from the 1920s the motor and component industry - did not open up great opportunities for employment and the development of skills for Africans; a policy of employing 'poor whites' in the 1920s and 1930s, and coloureds in the 1940s and 1950s, was rigidly implemented. So, in 1962, the percentage of African workers at Ford and General Motors - the two large motor assembly plants in PE - was a mere 4%. Where African workers were employed in industry in the post-war era, this was primarily in the food and textile sectors, which were more labour intensive and relied on cheap, unskilled labour. Most African workers were employed in the service sector, by the Municipality, the docks, the railways and in domestic or catering work.(Cherry 1992 p 34, 36).

Despite the disadvantages faced by Africans in terms of employment and skills opportunities, the African townships were always accepted as part of the city. While the usual controls over African residents and removals of inconvenient slums periodically took place, the PE Municipality prided itself on its innovations in the provision of housing for Africans, and its building of 'model' townships such as McNamee Village (part of

New Brighton) in the 1930s and Kwazakele in the 1950s.(Robinson 1990 p 219) Such housing schemes were based on the assumption that those Africans living in Port Elizabeth should be encouraged to have a stable family life; access to housing was often conditional upon marriage. The small number of migrant workers, and the failure of the local authorities to implement influx control before the 1950s, were crucial factors in creating a stable urban community which perceived itself, and was perceived to be, 'part of the city'. Even after its implementation, the African sector of the population grew steadily as conditions in the surrounding rural areas continued to deteriorate. (Cherry 1992 p 9)

While New Brighton, as the oldest 'established' township, has been the subject of extensive research (Baines 1994, Robinson 1990), the material for much of this paper is drawn from Kwazakele township and its precursor, the non-racial village of Korsten. There are a number of reasons for this. It has been argued that support for civic organisations, especially of the 'mass participatory' type where structures of 'direct democracy' in the form of street and area committees were established, tended to be concentrated in the old municipal housing areas built in the 1950s and 1960s. (Seekings 1992 p 229). This is true of Kwazakele, otherwise known as 'Site and Service', a township built in 1956-8 which accommodated the
58 000 Africans moved from the non-racial township of Korsten. While many of those moved were newly urbanized, many others had experienced the relative freedom of living in a village not controlled by municipal authorities; many had attended non-racial church schools, and many had participated in the multi-racial politics of the Congress alliance. In 1983 Kwazakele had the largest population of Port Elizabeth's black townships - an official population of just over 100 000 out of a total of 330 000. (White 1984 p 8) The population of Kwazakele has since grown in size, but the nature of the community is significantly homogeneous. It is homogeneous not only in terms of race, ethnicity, language and religion - which would hold true for most

African townships in the Eastern Cape - but also in terms of income and living conditions.

Many residents of Kwazakele have thus been living in Port Elizabeth for many decades, and there is a sense of stability and of 'belonging' to the city. At the same time, it is an extremely poor community; with the exception of the small number of traders and professionals, it is almost entirely working-class; and the level of unemployment is high as it is elsewhere in PE. In 1983 the average monthly household income in Kwazakele was R 254 - slightly lower than New Brighton, but slightly higher than Zwide and Soweto. (White 1984 p 11) Unlike New Brighton, where there are areas of affluent housing adjacent to extremely impoverished areas like the infamous Red Location, Kwazakele is made up mostly of typical 'matchbox' style municipal housing. Most houses are overcrowded, and residents live in close proximity to one another in very similar circumstances in terms of access to facilities and problems with services and amenities. The relative stability of the Kwazakele community is illustrated by the figures for households per dwelling, where Kwazekele has the highest number of single households per housing unit - 66%, which is higher than the average of 58% for all the townships. (Ibid p 9). This facilitated a tight network of support and information sharing among residents in the 1980s.

This is not to say that Kwazakele is completely homogeneous and undifferentiated; there are pockets of shack settlement in between formal housing; there is stratification along lines of age, gender, education and employment, as in other similar townships. However, it is argued here that the relative stability and homogeneity of the township, combined with its level of poverty and deprivation, established the circumstances in the 1980s in which a high level of political participation occurred. An interesting comparison can be made with an area like Soweto/Veeplaas, which had a reputation for being more militant and being the 'home' of the *amabutho* (youth militia) which would be in accordance with a theory of 'marginalisation' of youth.

Riordan refers to people in this drastically poor and unstable shack settlement as 'Ukuhleleleka', translated as 'the marginalised people' (Riordan 1988b p 2). By contrast, political participation in Kwazakele was characterised by a high level of participation by middle-aged residents, who were usually working and usually living in a stable nuclear or extended family situation. (Cherry 1993b p 64)

III: The emergence of political traditions

The above framework was the one within which African residents of Port Elizabeth 'made their own history' and developed strong traditions of political participation. The homogeneity and stability of the African population led to a tradition of participation in existing structures, however limited; of demands for inclusion into the accepted 'mainstream' of political life as institutionalised through citizenship and electoral representation. Simultaneously, the exclusion of Africans from economic opportunities, the unemployment, poverty and appalling living conditions experienced, was responded to with militant forms of mass politics which operated outside of institutional frameworks. This mass politics involved the meshing of class politics with inclusive populist politics.

