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1987-04
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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

African Studies Seminar Paper
to be presented in EW
4.00pm APRIL 1987

Title: 'Mayihlome!' : Towards an Understanding of Amalaita Gangs in Durban, c.1900-1930.

by : Paul la Hausse

No. 210

'Mayibomel': Towards an Understanding of Amalaita Gangs in Durban, c.1900-1930.

Introduction.

In January 1915 eleven African youths armed with sticks were responsible for an apparently unprovoked assault on two African men. Half their number were subsequently arrested and charged with breach of the peace. In the hot, dusty courtroom two intriguing facts came to light. Firstly, the victims of the assault were members of another more formally-constituted body - the much-resented African section of the Durban Borough Police. And secondly, the gang members failed to recognise them as policemen since one of them had been playing a mouth-organ. Perhaps the keen imagination of one of the youthful accused was responsible for providing the court with the vision of a policeman playing a mouth-organ, the possession of which sealed off what one official called the 'narrow universe' of the 'turbulent umfaan' from the ragged respectability of older African workers in the town. Either way, the ranks of youthful accused received sentences which, between 1900 and 1930, were shared by thousands of other young male workers - several months hard labour and at least ten lashes.[1]

In Durban the custodians of public order and racial etiquette - policemen, magistrates and native affairs officials - showed little evidence of being able to chart the precise limits of the amalaitas' 'narrow universe'. This paper represents an attempt to recover part of the largely hidden history of early youth gangs in South Africa: a history of young, mainly migrant workers whose traditions have been, unlike the proud groups of Pathfinders who posed for mission school Annuals, transmitted mainly through popular memory.[2] In broad terms this study involves an examination of the ways in which newly-proletarianised African youth adapted and transformed a repertoire of cultural practices (which were traditionally bound up with the rites of passage in rural societies and associated with patterns of youth socialisation) in ways appropriate to their experience of the depredations inherent in, and the possibilities opened up by urban proletarian life. During the period under discussion the age structure of migrancy determined that the young African male (in particular, the domestic worker) would be closest to the contested interface of two worlds: one which was constituted around capital's need for a disciplined and sufficiently-coerced labour force and another which was rooted in the non-capitalist social solidarities of increasingly embattled rural households. It was in and through this struggle straddling town and countryside but symbolically fought out in the backyards, streets and suburbs of Durban, that amalaitas were formed and transformed between 1900 and 1930.

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1 Natal Archives (hereafter NA), Durban Criminal Records (hereafter DCR), Court C, Rex versus Hlobolo and 10 others, 25 Jan. 1925.

2 Limited oral sources, at least for the twenties and thirties, have been utilized for this study. Further interviews promise to provide a more complex understanding of amalaitas. References to the gangs in official records (municipal, magisterial and Native Affairs Department) are diffuse and seldom attempt to "decode" gang activities. Most of the potentially rich Durban Criminal Records have been destroyed, while the archive of the Durban Borough Police has been "lost". This problem of sources in relation to gangs is not new. In the more recent past Ellen Hellmann noted in relation to her study of juvenile delinquency on the Rand: "I found it extremely difficult, almost impossible, to obtain information concerning ... gangs." See *Urban Bantu Youth* (Johannesburg,1940), p.49.

In general terms the literature on youth has emphasized its potentially ambiguous social location in between the dependent status of childhood and the responsibilities which are associated with adulthood. If it is possible to talk about the "traditions of youth", or even of archetypal patterns of youth behaviour, there is a need to grasp the historicity of the age-group in relation both to specific social and economic structures and previous historical experience.[3]

The youth-abbeys of sixteenth century France, for example, allowed youth particular rituals and provided them with a limited sphere of jurisdiction in the interval before they were married. Such rites of passage were only possible in societies characterised by particular inter-generational patterns of reciprocity and consensus.[4] Yet the economic and demographic transformation of societies, together with those institutions responsible for the socialisation of youth, clearly also altered the cultural repertoires of youth. Thus in one classic study it is argued that youth in the slums of Chicago created alternative, defensive and often criminal networks of gangs in response to the social disorganisation of urban life between the wars.[5] Indeed, the public identification of "youth" with urban male criminality has, at least in Europe, a long history.[6]

Historically, the relationship between crime, culture and consciousness in South Africa has been peculiarly complex, as the pioneering work of Charles van Onselen has suggested.[7] Another more recent study focusses on these complexities in relation to youth and political organisation on the Rand during a period of massive social dislocation and structural economic change.[8] Yet the rupture in patterns of youth culture in the post-1940 period, together with the revolt of black youth after 1976, has in some ways tended to obscure earlier forms of African youth organisation which were generated by the first wave of industrialisation in South Africa. What follows is an attempt to provide a basis for understanding some of the ways in which African youth struggled for control over, and attempted to give expressive content to, aspects of their daily lives in early industrial South Africa. Many of the questions which are raised implicitly or explicitly in this paper can only be answered with difficulty and some, at least at present, not at all.

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3 See J.R. Gillis, *Youth and History* (New York,1974), for a useful discussion of some of these issues.

4 N.Z. Davis, 'The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth Century France', *Past and Present*, No.50, 1971.

5 See F.M. Thrasher, *The Gang* (Chicago,1930).

6 M. Blanch, 'Imperialism, nationalism and organised youth' *in* J. Clarke, C. Critcher and R. Johnson (eds.), *Working Class Culture* (London,1979), p.103.

7 See C. van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*, Vol.2, *New Nineveh* (Johannesburg,1982), pp.171-201.

8 See P. Bonner, 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness on the East Rand, 1939-1955', unpublished paper, History Workshop Conference, 1987. (Bonner's current work on the Ma-Rashea also promises to advance our understanding of criminality and consciousness in the making of the African working class). The establishment and development of a repertoire of protest by black school students has also received deserved attention. See J. Hyslop, 'Food, Authority and Politics: Student Riots in South African Schools, 1945-1976', unpublished paper, African Studies Seminar, 1986.

'Turbulent Umfaans': The Making of Amalaita Gangs, 1900-1910.

The period of mineral discoveries in South Africa marked the rapid expansion of the coal and sugar industries in Natal. In response to these developments Durban was to rapidly assume a position as the main entrepot port of South Africa.[9] Early industry in the town had been primarily concerned with supplying the needs of a predominantly agrarian colony. By the turn of the century, however, economic activities, such as wagon making and wool processing, were based increasingly on inland commerce. Furthermore, engineering works catered for the shipping trade and were responsible for services and repairs to the machinery of coastal sugar plantations and the coal industry. By 1902 Durban was thus an important port town dominated by merchant capital held by shopkeepers and traders, as well as by stevedoring and shipping companies.[10]

In 1900 Durban's African migrant population, numbering around 18 000, was channelled into four main sectors of the labour market. These were: togt, or day, labour (comprising many dockworkers) ricksha pullers, washermen and monthly servants. Workers in each sector were governed by relatively discrete sets of regulations designed to achieve the overall coercion of the workforce. The togt labour system was related to the need to depress wages and to accommodate the fluctuating labour requirements of white merchants and shipping companies. The togt worker was obliged to pay a monthly registration fee, wear a togt badge and accept any work which paid at a rate above an official minimum. Contravention of these regulations could take the form of a fine of 20s or hard labour. Ricksha pullers and washermen were also forced to comply with regulations framed along similar lines. Registration as a monthly worker, on the other hand, brought an individual under the penal discipline of the Master and Servants Act.[11]

These attempts to regulate the labour market were underpinned by a wider struggle to police the working lives of migrant workers. A penal code provided against 'disorderliness', 'provocative language' and 'indecent conduct' and the Vagrant Law (No. 15 of 1869) enforced a 9 pm curfew,[12] while the erection of several barracks between 1878 and 1904 was designed to replace the rhythms of rural time with those of the clock and the working week.[13] By the turn of the century, then, the basis for the control and coercion of workers was achieved through a rudimentary system of 'native administration' which was funded by worker fines and

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9 The tonnage of vessels cleared in the port between 1875 and 1900 rose from 100 000 tons to 900 000 tons. See D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dockworkers of Durban', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 1979, p.20, pp.60-1.

10 See N. Hurwitz, *Agriculture in Natal 1860-1950*, Natal Regional Survey, Vol.12, (Cape Town, 1957) pp.10-11; and M. Katzen, *Industry in Greater Durban*, Part I, (Pietermaritzburg, 1961).

11 P. la Hausse, 'The Struggle for the City: Alcohol, the Ematsheni and Popular Culture in Durban, 1902-36,' unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1986, pp.24-31.