a) The Politics of Inclusion

Andre Odendaal describes Port Elizabeth as "the birthplace of organised African politics in South Africa". (Odendaal p 5). From as early as 1878 residents of the Native Strangers Location sent petitions to the authorities; and in 1882 the Imbumba Yama Afrika - the "first proto-nationalist organization" - was formed.(Ibid) From the participation of the African middle class in the Korsten Village Management Board at the turn of the century (Kirk 1990), to the participation of CPSA and ANC members in elections to the New Brighton Advisory Board in the 1930s (Baines 1994 Ch 8), Port Elizabeth's African population used most of the opportunities presented under the relatively liberal administration of the pre-

apartheid era. Moreover, although Africans were not eligible to stand for election to the PE City Council, members of the Communist Party of South Africa, working closely with the newly-formed black trade unions and the ANC, were elected to the council in the 1940s.(Cherry 1992) In addition, the qualified franchise that allowed a minority of Africans to vote for Native Representatives in parliament resulted in Margaret Ballinger being returned as the representative of the Eastern Cape right up until 1959, when the system was finally abolished. Ballinger's husband, William, was involved in attempts to establish trade unions for PE's African workforce in the early 1940s. Bodies such as the Joint Council of Europeans and Natives, the Native Welfare Society, the Friends of Africa and the Distressed Areas Committee, all reflected the acceptance of white liberals that Africans were 'citizens' of the city, and played a role in the articulation of their needs.(Cherry 1992 p 52)

This African middle-class political participation was not unusual in the first half of the 20th century in South Africa, and the strategies of the early ANC have been thoroughly examined in this period. Essentially, the demand put forward was for Africans who were 'civilized' to be included as full citizens, and the strategies used to attain these demands involved small numbers of the African elite engaging in deputations and negotiations with the authorities. What was different about PE's townships was that because the African middle class was so small - as Africans were excluded from employment and educational opportunities - and yet the African population of the city was relatively stable and homogeneous, the African elite, and their sympathizers of different colours, developed a much broader constituency, which involved a different style of politics. Hence the involvement of the Ballingers in trade union politics, and the quirky trade union leader Mohamed Desai, a member of the CPSA, being a member of the City Council while organizing mass protests in New Brighton.

During the 1940s the competing tradition of mass politics began

to emerge, with protests against food prices and rent boycotts being followed in the post-war era by a new style of working class politics. For a time these traditions existed side by side, building the broad-based, populist politics of class alliance. The leadership of the old middle-class elite was gradually replaced in the late 1940s by that of younger, working class leaders who often played important roles within the trade union movement as well as within the ANC.(Baines 1994 p 202; Cherry 1992; Lodge p 51)

1952 was in many ways the turning point for the 'incorporationist' style of politics, and the old moderates were pushed out as much by the new intransigence of local authorities as by their ineffectiveness in the eyes of their constituency. The Defiance Campaign of 1952 and the riots in New Brighton in the same year represented the end of the relative tolerance of the previously liberal administration. Not only were repressive measures such as a curfew implemented, but the council finally began to implement influx control (Robinson p 261; Baines 1994 Ch 9).

The destruction of Korsten and the creation of Kwazakele provides a nice illustration of the tensions within the ANC's politics of class alliance, and how it could not hold together in the new context of harsh implementation of apartheid by PE's formerly liberal council. In one of the biggest mass removals in South Africa's history, around 58 000 people were systematically removed from the non-racial township of Korsten in the two years between 1956 and 1958. Korsten, the one area in PE where Africans had the right to freehold title, had become the home of the thousands of immigrants from rural areas in the urbanisation process of the 1930s and 1940s. Despite previous attempts to remove Korsten as a 'health hazard', the township continued to grow. As in other similar parts of the country, the small, non-racial group of landlords rack-rented living space to the new immigrants. During the early 1950s, Korsten had a vibrant political life centred on the ANC; women were particularly active

in various ANC campaigns such as the campaign against Bantu Education. Children who had attended the non-racial church schools in the area were now to be forced to attend Bantu Education schools in New Brighton; as part of the boycott of these schools, women in Korsten taught their children in open areas:

> Our group used to meet in an open space in Korsten where the bus terminus is now. ..The children used to write on the ground, and learn to count using stones...When the government started to realise that the schools were empty they brought in the police and disrupted our schools. When they started to chase us away from those open spaces, we opened spaces in our houses, and made space in the yards in Korsten. (Cherry 1988 p 89)

The ANC was ambivalent about the destruction of Korsten; Govan Mbeki explains the dilemma faced by the leadership:

> Now, in relation to the property owners, what was the ANC going to do? Must it defend the right of the property owners, whom the ANC knew to be some of the worst exploiters? Must it acknowledge their right to freehold property in Korsten, and must it attack the government for moving people from there, when in fact it was better in that two-roomed house in Kwazakele than living in a shanty in Korsten? But then, the people who lived in the shanties preferred to live in those shanties rather than go to Kwazakele...so this was the dilemma facing the ANC. (Cherry, 1988, p 114)

It is possible that this ambivalence was also felt by the shack dwellers; while conditions in Kwazakele were to be better, materially, in the long run, this was by no means apparent at the time of the removals. Moreover, in return for a serviced site, the shack-dwellers would have to give up the freedom which Korsten offered, and the threat of influx control weighed heavily in their minds:

> The people who lived in the shanties preferred to live (there) rather than go to Kwazakele ...they would not surrender the privileges - what they called their rights - to go to a house in New Brighton. Because in New Brighton they were subjected to all the municipal regulations affecting life in a municipal township. (Cherry 1988 p 110)

The African Ratepayers of Korsten, a small body representing the property owners, put up a last-minute fight to protect their interests; but without the whole-hearted support of the ANC, and being alienated from the Korsten working-class to whom they were exploitative landlords, their deputations and court applications stood no chance against the inexorable logic of 'slum clearance'. The municipality consciously exploited this class division, moving first the most recent immigrants to the city, then all the other shack dwellers, leaving the property-owners isolated and without the potential to mobilize a mass base even if they had been able to do so.
At the same time as showing up the weaknesses of the ANC's class alliance, the removals effectively 'homogenized' the African population, reducing these class divisions.

While the politics of inclusion were rendered largely unviable at the height of the apartheid era - from the mid-1950s until the late 1970s - the 1980s saw the reemergence of this strand of political tradition together with an upsurge in mass militancy. So, while the strategies of the United Democratic Front involved boycotting the elections for Black Local Authorities and the pressurizing of councillors to resign, sometimes through violent means, the leadership of PE's African townships simultaneously engaged in negotiations with the white authorities. Swilling argued at the time that this reflected a maturity on the part of the leadership which presented an opportunity for negotiation which was lost to the white authorities, because of the intransigence of the security forces - and their mistaken belief that the strategy of the UDF was to make the township 'ungovernable'.(Swilling 1988) However, for the activists of PE's townships the two strategies were not seen as mutually exclusive; and reflected the 'joining' of the two traditions of political participation. Hence Mkhuseli Jack, spokesman for the Consumer boycott committee, explained that in retrospect:

> They (the street and area committees) embodied a fusion of various strategies; at the time, there was no sense of (national) negotiation in the near future. It was correct at some stages to be

> seen to be reasonable by followers; we had a broad strategy of maximising publicity, winning public opinion. You can't throw people into a war and show no signs that you are against the war. The kinds of actions we engaged in were biting (eg consumer boycotts) - but we would appear reasonable; consolidate and extend support to sectors which had not cared. (Interview, 12/8/93)

In the same vein, the engagement of civic leaders with the PE Municipality's town clerk, and the beginning of discussions around the creation of one, non-racial municipality, began in the late 1980s, at the height of the State of Emergency. Yet while there was some continuity in the willingness on the part of the leadership to engage in negotiation and appear 'reasonable', these strategies were not always based on the same concept of democracy. It could be argued that in the earlier period, a more pluralist or liberal understanding of democracy prevailed, and that inclusion was being demanded for particular interest groups - 'civilised' Africans, or urban insiders, or residents of a particular township. In the 1980s, the hegemonic position of the ANC meant that they embodied a less tolerant version of democracy, where they represented and spoke for all 'the people' when negotiations took place.

b) The Politics of Exclusion

While the stability of the urban African population allowed for this 'inclusionist' tradition to develop, the exclusion of most of the African working class from skilled employment and educational opportunities simultaneously generated another, more militant and class-based tradition to emerge. In the 1950s and again in the 1980s, it is this tradition which became hegemonic, infusing the populist politics of the ANC and the UDF with class content.

It could be argued that this parallel tradition began as far back as 1846, when the first recorded strike in South African history - a strike by Mfengu beach labourers - occurred. (Baines 1988 p 57). The mass protests in the town centre after the arrest of ICU

leader Masabala in 1920, which saw the shooting of twenty-two people, was another 'first' - foreshadowing similar urban massacres in later decades. (Baines 1988 p iv). Yet perhaps we should not overemphasize the significance of these isolated events in terms of the building of political tradition; in the 19th Century and the early decades of the 20th, the moderate, inclusionist tradition built by the African elite was probably, on balance, more significant. It was the growth of a stable, urbanized African proletariat which saw the gradual emergence of the militant political tradition from the 1930s.

Another result of the stability of urban Africans in Port Elizabeth was the high proportion of women - higher than any other major urban centre by the 1920s, remaining almost equal to, and sometimes surpassing, the male population through the next few decades. (Baines, 1988 p 45; 1994 p 153; Robinson p 240). African women played an important role in developing the militant tradition; Robinson describes how, in the 1920s and 1930s in New Brighton, the administration perceived women as "especially vocal and determined"; and that

> This persisted and assumed an increasingly organised form, until by the late 1940s and 1950s the Location Superintendent was receiving frequent and ever larger deputations from women demanding council action on a number of social and physical problems experienced in the township. (Robinson p 239).

The women of Korsten, too, were particularly vociferous, and through the ANC Women's League they took up local demands which were sometimes not part of ANC campaigns. Innovative and militant in their tactics, they participated in many of the campaigns of the 1950s such as the campaign against Bantu Education described above. In addition, they took action around issues such as the imposition of influx control, racism on the part of shopkeepers, and support for general strikes. In one instance, to prevent male workers from using the buses to go to work during a stayaway, the women dressed in overalls and ambushed the men:

> ...it was decided that each woman should organize herself an overall and a stick. Then we went to lie in the open space near General Tyres, in the tall grass. We then waited there, and we saw the men coming down from New Brighton Labour with their food cans. When they were close to use, one of the women stood up, and said 'Tshisa, tshisa!' (Beat them) and they did not know we were women, because we had overalls and knobkieries. I could not hit even one man I was laughing so much at these women attacking the men and the men running back to the townships! That was very successful, none of them went to ride the busses and the busses were taken away from General Tyres. (Cherry 1988 p 90)

Moreover, the consumer boycott strategy that was to be so successfully used in PE in the 1980s was pioneered by these women, who targeted shops which refused to employ Africans, and forced them in some cases to revise their employment practices. (Cherry 1988 p 87) A member of the Womens League in Korsten at the time explained that the militancy of women was related to their independence from the male leadership of the ANC:

> The women today are not organised like we were organised. They mix with men, that is why: we did not work with men, we did not want men, we wanted to work ourselves. (Cherry 1988 p 90)

Militant mass politics was not confined to women, however. During the Second World War, and in the immediate post-war years, the ANC in the African townships was radicalized as a new generation of working-class leaders came to occupy key positions in the organization. Protest marches into town against high prices during the war were followed by a rent boycott in 1946.(Baines 1994 pp 201-4; Robinson pp 239-244) Despite attempts in the early 1940s to build African trade unions, these did not - with the exception of the Food and Canning Workers Union - lead to lasting organizations with a strong and militant working-class constituency. In the post-war years, a 'new' type of trade union appeared, and the strikes by dock workers in 1945-6 and by laundry workers in 1948 indicated both the weak structural position of African workers in Port Elizabeth and a new, militant tradition of labour action led by African working-class

leadership. This tradition was characterized by non-racial and class discourses, as well as the mobilization of community support for worker demands and a populist discourse - all of which were to reappear in later decades. Hence a pamphlet in English and Xhosa issued in 1946 during the dockworkers strike exhorted people to send donations to a strike fund, and refrain from scabbing; it ended with the phrase: "A victory for the stevedoring workers is a victory for the community" (Cherry 1993 p 85). During the laundry workers' strike, a pamphlet appealed to the general public in the name of the working class:

> The workers need the support of the public and the working class to achieve their aims...Increased wages for any section of the working class means increased prosperity for all...Workers of Port Elizabeth, tomorrow it may be your turn to fight for your rights, for better living conditions and wages sufficient to meet the soaring cost of living. (Cherry 1992 p 111).

As has been well-documented, the 1950s saw the extension of the tradition of militant, mass politics incorporating both class and populist discourses.(Lodge, Walker, Baines, Cherry, Robinson) The organisational form this took was the close alliance of the ANC with trade unions aligned to SACTU, under a leadership which often wore 'two hats', being both ANC and trade union leaders, and often former members of the now-banned CPSA. While this saw the (largely working class) residents of New Brighton, Korsten and later Kwazakele participating on a large scale in ANC national campaigns such as the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the Freedom Charter campaign of 1955, the Bantu Education campaign and the campaign against the extension of passes to women in 1956, it saw also the use of localised 'mass actions' such as work stayaways and consumer boycotts. Most of the work stayaways involved the ANC and SACTU calling workers out in support of political demands - usually with a high degree of success, and sometimes in defiance of ANC national leadership, as was the case with the three-day stayaway around the general election of 1958 and SACTU's 'Pound a Day' campaign. Other successful stayaways were held in 1950, in the June 26 Day of Protest against the

Suppression of Communism Act; in March 1951 against the disenfranchisement of coloureds; and in November 1952, in protest against the imposition of the Riotous Assemblies Act and a curfew following the New Brighton riots. But there were also instances where the ANC supported worker struggles, one example being the LKB strike of 1959. In this instance, the FCWU won an important victory against wage cuts when the ANC threatened a boycott of LKB. In addition, public pressure was exerted through a mass meeting jointly organized by the union and the ANC, and the distribution of pamphlets; and the exhortations on other workers not to scab. Management backed down, reinstated the workers who had been locked out and restored their previous wage levels in the form of a bonus. Thousands of pamphlets were produced to inform the community of the victory, and the FCWU extended thanks to the ANC, SACTU, SACPO and SACOD for their support. (Cherry 1992 p 205-6)

As repression increased in the 1950s and the space created by the liberal council was gradually eroded, the ANC responded by adopted the 'M-Plan' which envisaged a tight network at street level, providing the means of communication between leaders and ordinary members. Although a national plan, it has been argued that it was only in Port Elizabeth's African townships where this strategy was implemented with any effect.(Lodge p 231, Baines 1994 p 237, Mbeki p 74). This strategy, although not thoroughly implemented even in these areas, contributed to the ANC's ability to continue with successful mass actions throughout the 1950s, with highly effective stayaways continuing until 1961 when the last general strike called by the Congress Alliance as a 'final warning to the government' was supported for all three days, and involved significant numbers of coloured as well as African workers. (Cherry 1992 p 214) The banning of the ANC and the collapse of SACTU led, in Port Elizabeth as elsewhere in the country, to the 'lost decade' of resistance.