12 In addition, workseekers and 'visitors' were obliged to take out a five day pass on entering the town, the Identification of Native Servants Act (1888) provided for the policing of individual workers in the town.

13 For comments on conceptions of time in Zulu society see R.C.A. Samuelson *Long, Long Ago* (Durban, 1929), pp. 304-06

registration fees, enforced by the Borough Police and supported by the sanctions of the prison.

At the level of everyday struggles, however, this "system" had a remarkably uneven impact on African workers in Durban. At virtually every point relations of domination and subordination were contested from below. One prominent town councillor's assertion that workers were 'out of control' because of the 'want of system, of rule',[14] might have found some confirmation in the fact that by 1901 a third of the African population of around 20 000 had been arrested in terms of various municipal and government laws.[15]

The first decade of the century was a crucial moment in the restructuring of capitalist settler domination in Natal. Similarly, in Durban, this period was characterized by sustained attempts to refine domination on racial lines and to secure, control and house an adequate supply of African labour. In conditions of labour shortage, especially during the economic boom of 1902-03, this proved to be a difficult task. African workers evaded the registration system, generally refused to enter barracks which they compared to gaols and succeeded in pushing up wages in 1903 through strike action. Attempts to enforce labour controls through amendments to the pass, registration and Togt laws met with uneven results. Then, during the depression between 1904 and 1909, a massive influx of African workseekers and the emergence of a flourishing African shebeen trade threatened to erode time and labour discipline altogether.

The ability of local government and employers to obtain particular forms of labour power under specific conditions thus foundered in the face of labour shortages, lack of finances and adequate laws and the moral economies of African workers. If the problem of labour supply declined after the Bambatha rebellion in 1906, it was only in 1908 that the basis for a more coercive and efficient system of urban control was laid through the establishment of a municipal beer monopoly.[16] It was during this period, spanned by war, moral panics, rebellion and depression, that the first reports of amalaita gangs appeared.

In 1900 Durban's Superintendent of Police recorded that:

> ...daring young thieves ... have started their games in Durban in broad daylight. I sincerely hope the community will be more careful whom they employ as domestic servants.[17]

This was the first of a number of reports which noted the appearance of African youth gangs in Durban. By 1903 a word to describe these gangs - amalaita - had entered the language of municipal officials. If the origins of this terms are unclear,[18] there is less doubt about the nature of gang

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[14] NA, Durban Corporation Letterbooks (hereafter DCL), No. 548, R.C. Jameson before the First Natal Municipal Conference, 22 Sept. 1904.

[15] NA, Superintendent of Police Report Books (hereafter PRB), Book 6, Report:4 Oct. 1901.

[16] For a more thorough account of this period see la Hausse, 'Struggle for the City', Ch. 1.

[17] NA, PRB, Book 6, Report: 6 March 1900.

[18] The gangs are variously referred to as 'laitas', 'lietas', 'lietis, 'amalayita' or 'olaita'. One contemporary explanation claimed that amalaita derived from gang members demanding of a victim to '"light" his way by putting his whole purse at their disposal' and hence escape

organisation and activity. Amalaita ranks were filled predominantly by domestic servants between the ages of 14 and 20 (*abafana*). Back rooms on their employers' premises (somewhat ironically referred to as 'kyas')[19] served as a base for their petty thieving and burglaries on other households. The gangs signalled their presence in the streets by playing mouth organs and took part in 'pitched battles' with other gangs, often after the 9 pm curfew. African policemen, in particular, were singled out as targets for their violence. Their weapons, at least in the early 1900s, were limited to light fighting sticks (*amashizo*), stones and, sometimes, sand-filled bottles.[20]

Stunned by this amalaita onslaught,[21] Superintendent Alexander traced his woes to the migration of Zulu refugees, who had been liberated from Johannesburg's gaols, into the backyards of Durban's white population. Certainly, as van Onselen has indicated, many of the thousands of Zulu-speaking 'houseboys' on the Rand had been in contact with a secret society of criminals known as the Ninevites during the 1890s.[22] It is likely that many of these youths and men were hidden in the ranks of over 4000 workers who were, ironically, escorted back to Natal by the future Manager of Durban's Municipal Native Affairs Department, at the outbreak of the South African War.[23] In 1901 a second wave of black refugees from the Witwatersrand broke in Durban. This time it comprised mostly young 'houseboys' who had abandoned jobs in the face of declining wage-levels.[24] Clearly, then, many of those black refugees who found work or swelled the ranks of the 'dangerous' unemployed in Durban, were bearers of newly-acquired forms of criminal organisation and cultural codes which had been forged in the urban-based prison-compound complex of the Witwatersrand.

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unharmed; see *Ipepa lo Hlanga* 20 Nov. 1903 quoted in van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, p.56. Rev. Sivetye suggested that amalaita meant "to make a fire" or "to strike a match", and further, that "when you hit someone you hit a fire". See University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter UW), African Studies Institute, Oral History Project, Tape No.93, Interview with Rev. G.Sivetye by T.Couzens and A. van Gylswyk, Groutville, 23 Oct.1978. (Thanks to C. van Onselen for drawing this source to my attention). An equally plausible explanation is that the word is a corruption of Cockney slang for young hooligan - 'lighty'. (Thanks to Tony Traill for discussion of these and other issues).

19 Kya is derived from the Zulu work for home or dwelling - *ikhaya*.

20 NA PRB, Book 6, Reports: 6 March 1900, 28 Jan. 1901, 7 June 1901, 7 Nov 1901, 6 Jan. 1902, and 6 July 1902.

21 In 1900 1000 of the 6600 arrests made on Africans were for breach of the peace soon to be known as 'lieta offences'. Arrests for Vagrancy increased from 1356 in 1900 to 1676 in 1901. 1901 saw a marked increase of arrests for housebreaking and theft. In 1901 there were 199 convictions for this offence. NA, PRB, Book 6, Reports: 7 Jan. 1901, 5 Aug. 1901 and 6 Jan. 1902.

22 See van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, pp. 54-55; and for Jan Note's Ninevites pp.171-201; and esp. 177-8 for the impact of the war on black workers.

23 The individual involved was J.S. Marwick, a labour agent at the time. For this deed he reportedly earned the popular name Muhle (good) which, at one point after his assumption of control of the Municipal NAD, was changed to Mubi (bad).

24 NA, PRB, Book 6, Report 6 March 1901.

Yet there is evidence to suggest that patterns of youth activity in Durban, which resonated with post-1900 forms of amalaita activity, predated the arrival of the young 'thieves and sharpers' from the Rand.[25] Indeed, it seems that in period after the outbreak of the South African war we are seeing the transformation of existing forms of youth organisation. This can be illuminated through an examination of domestic service in relation to the age structure of migrancy and the availability of older social and cultural forms within the context of urban, proletarian life.

The relative economic independence of African rural cultivators in Natal and Zululand during the 1860s gave way in the post-1890 period to an increasingly bleak struggle to retain access to land and to meet the requirements of taxation. The Natal Midlands and Southern Zululand bore the brunt of a jagged process of rural dispossession and proletarianisation.[26] The transformation of social relations in the countryside was accelerated by natural disasters: locust plagues in 1896, and then drought and rinderpest. By the turn of the century thousands of Africans had been forced into wage relations with commercialising white farmers or were impelled to seek wage labour on the goldfields or in towns such as Durban. During the early 1900s it was generally the younger, unmarried sons of homestead heads (*abanumzane*) who were forced into the colonial labour market in order to generate the cash incomes needed to lighten the economic burden on households. For these youths, sometimes as young as ten, "life changed suddenly".[27]

If impoverishment determined the position of the Reserves as the main labour exporting areas,[28] less easy to map are the social patterns which appear to have regulated migrant workers' access to different sectors of Durban's labour market. There is evidence to suggest that by the turn of the century certain smaller sectors of Durban's labour market had become identified with individuals from particular clans, ethnic groupings and rural areas. Durban's rickshaw pullers were predominantly from Mahlabatini, while the three hundred African members of the Borough Police hailed from Mapumulo.[29] Similarly, Amabaca carved out an economic niche for themselves as the town's sanitary workers.[30] It also seems more than likely that sections of the larger togt workforce (mostly stevedores and dockworkers) also defended and controlled their jobs on the basis of these older social solidarities. Indeed, a series of clashes between over two

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25 See, for example, NA, PRB, Book 6, Report: 7 Nov. 1898.

26 See S. Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion* (Oxford, 1970), Ch. V for an incisive account of these processes.