When resistance politics reemerged in the late 1970s in Port Elizabeth, it combined the same mixture of moderate and militant

political tradition; and once again, as repression grew fiercer in response to ever wider mobilization, the politics of militancy gained hegemony over that of moderation. Thus the middle-class leadership of the early PEBCO gave way to the radical leadership of the ANC 'old guard' and the PE Youth Congress; and trade unions, despite initial tensions between their leadership and the UDF over the employment of stayaway tactics (Pillay 1985), were drawn by their membership increasingly under the hegemony of the Congress movement. As repression intensified from 1985, the strategies of the 1950s were consciously resurrected; as in 1952, when public meetings were banned in New Brighton, in March 1985 UDF meetings were banned in Port Elizabeth. An extensive network of street and area committees was established with the inspiration of the M-Plan, which enabled the UDF to engage in extremely successful consumer boycotts and work stayaways.

What is interesting for the purpose of this paper is not the details of these campaigns and how successful they were, but the extent of involvement by ordinary residents in such structures and actions, and what sort of political culture was built. There was an extraordinary high level of political consciousness and political participation by residents of townships such as Kwazakele during the 1980s. Riordan, in a survey of political loyalties of Africans in Port Elizabeth in 1987, notes that

> It is doubted that anywhere else in South Africa will one uncover such unity in political loyalties as one does in African Port Elizabeth. The UDF and the ANC...enjoy near total loyalty. (Riordan 1988b p 75).

This political involvement went beyond loyalty; 86% of residents of Kwazakele claimed to have been members of civic or youth organisations in the 1980s, and 94% said that area committee structures had existed in their areas. 84% said that street committees had existed in their streets in the 1986-7 period. (Cherry 1993) Not only did they participate in the consumer boycott and other mass campaigns through these committees, but they participated in electing their own leadership at local

level, and in political education classes. In addition to political campaigning, the committees were seen as playing the useful roles of controlling crime and keeping the streets clean; and gave many residents a sense of real control over their lives. While the democracy practised by these structures was somewhat erratic, residents felt a sense of loyalty and 'ownership' of the structures as expressed in these quotes: "No-one can come and teach us how to build democratic structures now, we know that very well"; "We managed to build democratic structures without the help of the government"; "We have built our own democratic government", to "control our own affairs" and "govern our township." (Ibid)

Nor were those who participated in these structures the 'marginalized youth': activists claimed that those who participated in the street and area committee structures were "ordinary...honest church people who had problems with apartheid"[12] and that the representatives from area committee structures on decision-making forums were "mostly older people."[13] While the middle aged and elderly residents were attending meetings, finding ways to continue providing basic services to the township, control crime, and keep down the cost of providing food for their families while not buying at supermarkets, it was the youth who provided the 'shock troops' of the quasi-insurrectionary situation from 1985 to 1987. Galvanized by a militarist culture, they were sometimes controlled by members of MK, the ANC underground, or the leadership of the UDF; at other times they refused to acknowledge the leadership of anyone other than the inaccessible Mandela. While their methods were sometimes brutally violent, and criticised by their elders, there was a widespread feeling that all residents were 'on the same side'; and while not exonerating their children from blame, the elders would protect them from police harassment where possible, and contextualise their

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[12] Interview with Mike Xego, 15 November 1993.

[13] Interview with Alex Rala, 12 November 1993

actions.

c) The Political Cultures of Inclusion and Exclusion

The political culture of African residents of Port Elizabeth in the 20th Century contains many different and sometimes contradictory discourses. The 'inclusion' of Africans as urban residents and their perception of being part of the city, and the arising politics of representation, deputation and negotiation, were consistent with a discourse of rights, citizenship and 'modernization'. Together with this, language which appealed to class identity or to a more populist, non-racial concept of community were more prevalent than those which emphasized separateness on ethnic, racial or cultural lines. The exclusion of Africans from jobs and skills, the poverty in which they lived, and in the 1980s the widespread unemployment and rejection of schooling by the youth, led to a more militant discourse which revered militarism and communism, and was occasionally - though surprisingly not more frequently - anti-white.

The fact that the vast majority of African residents of Port Elizabeth were, and are, Xhosa-speaking has meant that the potential for ethnic division and ethnic mobilization has been significantly less than in areas such as the PWV where migrant labourers and urban residents from a range of ethnic groups have congregated. As far back as 1931, a Port Elizabeth magistrate thus stated that

> "In this district there is not the faintest shadow of any tribal system. The local natives consist of Fingoes, Xosas, Gaikas, Gcalekas, Tembues, Basutos etc all inter marry freely, both by Christian and Native rites...No Native Chief ever resided here" (Cherry 1992 p 51).

Where different ethnic groups have settled in the area, they have been treated with respect and accepted in the community even as they maintained a separate identity. The best example of this is perhaps the Korsten basket-makers - a group of maShona from

Rhodesia who belonged to a religious sect referred to as the 'Hosannas'. Remembered with affection by previous residents of Korsten, they were deported en mass in the late 1950s. They were described by a resident as "Peaceloving and hardworking" (Cherry 1988 p 75)

Even so, this does not explain why movements based on ethnic identity, such as Inkatha, have never had much resonance in the Eastern Cape. The reasons for this lie perhaps in the stability of the urban population, and the small proportion of migrant workers retaining links to rural areas and traditional authorities. New immigrants were accepted fairly soon after their arrival, although tensions did arise at times. In one instance in 1957, the ANC Womens League took aggressive action against men who were breaking a stayaway; these men were workers from the homelands, and their lack of commitment was met with antagonism.(Cherry 1992 p 155) It was this division between recent arrivals and old urbanites which enabled the municipality to 'divide and remove' the residents of Korsten. Yet in another instance, ANC women defended migrant workers' wives who had recently immigrated to PE. These women used to come to PE by train, and the Labour Bureau started arresting them at the station and endorsing them out. The ANC Womens' League responded by complaining to the township superintendent, and when this did not work, they slept at the station to prevent the new arrivals from being arrested. (Cherry 1992 p 156).

In the 1980s, when Zulu policemen were brought into Eastern Cape townships as part of the municipal forces to control the rebellion, they were referred to derisively as 'amaTshaka'. This, however, was not a response based in a positive sense of Xhosa ethnic identity, but rather a response to a state strategy of using 'others' against a particularly homogeneous community. Songs referring to Gatsha Buthelezi were not aimed against him as representing Zulu identity, but at Buthelezi as representing the homeland system. This is borne out by the fact that even more frequently, the object of attack, in both language and practise,

were the African collaborators associated with the Black Local Authorities - in the case of Port Elizabeth, the Ibhayi Council; and the leaders of the 'homelands' of Ciskei and Transkei - Sebe and Matanzima. In a survey of the language of the resistance politics of the 1980s, it can be seen that there are very few indications of mobilization around Xhosa culture or ethnic identity.(Cherry 1993a) 'African' and 'black' are used inclusively, and are posed against 'the enemy'. These inclusive definitions were adopted by the Black Consciousness movement in Port Elizabeth in the 1970s; many of the young leadership of this movement in PE's schools went to Robben Island in 1977, and were released in 1982 with a firm commitment to the non-racialism of the ANC.

In the early 1980s, the ANC was quite consciously revived as the leading liberation movement in the new mass-based organisations. As one of the leaders of the PE Youth Congress and an ANC underground member explained:

> So I went into the youth, together with comrades, but that decision to go in there was a discussion with the underground that I must go in there ... you could see the changing of the Black Consciousness politics into the Freedom Charter politics taking place within PE. Remember those days people were still singing the national anthem wrongly - there was that PAC section, 'Makube Njalo....' - that's not the national anthem as known by the ANC. People were still saying 'Izwe Lethu iAfrika' within the trade union movement, and at youth rallies; we discouraged all those kinds of things..it was a direct plan from the underground to spearhead a certain political trend, and loyalty, in a much more structured way, to the masses, so that the ANC benefits at the end. So we built that ideology, that understanding, at street and area committee level, and it started to be understood that 'We are ANC'.[14]

In addition to demands for the release of leaders from prison, the return of exiles, and the unbanning of the ANC, some of the songs used in the period of rebuilding the Congress tradition in

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[14] Interview Mike Xego, 15 November 1993.

the 1980s were old songs from the ANC campaigns of the 1950s. They express, simply, opposition to the apartheid regime and to the racist (white) 'enemy'; as well as specific demands around particular apartheid laws. In one of these old songs we see a reference to the term 'boers' - which means, in context, not farmers but the oppressor who, in the decades of 'grand apartheid', was the white Afrikaner who controlled the government and implemented apartheid laws. The song is a particularly sad and slow one, usually sung with pathos and humility rather than anger - despite what may seem a particularly insulting phrase (the boers are dogs). Many of the old songs (and some of the new) were based on the tunes of well-known hymns - hence the somewhat sombre or reverent nature of the tunes, in contrast to the later, more militaristic songs which had a stronger 'beat'!

Senzenina, senzenina (What have we done)
Sonosethu bubunyama (Our only sin is our black skin)
Amabhulu azizinja (The boers are dogs)
Mayibuye iAfrika (Let Africa return)

The relatively easy transition from the language of black consciousness to that of non-racialism can be better understood if it is remembered that the older generation, both of leaders and of ordinary members of the ANC, were still influential in township politics. The repression of 1977 meant that black consciousness organisations were a brief interlude in a much longer political tradition, for no sooner had a new generation of leadership been produced than they were 'converted' to the old traditions. Despite the weakness of organisation in the coloured and indian townships, and the tiny number of whites who aligned themselves with the liberation movement in Port Elizabeth, the tradition of non-racialism flourished in the UDF. Many of the 'old guard' of the ANC had either lived in Korsten or had worked within the trade union movement in earlier decades.

In Korsten during the 1950s

> there were Chinese, coloureds, and there was never any conflict between the Africans and coloureds, between different groups ...There was a very good spirit in Korsten - we were united with the so-called 'coloureds'.

Coloured residents, although not necessarily involved politically with their African neighbours, felt that in Korsten there was a lack of fear and a mutual respect between different people. (Cherry 1988 p 75) The congress alliance took up a number of campaigns in Korsten in the 1950s which were consciously designed to build non-racial unity, such as campaigns against the Population Registration Act, the removal of coloureds from the voters role, and for the improvement of conditions at Livingstone Hospital. (Cherry 1988) The 'mixed' constituency of influential trade unions such as the FCWU, as well as the Womens League, promoted non-racialism in practise among activists if not among the majority of members who were residentially segregated from the late 1950s. A small number of coloured, white and indian activists contributed consistently to the leadership of the FCWU and other trade unions, as well as the Women's League.