27 See Interview with G. Sivetye.

28 In 1904 67 % of Durban's African workers came from Natal and 29 % from Zululand. In Natal, the Reserves in Mapumulo, Kranskop, Lower Tugela, Umlazi, Ndedwe and Umsinga had the highest migrant populations together with Eshowe, Nkandhla, Mahlabatini and Nqutu in Zululand. See *Natal Census Report* (Pietermaritzburg, 1904); and Hemson, 'Dockworkers of Durban', p.56.

29 NA, PRB, Book 7, Report 31 July 1906. Ricksha pullers were noted at the forefront of clashes between rebels and the Transvaal Volunteers during the Bambatha Rebellion.

30 Interview with L. Zungu by P.la Hausse, H.Matiwane and I.Edwards, Clairwood, 3 Aug. 1986. For the ways in which Zulu-speakers came to dominate particular occupations on the Rand, see van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, esp. pp. 74-110.

hundred dockworkers and Borough Police at the Point in 1902 were precipitated by the transposition of rural-based conflict into the urban context.[31] Perhaps this is not so surprising. There can be little doubt that workers' world views were integrally bound up with notions of reciprocity and obligation associated with kin, clan and chiefly authority.

Yet if clan and ethnic ties were important in weaving the social fabric of Durban's labour market, so too was age. By 1904 possibly as many as 4000 youth ,[32] some of whom were as young as twelve, were employed as 'kitchen umfaans' - general domestic servants who bore the brunt of domestic work in the kitchens of Durban's whites. For a first generation migrant worker his first point of entry into the town's labour market was invariably through the service sector. Finding work as a 'houseboy' marked the first of a number of possible subsequent forms of employment. The identification of African domestic service with very young workers (between the ages of 12 and 20) appears to have been the result of a complex process of negotiation between colonizer and colonized. At one level the explanation for the relationship was economic: young unmarried males were potentially more exploitable than older men with wider social and economic responsibilities. Moreover, at a time of acute moral panic over inter-racial sexual relations,[33] the sexuality of the youth may have presented less of a threat to the female presence in white households than would have been the case with an adult male. But this relationship between age and domestic service was not solely forged by the economic imperatives and sexual anxieties of white colonials.

As has been noted elsewhere, the social organisation of rural societies in Natal and Zululand during the nineteenth century was significantly based on age categories.[34] Although the creation of age regiments had been outlawed after the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, it is quite possible that workers-seekers entering Durban frequently did so on the basis of age-sets of migrants from particular rural areas.[35] It is implausible that

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31 *Natal Advertiser*, 19 Sept. 1902. See Hemson, 'Dockworkers of Durban', p. 70 for divisions along occupational lines with the togt workforce. In 1905 the small Pondo section of Durban's workforce was accommodated almost exclusively in what were referred to as the Old Barracks - the most dilapidated municipal quarters in the town. See NA, DCL, No. 547, Superintendent of Police to Town Clerk (hereafter TC).

32 The figure of 4000 is a rough estimate since registration figures in Durban are extremely inaccurate for this period. In 1904 there were 30 100 Africans in domestic work in Natal. See *Natal Census* p.678.

33 In addition to the influx of Africans from the Rand in 1899, Durban experienced an 'invasion' of several thousand white lumpen refugees: prostitutes, criminals, illicit liquor dealers and unemployed workers. Municipal officials continually pointed to the 'contaminating infuence' of this 'cosmopolitan crowd' on existing master-servant relations. See la Hausse, 'Struggle for the City', Ch. 1. By 1903 Durban was being described as a 'modern Babylon with 200 houses of ill-fame'. NA, PRB, Book No.7, Report: 4 Nov. 1903.

34 See, for example, E. Krige, *The Social Systems of the Zulus*, (Pietermaritzburg, 1965).

35 It seems that elements of the regimental system survived 1879. Certainly the *isibalo* system (a system of forced labour whereby chiefs were obliged to call out young men for service on roads and public works) could have, apart from normal processes of youth socialisation, relied on elements of the regimental sytem. See Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, p.43; and Krige, *Social System*, Ch. 5. esp. p.

older Zulu social structure was simply transposed into the urban setting. At least in the case of domestic service, it appears that elements of Zulu social structure were reinforced from above by whites with well-developed ideas about the importance of age hierarchies amongst African workers,[36] and from below by older workers themselves. The notion that domestic service was 'women's work' appears to have been internalised as a common sense idea by the 1920s.[37]

It was in the context of this corporate sense of identity amongst domestic servants (welded by age and possibly rural origins) that the amalaitas were formed. As one white burgess of Durban noted:

> These laita gangs are not merely groups of turbulent umfaans, they are organised bands having for their object the terrorising of the police and the defiance of authority.[38]

Although paucity of evidence makes the task of disaggregating the gangs, especially in terms of their inner structure and workings extremely difficult, it is possible to periodise and suggest their broader patterns of rebellion. In noting the occurrence of stick-fighting between amalaita gangs Durban's Superintendent of Police could not help noticing that their 'game' was similar to that 'practised by older warriors the other side of the Berg'.[39]

With the destruction of the Zulu kingdom in the decade after 1879, the cohesion of Zulu society, based on vertical and horizontal loyalties constituted by the Zulu King and age-regiments respectively, collapsed. It was in this context that *umgangela* emerged as a mechanism to cope with increasing antagonisms along horizontal lines. The *Umgangela* was a large, organised and highly-ritualised inter-district stick-fight.[40] It seems likely that the Superintendent of Police was in fact alluding to the mobilisation of elements of the *umgangela* by youth in Durban. Certainly the ritualised nature of amalaita activity, as suggested in a number of sources, indicates that this probably was the case. In more general terms, however, stick fighting, between youths of the same age-set was a central aspect of youth socialisation amongst Zulu-speaking boys. Interestingly stick fighting was known as *ukudela ngenduku* ('to play with sticks') and was governed by strict codes and conventions, particularly the rules of

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107. It would be interesting to trace the genesis of clan-based sectors of the labour market. This would require, at least, a detailed picture of rural impoverishment and proletarianisation at particular junctures.

36 See, for example, NA, DCL No 583, Chief Constable (hereafter CC) to TC 20 March 1908; and PRB Book 7, Report: 1 March 1906. In 1904, R.C. Alexander warned: 'It will be a bad day for Natal when the old men die.'

37 UW, Church of the Province of South Africa Archives (hereafter CPSA), Native Economic Commission (hereafter NEC), Box 12, Natal Memoranda, *passim*.

38 *Natal Mercury*, 3 July 1902.

39 NA, PRB, Book 6, Report: 7 June 1901.

40 See J. Clegg, 'Ukubuyisa Isidumbu - "Bringing back the Body". An examination into the ideology of vengeance in the Msinga and Mpofana rural locations, 1882-1944' *in* P. Bonner (ed), *Working Papers in Southern African Studies*, Vol. 2, (Johannesburg, 1978), pp.167-9.

'fair-play'.[41] Despite the highly competitive nature of stick fighting, as the one description of *ukuqaqulisana* suggests,[42] death was seldom the result of such encounters. Indeed two informants who were young boys in Natal in the 1910s testified to the widespread popularity of stick-fighting amongst youth.[43] Significantly, too, they emphasized the codes of conduct associated with stick-fighting. As one man who grew up in Umvoti recalled: 'If your head was cut in a fight you would rush to the river and cover the wound with mud so that your parents did not see'.[44]

Seen in these terms, then, the observation that in Durban youths between the ages of 16 and 24 'turn[ed] out in small forces, armed with sticks, to beat any other native they way came across',[45] has a certain resonance with the stick fighting of rural youth.[46] Refracted through the eyes of colonial officials, however, these organised and ritual forms of youthful assertion came to be seen as 'wilful, malicious and premeditated' acts demanding prosecution under criminal law and not breach of the peace bye-laws.[47] The cultural continuities between town and countryside should not, however, mask the ways in which amalaitas represented an innovation on youthful forms of organisation.

The inability of local government and employers in Durban to enforce the registration system or to force workers out of backyards and rented private premises into barrack accommodation, conferred a certain fluidity both on the geography of African worker settlement and the local labour market. Although togt workers had succeeded in pushing their daily wages up to 4/6 (and struck for further increases) during the boom period of 1902-03, young domestic workers were probably not as well placed to improve their wages or conditions of work. In a town where age had definite prescriptive powers in the workplace it is conceivable that the £1.10s a month earned by some domestic workers ('four times the amount they are

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41 In their study of peer socialisation amongst 'Red Xhosa' the Mayers point to the significance of stick fighting in an extended and complex process of youthful induction into the world of adults. Stick fighting in this context occurred amongst social groupings known as *intutu* (gatherings of boys between the ages of nine and thirteen) and *mishotsho* (an internally differentiated pre-initiation youth grouping). See P. and I. Mayer, 'Socialisation by Peers' *in* P. Mayer (ed). *Socialisation: The Approach from Social Anthropology* (London, 1970), pp. 164-72.

42 This was a form of "stick fencing" possibly current in the nineteenth century. It, too, was governed by strict codes of conduct and began with a challenge from one individual to another. Samuelson, *Long, Long Ago*, pp. 373-4.

43 Interview with F.Zondi by P.la Hausse and M. Marrengane, Maqadini, 25 Feb. 1987; and Interview with S.Ndhlovu by P. la Hausse and E.Mbele, Durban, 27 Feb. 1987.

44 Interview with F. Zondi.

45 NA, PRB, Book 7, Report 2 May 1904.

46 As G.Sivetye recalled: "They ['houseboys'] wanted exercise and the exercise they knew quite well was hitting [with sticks]. Interview with Sivetye.

47 NA, *South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-05*, Minutes of Evidence, Vol. 3, p. 645.

entitled to') was more the exception than the rule.[48] The differential experience of wage-labour along age lines seems to have encouraged the formation of youth gangs and the establishment of 'judicious thieving' as a dominant feature of their repertoire.

The depression of 1904-09 clearly did force the youth groupings of Durban's backyards and slum areas into adopting new patterns of criminality. Some workseekers covered their entry into town by taking out a togt badge and proceeded to 'prowl about on the look out for plunder'.[49] In 1904, apparently for the first time, deaths were reported after amalaita clashes. Small wonder, then, that with large scale unemployment amongst domestic workers after 1904 'idle vagabonds' under the age of twenty, having recently been released from prison, could be found wandering in Durban's streets, impervious to the threat of re-imprisonment.[50] Driven violently off Durban's pavements by white males and frequently fired without notice by employers, young 'houseboys' adapted the 'country stick-fight' to suit the exigencies of their situation in a racially-oppressive colonial town. In short, 'they learned to hit anybody'.[51]

If the solidarity of the youth group in general, and the amalaitas in particular, represented ways of shoring up the social discontinuities which proletarianisation and rural dispossession carried in their wake, white officials tended to associate such forms of organisation with a 'new code of morals leading to disease and destruction'. In a town where the contours of racial domination and the form of master-servant relationships seemed, at every point, to be threatened, it is hardly surprising that the anxieties of Durban's white population should have found expression in myths of social pathology constituted around prostitution, disease and drink. Of particular concern was the 'dissolute "town boy"' who, as one magistrate put it, 'loses his identity and joins the great multitude of no'er-do-wells or the notorious "leita" gangs'.[52]

Durban did, however, experience a real plague in 1903. Perhaps there was more than a germ of truth in the claim that the:

> irresponsible portion of our Native population, the youth and younger generation of 20 years and under who have grown up since the Zulu War of 1879 [have] no conception of our justice or our might.[53]

There is little doubt that the 1900s would have been experienced as a period of heightened social dislocation and economic hardship for first generation migrant workers. Moreover, the legal abolition of the age regiments together with the traditional means whereby a youth was initiated into manhood (*ukubuthwa*), must have impacted on youth socialisation and the constraints provided by the sanctions of parents, elders and chiefly authority. But the ways in which youth began to employ older so-

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[48] NA, PRB, Book 6, Report: 28 Jan. 1901. The average wage of domestic servants was probably £1.

[49] NA, DCL, No. 548, First Municipal Conference, 1904.

[50] NA, PRB, Book 7, Report 2 May 1904; and Report 1 Aug. 1904.

[51] Interview with Sivetye.

[52] NA, Secretary for Native Affairs (hereafter SNA), 1/1/367, 1116/1907 Report of Magistrate, Alexandra Division, 1907.

[53] NA, SNA, 1/1/367, 1116/1907, Report of Magistrate, Umlazi, 1907.

cial forms to express new content, derived from the experience of urban life, were distinctly threatening.

White perceptions of African youths' loss of the 'proper control or good influence of the old men', was endorsed by the most prominent member of Durban's tiny *kholwa* population, Rev. John Dube. In the columns of *Ilanga* he commented: 'You find youths...wandering about playing concertinas, smoking cigarettes being insolent and defiant, and unheeding, and then you behold the foundation stone for good in a race which was established by Tsha a, long since crumbled'.[54] This increased concern over uncontrolled youth can be traced to the immediate aftermath of the Bambatha rebellion in 1906. Not only did the poll tax strike at the fragmented population of farm and Reserve dwellers in Natal and Zululand, it placed an additional economic burden on younger men who were already responsible for earning income for their fathers' hut tax. For many of these youths and young men the possibilities of accumulating money for the purposes of *lobola* must have receded into an ill-defined future,[55] while the mobilisation of youth organisation for criminal purposes remained a distinct possibility in the present.

In 1907 the first report which attempted to disaggregate the 'large number of Native thieves and vagabonds' in Durban appeared. It outlined the existence of three types of gangs. Firstly, at least nine criminal gangs each having appointed leaders and most of which operated from some of Durban's over 100 shebeens. Secondly, a large number of gangs comprising many unemployed seven to twenty year olds who lived off 'sneak thieving and gambling', and a third group of gangs which was differentiated from the second by the name amalaita, an ability to 'wage war against another gang' and the presence of domestic servants in their ranks.[56]

These distinctions provide vital clues to the making and transformation of youth gangs in Durban during this period. The distinction between the criminal housebreakers - *izigebengu* (probably containing a strict hierarchy within their membership) and youth gangs, was one which had been alluded to previously.[57] It would seem reasonable to suppose that the amalaita gang led by Msuluza Ngongoma, a hunchback from Mapumulo, displayed a form of criminal organisation akin to that of the Ninevites or *izigebengu*.[58] Yet the more general location of the amalaitas on the permeable boundary separating delinquency from hardened criminal activity

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[54] *Ilanga lase Natal*, 4 January 1907, (Translation).

[55] The Natal Code of Native Law stipulated ten head of cattle as the maximum payable for the wives. However, up to six-sevenths of African owned cattle were lost during 1897-8 which made *lobola* extremely difficult for young men to raise over the following years. See Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, p. 128. For the magnitude of cattle losses, see Interview with Sivetye.

[56] NA, SNA, 1/1/361, 197/07, R.H. Arnold to Chief Magistrate, 14 Jan. 1907. Arnold claimed to have located six amalaita gangs with an estimated strength of a least 150. The number of youth gangs appear to have been indeterminate.

[57] Superintendent Alexander was deeply concerned about the criminalisation of youth through imprisonment. He suggested that since the government could not afford a reformatory, youths should be placed on 'an old hulk in the Bay to learn a trade'. See NA, PRB, Book 7, Report: 1 Aug. 1905.

[58] Ngongoma was remembered by G. Sivetye as the "chief of the amalaitas

confirms an interpretation of the amalaita gang as a traditionalist form of youth organisation born of the experience of migrant labour. It is precisely the broader strength of youth-based rituals and the solidarities of the age-group in the urban setting to which the 1907 report alludes.

There was clearly no automatic graduation from youth group or gang to the ranks of *izigebengu*. Youth organisation (particularly that of the amalaita) was locked into rural economies and the ability of the family to absorb the young migrant worker into communities through marriage. Yet patterns of behaviour created in town could also be transposed back into a rural setting. When members of one amalaita gang, possibly forged in Johannesburg or Durban, returned to their kin at Sikaleni near Colenso, they were responsible for attacking policemen who had arrested some of their number. Their war cry, *Shaya Kula Kula!* ('Hit the Coolies!'), was possibly the product of particular animosities experienced in the service sector of the urban labour market.[59] Certainly the entry of the word *amahuzu* ('a town kafir of low class') into the Zulu language at the time, was the product of these new conditions of life.[60]

'Lawless Bands of Youth': Amalaitas Ascendant, 1916-1922.