The realities of white rule were not easily overcome by organisational practise, however, especially when mass militancy went beyond the bounds of organized action. Non-aligned whites who happened to be in the township at the 'wrong time'- during the riots in 1952 in New Brighton, and during the State of Emergency in the 1980s - were murdered. Yet the influence wielded by the non-racial ideology of the leadership, combined with the common decency of the vast majority of residents who participated in the more structured forms of mass action, meant that those individuals of other colour - whether white, coloured or indian - whose organisational allegiance was visible, were never attacked.

Where appeals were made to Africanist or black consciousness sentiments, they were usually in terms of an 'inclusive' nationalism, where 'the people' were mobilized against 'the enemy' who could be defined by the term 'amabhulu'. Examples of

this are Vuyisile Mini - the Port Elizabeth trade unionist - writing the song *'Pasopa Nants'indod'inyama, Vorster'* (Watch out, here is a black man, Vorster); or the 1980s song *'Kwela phezu kwendlu kaLinda - uMam'uyajabula masishayibhulu'* (Climb on top of Linda's roof - my mother is jubilant when we beat the boers). In the latter case, the enemy identified with the 'boers' is Linda, the 'Mayor' of the Ibhayi Council.

As resistance intensified in the mid-1980s, the dominant trend in the language of political mobilisation was that of militarism. As the capacity of uMkhonto we Sizwe to carry out armed actions inside South Africa increased, and as the 1976 'Soweto generation' left the country to get trained and come back into the country as guerillas, a whole new group of 'MK songs' became popular. The armed struggle was venerated, the sacrifices involved were portrayed as heroic, and many songs with a military content were widely sung by school students organised by COSAS, PEYCO and of course the *amabutho* who saw themselves as military formations. An interesting dynamic is that while earlier songs referred to Mandela and sometimes even Luthuli as leaders, later songs referred more frequently to Oliver Tambo and Joe Slovo, exiled leaders who were involved in directing the armed struggle. The most well-known of these is no doubt 'Hamba Kahle' which is almost the 'anthem' of uMkhonto, sung with deep reverance at the many political funerals of the 1980s. We see in this song the reference to 'killing the boers', and again it must be clear that this is not a reference to farmers, or even specifically to whites, but more generally to 'the enemy':

Hamba, Hamba Kahle Mkhonto, (Go well MK)
Mkhonto, Mkhonto we Sizwe
Thina 'bantu bo Mkhonto sizimisele (We the people of MK, we are determined)
ukuwabulala wona lamabhulu (to kill these boers)
Buya, Buya kahle Mkhonto (Come back safely MK)
Mkhonto, Mkhonto we Sizwe

Most songs reflect or encourage military mobilisation, referring to soldiers and various weapons to be used.
Another significant element of this militarist discourse was, of course, the ubiquitous 'toyi-toyi' - a simulation of military discipline, in which hundreds or thousands of people would stamp in unison, chanting words or simulating the noise of machine guns or the throwing of grenades, under the direction of a 'leader' who would call out the actions.

The different aspects of this language of mobilization combined together into a discourse of resistance which was nearly universal in PE's African townships in the 1980s, and much of which has been carried through into the transition.
While it is nearly impossible to define categorically a culture or discourse of resistance in absolute terms, it is possible to argue that certain ideological 'themes' are dominant while others are more or less absent. The presence or absence of such 'themes' has relevance for our understanding of political culture in the transition period, and in the conclusions we reach about such issues as how to curb political violence, accommodate minorities, create a culture of democracy or rights, and 'nation-building.'
The type of nationalism expressed in the political culture above is both vague (when related to identity) and specific (when concerned with anti-colonial demands such as land restoration or political control of the state). A dominant theme in the culture is internationalism, including a broad Africanism, and socialist anti-imperialism. Neither of these conform to a narrow or ethnically-based nationalism. The Africanism expressed does not evoke a desire for territorial separateness, but the demand for control over, or participation in, the existing state. A significant, and positive, aspect of this political culture is the demand for citizenship; for self-determination in the anti-colonial rather than Afrikaner or ethno-nationalist sense; for inclusion in institutions of 'Western democracy' rather than exclusivity. Thus, while resistance took increasingly militant and sometimes violent forms, the demands expressed were in terms of the political tradition of inclusion. What the language of

resistance does not say about democracy can be linked to an understanding of populist militarist ideologies which tend to promote intolerance.

The very success of the ANC's building of ideological hegemony resulted in a lack of tolerance for those who were 'outside' of the mass organizations - not only the collaborators, but those who stubbornly continued to support AZAPO or the PAC. So while most residents of Kwazakele, who supported the ANC, perceived the street and area committee structures as democratic, they - and the strategies they were involved in implementing - were not democratic to the minority of residents who differed ideologically from them. The hegemony of the ANC was so extensive, however, that after the UDF-AZAPO 'feud' in 1985, most AZAPO supporters moved into particular areas of the township which to this day do not have civic structures.