In 1918, the manager of Durban's municipal Native Affairs Department (NAD) noted with some uneasiness that 'the gradual disintegration of tribal conditions, and the attachment of some of the Natives to industrial habits, are influences which tend to give an element of permanency to the Native urban population.'[61] It was a concern shared, but for different reasons, by chiefs and homestead heads. Illegitimacy and the loosening of parental control over young wage-earners in towns deeply threatened production relations based in the household. Moreover, at a time when cattle for *lobola* payments were scarce, unmarried young men were reportedly refusing to pay off debts to the fathers of those women by whom they had had children.[62]

Both prostitution and illegitimacy, then, came to symbolise the erosion of family ties and homestead authority. The genesis of this process was also associated, more generally, with the perceived disintegration of those youthful codes of behaviour and identities which underpinned economic and social relations associated with homestead and clan. In Durban the *Iso lo Muzi* (Vigilance Committee) thus came to define the disciplining of youths who directed 'bad language' and 'unfit words' at

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in Durban". See Interview with Sivetye. For form of Ninevite organisation, see van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, pp.182-6.

59 NA, SNA, 360, 72/07, Record of Proceedings at the Enquiry into an Assault on two Native Constables, 5 Oct. 1906. Johannes Kumalo's observations on the roots of animosity between Africans and Indians are interesting. In giving evidence to James Stuart at Ladysmith in 1900 he claimed: 'There are several grave objections to the Indians ... [they] ... become domestic servants in the principal places like hotels, refreshment places etc., thereby displacing natives'. See C. de B. Webb, J.B. Wright (eds.), *The James Stuart Archive*, Vol. 1, (Pietermaritzburg, 1976), p. 222.

60 Also see Webb and Wright, *James Stuart Archive*, Vol. 4, p. 252, n. 51.

61 J.S. Marwick, *Natives in the Larger Towns*, (Durban, 1918), p.1.

62 NA, Chief Native Commisioners' Files (hereafter CNC), Minute Papers, 199, 205/1915, Proceedings of a Meeting held at Verulam, 23 Feb. 1915.

African women, as one of its major duties.[63] Linked to the aggression of the amalaita gang, such challenges may have appeared more threatening. Certainly, between 1916 and 1921 there was an apparent resurgence of amalaita activity after a period of relative quiescence.

The First World War ushered in an era of industrial expansion in South Africa. In Durban the size of the black workforce employed by local industry increased from 7 530 in 1915-16 to 15 940 in 1919-20.[64] By 1918 local industry, in particular the building and food and drink sectors, was capable of absorbing increasingly large numbers of landless or impoverished rural Africans. After 1910 the ability of local government to limit the size of Durban's African population to the labour needs of employers was considerably strengthened by the introduction of new labour registration bye-laws in 1916. Backed by penal sanctions, these bye-laws considerably tightened up procedures for work registration, pass and curfew laws and contracts of service.[65] They struck particularly harshly at African women who were, because of extremely limited job opportunities, invariably included in the ranks of the 'habitually idle and suspicious class' of blacks. Moreover, in a town where the presence of African women was viewed as incompatible with the maintenance of a cheap, migrant labour system, it was hardly surprising that the concessions to the urban African family were extremely measured. Those men and women whose claims to married status were scuttled by an official language which labelled them 'persons of unspeakably bad character', settled on the immediate outskirts of the town.[66]

Despite the massive housing revenue generated by the municipal beer monopoly only about a quarter of Durban's nearly 30 000 African workers could be formally housed. Sometimes paying exhorbitant rents to landlords and receiving wages which probably ranked amongst the lowest paid to urban workers in the Union, Durban's African workers experienced the post-1916 period as one of acute economic hardship. Then, in 1918, steep price rises and post-war inflation precipitated workers into strike action.[67]

Less dramatic, but no less organised, was the reported resurgence of amalaita activity after 1916. The editor of the *Natal Mercury* angrily pointed to the 'menacing and violent behaviour of these bands of native hooligans' whose activities were 'visibly going from bad to worse'.[68] While admitting to 'a re-appearance of this lieta gang nuisance' and to

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[63] Between 1912 and 1916 Rev. C.C. Nyawo attempted to gain recognition for the *Iso lo Muzi* without much apparent success. For example see NA, DCL No. 635, C.C. Nyawo to TC, 19 Sept. 1912.

[64] For more general indicators of industrial expansion in Durban during this period, see *Report on Industries in Durban 1915/16 - 1922/3*, Office of Census and Statistics, Special Report No. 28, Pretoria, 1924.

[65] *Mayor's Minute*, 1917, p. 15.

[66] NA, Town Clerks' Files (hereafter TCF), 36, 49 Manager of Municipal NAD to TC 12 Sept. 1919. Only 60 families were accommodated in Baumannville 'married Native Quarters' while at least 340 families settled on the outskirts of town.

[67] See Hemson, 'Dockworkers of Durban', pp. 161-91; and la Hausse Ch. 2.

[68] *Natal Mercury*, 15 March 1916. Also see NA, Durban Magistrates' Correspondence, (hereafter DMC), 506, 4/14/1037/16, Chief Magistrate to CNC, 14 Sept. 1916.

weekly arrests of youths for playing mouth organs and congregating, a defensive Chief Constable denied that the gangs were organised. 'They are', claimed one police officer, 'more of a 'clique system [of] small umfaans working close to one another' whose activities were continually broken up by the police.[69] The fragmentary Durban Criminal Records have, however, left behind splintered clues which seem to attest not only to the increase of amalaita activity during these years, but also to changing patterns and codes underlying gang activity.

In 1919 four youths appeared in a Durban court on charges of 'congregating in a body armed with sticks and acting in a manner likely to cause a breach of the peace'. The fragmentary record of the proceedings, rendered in the mostly illegible hand of an overworked magistrate, is beyond recovery. Yet the surviving charge sheet re-affirms the connection between amalaitas and young domestic workers: the accused shared their youth (three were eighteen years old and one was fifteen) as well as a common occupation in the same suburb.[70] Less apparent from this evidence, however, is the relationship between the subterranean ties and identities of migrant youth and the structure of the labour market. For it was at their point of intersection that the amalaitas came into being.

In 1921 the first official figures reflecting the size of Durban's African domestic worker population put their numbers at 8 944. At least 7 590 of these were males, perhaps 75% of whom were below the age of twenty.[71] One man whose early job experiences might have been fairly typical of thousands of ther newly-proletarianized workers during this period is Lazarus Zungu. Having been compelled to seek wage labour at the young age of fifteen he found work as a domestic servant at Seaview in 1918, earning £2 a month. It took him at least four years to move out of domestic work into the world of store hands.[72] Dragooned into the service sector young domestic servants ranked amongst the worst paid of urban workers.[73]

The solidarities of the age group (*inkanga*) and the sinews of rural home networks were not however, shattered by urban wage labour. Paradoxically, they often found fiercer expression in the urban setting. Not only did groups of workseekers bearing such ties attempt to find jobs as domestic servants in close proximity to one another, but their access to such jobs was frequently determined by pre-existing patterns of em-

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69 NA, TCF, 110, 605, CC to TC, 15 March 1916; and J.F. McArthur to TC 18 March 1916.

70 NA, DCR, Court B, Rex versus Makasonke Mbambo and 3 others, 17 Nov. 1919.

71 See *Census*, 1921, Part VIII, U.G. 40-24 and R.H. Smith, *Labour Resources of Natal* (Cape Town, 1950), pp.65-8. Smith explains the relationship between youth and domestic work in the following terms: "It is an occupation in which their immaturity and their ignorance of urban life place them at the least disadvantage, and it has evidently been the means of introducing many Natives to urban employment". (p.68).

72 Interview with L. Zungu.

73 In 1920, rough estimates of workers wages were as follows: Togt workers 18s per week, domestic servants £2 to £3.10 a month, with food and lodging, rickshaw pullers up to £6 a month, store workers £2.10s to £4 a month, indunas up to £5 a month and artisans up to £3 a week.

ployment in each suburb.[75] With the high turnover of jobs in the service sector it is likely too that over time domestic work in particular suburbs became identified with youths who shared common ties of kin or clan. It seems that many amalaita gangs were an expression of these existing youth solidarities in particular suburbs. Moreover, their mobilisation appears to have been part of a broader struggle which involved the utilisation of accessible cultural repertoires and ritual forms to defend the integrity of the group in the face of competition from "outsiders".

One court case is especially illuminating in this regard. In 1916 eighteen stick-wielding youths led by Mapandhla Dhladhla were arrested and charged with public violence. Eleven of the sixteen found guilty hailed from Ndwedwe, all were between the ages of sixteen and eighteen and most were subjects of Chief Kamanga. The evidence also suggests that most, if not all, bore the mark of domestic service: a red-trimmed calico uniform.[75] Clearly, for many newly-proletarianised workers the potential depredations and loss of identity which accompanied wage labour could be partially met through an aggressive affirmation of the ties of age and kin which some amalaita gangs embodied.[76] When welded along suburban lines and defined against similarly constituted groups the amalaitas might have appeared more as "street armies" than 'houseboys who disappear like rabbits the moment the police appear'.[77]

Today many old men remember, with the animation of youth, the apparently arbitrary violence of the amalaitas - at least some of them having suffered bruised bodies as a result of gang attacks.[78] Yet what is also apparent from their testimonies are the amalaitas' codes of behaviour and patterns of organisation. The conflicts between amalaita gangs were most obviously played out over territory. Amalaita 'sections' were, it appears forged on distinct suburban lines: Sydenham, Greyville, Botanic Gardens and the Point, all spawned gangs with reputations for violence.[79] Clashes between gangs up to fifty in strength could be initiated with a verbal challenge or an insult directed at the poor quality of mouth organ playing amongst the opposing gang. In the *mêlée* which followed, heads might be broken but fatalities were rare.[80]

It is difficult to say to what extent inter-gang fighting was linked to the historical animosities and feuds based in rural societies, although the clan composition of some amalaitas could have made this a distinct possibility. What is clearer, however, is that the reported 'outbreaks'

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[75] Not least because 'home boys' swapped passes freely and returned to rural areas only after having organised a friend or kin member to replace them. See Interview with A. Tshabalala and C. Kumalo by P. la Hausse, Durban, 28 Aug. 1986.

[75] NA, DCR, B Court, Rex versus Mapandhla Dhladhla and 18 others, 3 Jan. 1916.

[76] For possible examples of this see NA, DCR, C Court, Rex versus Hlobolo and 10 others, 25 Jan. 1915;C Court, Rex versus Ngcibi Mtikazeli and 4 other, 17 March 1917; and B Court, Rex versus M. Mbambo, 17 Nov. 1919.

[77] NA, TCF, 110, 605, CC to TC, 15 March 1916.

[78] Interview with C. Kumalo, by P. la Hausse, Bruntville, Mooi River, 1 Sept.1986; and Interview with F. Zondi.

[79] Interview with L. Zungu; and Interview with F. Zondi.

[80] Interview with F. Zondi.

of gang activity at particular moments tended to coincide with periods of increased economic hardship and the arrival of waves of newly proletarianised workseekers in town.[01] This in turn intensified levels of police repression. In the five years following 1916, arrests for vagrancy, drunkenness and breach of the peace increased dramatically.[02] The 'steady stream of arrivals from the country districts' during this period probably resulted in intensified job competition amongst blacks. The potential threat which this influx could have posed to existing networks amongst 'houseboys' seems to have been met with increasingly violent mobilisation of amalaitas.[03] The assertion of age and clan identities by young first generation jobseekers themselves would have, if anything, increased the possibility of more violent conflict.

In Durban's white working class suburbs where young domestic workers might have been driven harder and paid particularly low wages, amalaitas appear to have taken on a distinct character. Certainly, two amalaita 'sections' located in the poorer suburbs of the Point and Greyville earned a reputation for ferocity which was, no doubt, accompanied by a greater willingness to engage in petty theft and incorporate unemployed youth into their ranks.[04]

Yet if many amalaita gangs represented a defensive and often violent response to wage labour, urban conditions of life also continually transformed their cultural repertoires and forms of organisation. In some cases the resilience of age and kin ties tended to be replaced by the comradeship of the workplace forged relatively independently of such networks. The collective membership of one Point amalaita gang, for example, did not clearly reflect the solidarities of either age grouping or kin ties, but rather the patterns of domination and subordination associated with the workplace and the barrack. Muhlatovu Zimela, a forty year old induna at Renauds' barracks, was the leader of this gang which appears to have comprised mainly stevedores whose average age was twenty seven.[05] If strikes were one dockworker response to declining real wages, gang formation might have been another.

As periods of wage labour were drawn out by rural impoverishment or dispossession, it is likely that urban conditions of life, at least for some workers, came to constitute the bedrock of their experience. One alternative for those who were unable or refused to be incorporated into the more "respectable" ranks of clerks, messengers, artisans or workers, and who had lost the option of re-absorption into rural society, was to join the ranks of an emerging criminal underclass. One amalaita gang which

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01 This tends to confirm van Onselen's periodisation of amalaita activity. See C. van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, pp.57-9.

02 Arrests for vagrancy jumped from 710 in 1915 to 2 411 in 1917 while arrests for breach of the peace increased from 454 to 760 during the same period. See *Mayor's Minute*, for the years 1915-17.

03 Deaths as a result of amalaita activity started being reported again after 1916. See NA, TCF, 110, 605, CC to TC, 15 March 1916.

04 Interview with S. Mtshali by P. la Hausse, Umlazi, 26 February 1987.

05 NA, DCR, C Court, Rex versus M. Zimela and 15 others, 3 Jan. 1919. Interestingly Zimela's position as leader of the gang was clearly related to his position as an induna which itself probably related, at least, to his age. The number of gang members from particular districts was follows: Mtunzini (3), Eshowe (3), Melmoth (2), Ixopo (1), Camperdown (1), Bulwer (1), Nqutu (1), Hlabisa (1) and Cape Province (1).

showed signs of having intergrated strong elements of urban criminal sub-culture into their repertoire was the Amakosi gang. Its terrain of activity comprised the shebeens and dancehalls of Overport where in 1922, thirty of its number were arrested for attacking revellers, and then policemen, at a 'creole' dance organised by one American George. Court records put the average age of the gang at 23 and suggest that membership was confined to domestic workers or the permanently unemployed. Of particular interest however is the fact that over half of the thirty accused shared sixty-four previous convictions between them. These ranged from culpable homicide, house breaking and theft and assault to gambling, desertion, pass forgery and liquor offences.[86]

It is more than possible that members of the Amakosi gang had come into contact with the criminal networks of the Ninevites who were active in Durban's Point Prison at this time.[87] Indeed, in a town where the control of workers was achieved through rigorous policing and criminal sanctions attached to labour repressive laws, it is not surprising that many Africans should have, at least, been exposed to elements of a criminal sub-culture. Yet permanent lumpenproletarian criminality was not the inevitable outcome of amalaita activity. Unlike the leader of the Ninevites, Jan Note, who claimed towards the end of his criminal career that he had 'long lost all touch with his people',[88] the identity of amalaita youth would have been, for the most part during this period, closely bound up with a rural past. Even the Amakosi gang, as their name suggests, perhaps also nourished the hope of a return, in some form, to the land and the homestead. There can be little doubt, however, that for some marriageable young men such a return became increasingly difficult after the First World War.[89]

As early as 1904 the Durban Superintendent of Police had noted that the 'Native Convict' was regarded 'more in the light of Hero than Criminal' by 'his own people'.[90] Even if Christian vernacular newspapers called for a meeting of the 'old men' (*uMdunankulu*) to suggest ways of dealing with uncontrolled amalaita activity,[91] it seems that the gangs had the tacit, if not unambiguous, support of the African labouring poor during this period. There are suggestions that where local government and white townspeople saw 'lawless bands of youth', African workers might have regarded amalaita activity as emblematic of personal liberty in a time of political and economic oppression.[92] Certainly, Fanyana Zondi, an induna

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[86] See NA, DCR, C Court, Rex vs Matshinga Zulu and 29 others, 28 June 1922.

[87] See *Annual Report of the Director of Prisons for the Year 1919*, UG 54 -'20, p.48. In 1919 'a Ninevite affair was dicovered, wherein it was planned to throw the European warders overboard from the ferry boat while crossing the bay'.

[88] See NA, CNC, 265B, 2065/1916, SNA to CNC, 6 Dec. 1916. Also see Charles van Onselen's useful discussion and qualification of the urban, lumpenproletarian nature of Ninevite criminality, *New Nineveh*, pp. 193-5.

[89] It is interesting to note that many members of the Amakosi gang would have started working in the punishing economic conditions which set in during the First World War.

[90] See NA, PRB, Book 7, Report: 1 Aug. 1904.

[91] See *Izindaba Zabantu*, 1 May 1916.