The legacy of political mobilization carried into the 1990s, and ultimately into the post-election period, is reflected in the still contradictory politics of today. The ways in which the traditions of inclusion and exclusion, and the cultures of non-racialism, inclusive nationalism, militarism and militancy, democracy and intolerance are reflected in the current transitional situation, are explored briefly in this conclusion.

IV: Conclusion.

How do the two traditions outlined above, and the elements of political culture, 'mesh together' in the changed circumstances since 1990? On the one hand, the very high percentage poll in the Eastern Cape (92%) and the low number of spoilt papers indicate the high level of political awareness. This reflects the prior experience of the majority of Africans of participation in either 'formal' political institutions (the older generation who remember the Native franchise and the Advisory Boards) and in informally electing leadership (the younger generation who participated in civic structures, street and area committees).

The tradition of participation and the desire for inclusion are reflected in the widespread and joyous embracing of parliamentary democracy, as illustrated in the introduction. The legitimacy of the elections was based in part on the real sense of personal pride felt by many residents, and the understanding that what they had struggled for over many decades had been achieved. The relative facility with which the non-racial transitional local authority has been established reflects not only the sophistication of the negotiators, who had been mobilizing under the slogan of 'One City, One Municipality' since the mid-1980s, but also the re-embracing of the old liberal tradition on the part of the white municipal officials and of the principle of non-racialism on the part of all participants.

On the other hand, there is confusion when it comes to ordinary people's experience of institutions of direct democracy, and the future role of civil society. Strong loyalty to the ANC and trust in the new government is combined with high expectations and the understanding on the part of many residents of Kwazakele that they may have to engage in mass action to ensure delivery. Others, accepting the limitations of representative democracy, say they will simply have to vote for another party if the ANC does not meet their needs. Residents are divided on the need for independent organs of civil society, or structures of participatory democracy, in future- nearly a third of those interviewed said there would be no need for civics and trade unions under a new government, because "Our government will see to it that everything is in order".[15] Others saw the continued need for civic organisation in different ways; some said they will "continue to fight poor services" or "fight for the rights of people in the township", while others said they would "work hand in hand with local government officials in developing the township" or "liaise with local authorities with regard to programmes that need to be developed in communities"[16]

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[15] Kwazakele survey 1994.

[16] Ibid.

The ongoing controversy over the role of self-defence units indicates that not only does territorial hegemony and intolerance still exist, but that the militant and militarist culture of the youth has yet to be channelled in a positive direction. Attempts at retraining the members of SDUs and establishing 'community policing' structures with the cooperation of the police are ways in which this is being done. The high levels of violence and repression in the 1980s dropped to almost non-existent levels in the 1990s, in contrast to other regions where existing divisions were able to be exploited to weaken the ANC's position in the negotiation process. However, fierce competition for jobs and the failure to integrate many returned MK combatants is likely to be an ongoing source of tension.

What role people at grassroots level will play in the 'new politics' of reconstruction is by no means clear. A process of demobilization at street level is already clear; the civic organisations have redefined their role in terms of negotiations over the provision of housing and services, job-creation projects, and the distribution of food aid. Thus, one rather cynical activist described the demobilization process:

> Today street and area committees don't deal with political issues such as negotiations; they don't rise above disputes. Meetings of zones or areas are active - but people go to general meetings of the area or the ANC branch; things are dead at street level. Things are directed by organisations now; there is money around. The only means of communication is by loudhailer. If you don't mention food or electricity, attendance at meetings is poor. We used to have large numbers of people attending political meetings, but not any more. [17]

While the first survey of Kwazakele residents showed that a very high percentage of people were members of civic and youth organisations in the 1980s, in the second survey, conducted in the week after the election, residents claimed to be members of the ANC rather than of civics; while they were still members of

[17] Interview Alex Rala, 14 July 1993

other organisations, these were identified as church or sports organisations, or trade unions.[18] The political allegiances and participation of residents has thus been 'transferred' to the ANC; but does the ANC have the ability to function as a forum for mass participatory democracy? Indications already are that it is transforming into a more conventional political party, producing leadership for different levels of government rather than creating space for mass participation. It is difficult to see how the Reconstruction and Development programme can involve people at grassroots level in decision-making, prioritisation of needs, and implementation.

Yet, the tradition of militant mass mobilization is strong, and if the new authorities prove unable to meet people's demands, it is unlikely that they will meekly accept the situation. The tensions between this political culture and the 'normalized' politics of representative democracy are already clear with regard to the labour movement, the civil service, and prisoners. A number of strikes have taken place in Port Elizabeth in the short few weeks since the elections, despite the pleas from the leadership for labour discipline, and admonishments that the time for mass action is over.

In conclusion, the first tradition of 'inclusion', combined with the hegemonic ideology of the ANC, has leads comfortably to the legitimacy of the ANC government and the consensus politics of the RDP, with the class compromises which that necessarily entails. Where people's needs are not met, or where the new authorities are insensitive or in conflict with many people's more radical idea of democracy, this tradition will come increasingly into tension with the second tradition of militant mass political participation. While the hegemony of the ANC gives it some space to govern its supporters, this space is not unconditional; it is restrained by the same tradition that built it.

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[18] Kwazakele survey 1994.

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