[92] Cf. P. O'Malley, 'The Class Production of Crime: Banditry and Class

for much of his working life, did not regard amalaita gang members as criminals until the later 1930s.[93]

Seen in this light it would be tempting to cast the amalaitas into the mould of youthful social bandits.[94] But what were the precise limits of the amalaita gangs' rebellion ? In many ways age was used to reinforce the potential marginality of African youth in Durban. The amalaita gang might have provided a refuge from which the young worker could define himself in relation to his exclusion from the world of older married men (*amadoda*), his inability to drink in municipal beerhalls[95] and his potentially demeaning and subservient position as 'Jim' or 'Sixpence' in the hot kitchens of Durban's white townspeople. There was also a forthright economic basis to such exclusion on the basis of age. In 1918, John Dube, as spokesman for striking workers, demanded differential wage increases based on age.[96]

Moreover, removed from the social constraints of the family and deprived of those rites of passage which initiated youth into adult society, young workers were left to develop their own patterns of behaviour in ways appropriate to their new-found status within a particular stratum of urban workers. This tendency towards marginality must have given youth added impetus to affirm their identity in relation to those resources over which they *did* have some control: physical strength, sexuality, and domestic work.[97] It is likely, too, that when the particular rituals associated with rural youth were reconstituted in an urban setting they emerged in a form which conferred on inter-youth conflict a novel competitiveness and violence.

Although a great deal of amalaita activity focussed on struggles between gangs over territory, the gangs also directed violence at other targets. On numerous occasions black members of the Borough Police were attacked, beaten and sometimes stabbed by amalaitas. At one level the reasons for this animosity are obvious. In attempting to enforce breach of the peace and curfew bye-laws policemen frequently encountered amalaitas in suburban streets. Black policemen, however, were also known for their brutality and their "ignorance".[98] For the amalaitas, in particular, it is likely that these policemen not only a symbolised colle-

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Strategies in England and Australia', *in* S. Spitzer (ed.) *Research in Law and Sociology*, Vol. 3, p.188.

93 Interview with F. Zondi. S. Mtshali, who was in Durban during the early twenties, simply regards amalaitas as 'naughty boys'. See Interview with S. Mtshali.

94 Eric Hobsbawm notes that the social bandit will be "young and single or unattached, if only because it is much harder for a man to revolt against the apparatus of power once he has family responsibilities". See *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester, 1978), pp. 17-18.

95 Interview with S. Ndhlovu.

96 See Central Archives Depot (hereafter CAD), Secretary of Justice files (hereafter JUS), 270, 4/267/18, Petition on J. Dube on behalf of Native Workers. Interestingly one reason for chiefs resentment of *isibalo* was that young boys were paid the same wages as older men. See Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, p. 45.

97 Cf. J.S. La Fontaine, 'Two Types of Youth Group in Kinshasa (Leopoldville)', *in* Mayer and Mayer (eds.), *Socialisation*, p.208.

98 Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala; and Interview with Sivetye. Also cf. van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, p.188.

oration with oppressors, but also presented young workers with a physical image of their own colonised status. Significantly, black policemen were derided as *aliantshingelana* - "those who march in a straight line".[99] For amalaita gangs who drew on fighting idioms rooted in older traditions of Zulu militarism it might have been an especially apposite term. Certainly the violence which they directed at black policemen would tend to confirm this.

The limits placed upon, and the consciousness underpinning amalaitas' rituals of rebellion is suggested by the iconography of their dress. In a town where workers' clothes frequently signalled their position within the African workforce it is not surprising that dress could have been made to assume different meanings. Gangs reinforced their control over territory by developing collective symbols of membership. Clothes might be embroidered with different coloured patterns or particular items of clothing could be worn by gangs in specific localities.[100] Thus members of the 'Black Band' gang of Botanic Gardens all wore black-ribboned hats.[101] Symbols with a particular historical resonance, such as the *umshokobezi*, were worn by at least one gang.[102] The *umshokobezi* (ox-tails bound round the head) was a traditional Zulu war emblem which had been used by armed rebels in 1906. Unsuspecting workers traversing the terrain bounded by these symbols could be mercilessly beaten.[103]

It was in the face of increasingly violent gang activity in the post-war period that local government introduced new legislation prohibiting the carrying of a range of different sticks by Africans. Undoubtedly it was the *amashiza* of the amalaitas which was the more specific target of the legislation.[104] Whether the legislation had the desired effect is debatable, for at least one gang substituted their sticks with umbrellas, possibly sharpened at the end.

The obvious capacity for violence which was displayed by the amalaita gangs was also however, rooted in a deep defensiveness. To some extent this is illustrated by the emergence of the *isihebehaba* - groups of domestic servants who appropriated female styles of dress and engaged in homosexuality.[105] In 1917 it was reported that 'large numbers' of *isihebehaba* - mostly 'very good house servants' - had emerged in Durban. The relationship between the amalaitas and the gangs is unclear,[106] but certainly their tightly knit organisation resonated strongly with that

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99 Interview with Ngcobo.

100 Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala.

101 *Natal Mercury*, 14 March 1916.

102 See NA, DCR, Rex versus M. Dhladhla and 18 others.

103 Interview with Zondi; and Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala.

104 See NA, TCF, 103, 467B, Natives Carrying sticks - Amendment of General Bye-Law No. 71, 1920.

105 NA, CNC, 341, 3271/1918, Det. Stevens (SAP) to Pietermaritzburg CID, 2 Oct. 1917. There are a number of historical examples of young men dressing in women's clothing. See, for example, Gillis, *Youth and History*, p. 33, p. 45.

106 Although J.S. Marwick claimed that all amalaitas were *o'Nqinqili* (or sodomites). See *Natives in the Larger Towns*, p. 10. Their sexual relationship was similar to *hlobonga* - a form of external intercourse widely practiced by young Zulu men and women before marriage.

of the gangs. Their use of *hloniphq* vocabulary,[107] "marriage" ceremonies and collective funds for the payment of fines all seemed to underscore a cultural distinctiveness and defensive autonomy.

In many ways, then, amalaita gangs were inward-looking, conservative groupings whose members were attached to rural identities and traditional idioms. They were social only within well-defined limits outside of which they had a remarkable capacity for violence. Their rebellion seldom extended further than attacks directed at particular symbols of their oppression which were phrased in a language of traditionalism. Although their identification with the sub-culture of habitual criminals was not unambiguous, they showed signs, at particular moments, of recidivism. Yet clearly, too, their repertoires showed evidence of transformation and their organisational forms signs of innovation. The gangs also possessed an organisational basis and culture from which more direct challenges to their conditions of oppression could be launched.

For example, in 1919 the *Ngqolayomlilo* (Fiery Wagons), an amalaita gang probably from Greyville (possibly comprising dockworkers), was involved in a running battle with police.[108] It appears that the gang had attacked an Armistice Day celebration at which the municipal NAD had organised food hand-outs for workers. At a time when workers were striking for higher wages their action was hardly surprising. Particularly suggestive, however, is the fact that one old man remembers the *Ngqolayomlilo* as an *ibutho* and certainly their name is remarkably evocative of a regimental one.[109]

'From Amalaitas to Amacowboys': Youth, Amalaitas and Popular Politics, 1925-1930.

In 1931 Violet Sibusisiwe Makhanya wrote: 'The parental and tribal control of the days of Tshaka, Moshesh, Hintsa and Khama have died a natural death'.[110] It was an observation upon which John Dube elaborated in his memorandum before the Native Economic Commission during the same year. 'There have arisen', he claimed, 'certain groups of Natives who cannot be retribalised again under the system as it was before the white man came'.[111] In a society increasingly characterised by its class antagonisms, Dube found himself ambiguously drawn towards segregationist notions of "re-tribalisation". His prescriptions for black South

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[107] This word literally means to have shame or shun through bashfulness, and affected women mostly. See Krige, *Social System*, pp. 30-1.

[108] See NA, DMC, 513, 27/551/9, Chief Magistrate to CNC, 8 Aug. 1919. The gang was either from the Point or Greyville. It is possible that its membership comprised dockworkers since both at Greyville and at the Point there were high concentrations of dockworkers housed in barracks. This might also account for the fierce reputation of the gangs in these two areas.

[109] Interview with Zungu. This informant also remembers the gang as 'prominent in the amalaita class'. Although a Zulu royal regiment was established in 1918 and another in 1925 it appears that by the 1920s the regimental system had largely disappeared. Interestingly, however, the Makhanya people on the South Coast of Natal had active regiments in the 1920s. See D.H. Reader, *Zulu Tribe in Transition* (Manchester, 1966), pp. 275-80.

[110] V.S. Makhanya, 'The problem of the Zulu Girl', *Natal Native Teachers' Journal*, Vol. X, No.3, April 1931, p. 119.

[111] U.W., CPSA, NEC, AD 1438, Box 12, Evidence of J.L. Dube before NEC.

Africans, however, hinged on one important premise: that 'detribalised' Africans - those who were educated, individual land owners, urban artisans or white-collar workers - should be accommodated on differential political and social lines.

It was a point which Durban's Joint Council was at pains to make. The Council urged a recognition of the 'difference between the umfaan of 16 and 17, the respectable adult kraal native, and the growing class of educated native clerks, teachers, artisans etc.'[112] If this optimistic vision foundered in the face of government intransigence, by the later twenties it was also implicitly challenged from below by the swelling numbers of dispossessed African urban-dwellers frequently 'contaminated with the criminal classes'. Ironically, too, it was from the fractured ranks of Dube's own class that his vision was challenged: from the lower middle class leadership of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union which established branches in Durban and the countryside of Natal after 1925.

The social dislocation which industrialisation in South Africa had carried in its wake was exacerbated after the mid-twenties by the intensified capitalisation of agriculture. In Natal, the expansion of sheep farming and wattle plantations in particular, led to the mass eviction of labour tenants and the impoverishment of many more. These conditions provided the crucible in which the ICU was transformed into a mass movement seeking freedom from worsening conditions of oppression.[113]

For those Africans who were pushed into towns, conditions were generally no less bleak. By 1925 Sydenham, Mayville, Cato Manor and South Coast Junction were supporting over 22 000 Africans, three quarters of whom were living as families, and many of whom worked in Durban.[114] Unable to find work and desperate for additional family incomes, many female members of these households resorted to the illegal brewing of beer. In Durban itself half of Durban's 40 000 African workers were living in municipal barracks. Even in real terms their wages had barely risen, and in some cases had declined, during the 1920s.[115] Rising levels of worker exploitation were coupled with increasing levels of coercion. The Urban Areas Act and a battery of labour-repressive bye-laws tightened up control over workers' daily lives. It was in this context that the ICU's Durban Branch captured the imagination of workers through a sustained and generally successful campaign of litigation aimed at oppressive bye-laws and unfair employment practices.[116] Yet the attempts by Union leadership to consolidate these

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[112] University of South Africa (hereafter UNISA), ICU Microfilm, Reel 1, Extract from Report of Joint Council of Europeans and Natives, June 1930.

[113] See H. Bradford, 'The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of South Africa in the South African Countryside, 1924-1930', Ph.D. Thesis, U.W., 1985.

[114] These peri-urban areas which were a *de facto* part of Durban, were incorporated into the city of Durban in 1932. Sydenham alone supported an African population of at least 10 000 in the later twenties. In 1925, half of Mayville's African population of 8 000 comprised women and children. See NA, TCF, 48, 467, *Report of Health Committee of Durban Joint Council*, 1925.

[115] See NA, TCF, 63, 467, Evidence of Durban Town Council to NEC, March 1931.

[116] See la Hausse, 'Struggle for the City', pp. 144-52, for a fuller discussion of this campaign.

victories met with ambiguous success, especially after the Natal branch of the Union seceded from the national union in 1928.

The fierce populism which Union officials succeeded in moulding tended to dissemble the extent to which the ICU *yase* Natal was a vehicle for the class interests of its leadership. Between 1929 and 1930 the Union's leadership was radicalised from below by its increasingly desperate constituency, resulting in fierce riots in June 1929 and a year-long boycott of municipal beerhalls. Yet popular support for the Union remained dependent on the ability of the Union to meet rank-and-file demands for higher wages. It was during the onset of depression and the restructuring of Durban's labour market that the CPSA succeeded in drawing a large section of the ICU's disillusioned and desperate membership into its 1930 pass-burning campaign.[117]

It might be expected that these processes of class formation and mass political mobilisation, combined with new levels of rural impoverishment and depression, should have served to refashion the nature of amalaita gang activity. Although it is difficult to trace patterns of gang activity through official records, during this period, where the gangs do appear, they do so in two apparently new contexts. Firstly, in the slum communities on the boundaries of the town and, secondly, in the rhetoric, at least, of ICU organisers. Moreover, the amalaita gang came to provide a motif for heightened government and liberal concern over the 'demoralisation of the Native' and the 'making of criminals'.[118]

The attack by an amalaita gang on a white man in Mayville in 1924 was possibly an unusual occurrence, less so however, was the incidence of knife-assaults by 'ill-disposed and habitually idle natives in Durban'.[119] By the end of 1925 it was with a degree of nostalgia that Police reports invoked the gangs of the immediate post-war period. Such reports further blur an already difficult distinction between the amalaita gangs composed of domestic servants between the ages of twelve and twenty and those of older lumpen-criminals. The reinforcement of young workers' exclusion from adult society produced particular patterns of cultural expression which both intersected with, and remained distinct from, criminal sub-culture.[120] For older lumpen-criminals their marginality was defined more in terms of the dysjuncture between newly-emerging social and economic responsibilities and the possibilities available for their fulfillment.

As the testimony of a number of old ex-domestic workers suggests, many young men attempted to secure better-paid jobs after working a few years as 'houseboys'.[121] This transition was no doubt related to increased

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[117] For these struggles see P. la Hausse, 'The Message of the Warriors: The ICU, the Labouring Poor and the Making of a Popular Political Culture in Durban', unpublished paper, 1987.

[118] NA, TCF, 48, 467B, Manager, Municipal NAD to TC, 3 Nov. 1925.

[119] CAD, JUS, 270, 4/157/18, District Commandant, SAP to Deputy Commissioner, SAP, 21 July 1924; and also see, NA, TCF, 48, 467B, CC to TC, 3 Nov. 1925.

[120] In its evidence before the NEC Durban's Joint Council emphasized the juvenile nature of amalaita activity. See U.W., NEC, AD 1438, Box 6, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 6325-27.

[121] This was the experience of at least three informants. See Interview with Zungu; Interview with S.Ngcobo by P. la Hausse and E.Mbele, Umlazi, 26 Feb. 1987; and Interview with Zondi. Zungu started working

pressure on the individual to accumulate wealth for *lobola*, remit wages to homesteads and to cover an increased tax burden after 1925.[122] Yet many workers must have struggled to effect this transition in a period of increased levels of exploitation, unemployment and depression. One alternative might have been to inject traditonalist forms of youth organisation with the content of urban lumpen-criminality.

Charles Dube pointed to these differential processes of criminalisation in a 1929 Mission Report. He indicated the existence of three kinds of gangs, all 'well organised', in Durban. Firstly, those living off earnings prised out of gambling operations,[123] secondly, 'lieta gangs composed mostly of umfaans' and led by full grown men. And, finally, 'skebengas' who 'if necessary take the life of any person' and 'break up stores and steal'.[124] At least some of this gang activity, as Dube acknowledged, was generated by massive social dislocation. Gang-formation must have been one response to conditions where family life was skewed by overcrowding and economic hardship.[125] In explaining their membership of gangs some of Dube's informants claimed:

> We are required to pay for the Poll tax, lodging and boarding, and if we cannot find employment quick enough, we get arrested and lodged in jail...when we come out we have to look sharp and try to do something to make a living. The wages as a rule are low and we cannot make ends meet and the next thing we are compelled to steal, gamble, or gebenga...Most of these organisations have funds and are able to assist their fellowmen when they are in trouble.[126]

Gqovala Dhlamini, the leader of the Point amalaita gang in 1917, testified to the ways in which the composition and structure of the gangs were subject to continual change. Speaking as a "respectable" employee of ten years standing in 1929, he claimed to know 'many of the older Lieta Leaders'. In a climate of intense rank-and-file militancy, however, there were 'many new ones' whom he did not know.[127] The formation of an amalaita gang by Chief Jono in the later twenties was probably a defensive reaction to increasing population pressure on the outskirts of Durban. If so, it soon assumed the predatory character apparently shared by an increasing number of gangs, and was responsible for 'terrorising' the shack population of the district.[128]

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in 1918 while both Ngcobo and Zondi first took jobs as domestic workers in the early thirties.

[122] The tax burden on young, unmarried African males increased with the passing of the Native Taxation and Development Act (1925).

[123] For rigged gambling operations in Durban in the twenties see Interview with Kumalo and Tshabalala.

[124] *The Natal Missionary Conference, Annual Report*, (Lovedale, 1929) pp. 15-17.

[125] By 1930 most African families must have been sturggling to make ends meet meet. For family budgets see U.W., CPSA, NEC, AD 1438, A note on some Native Budgets, Durban Joint Council, 1928.

[126] *Missionary Conference Report*, p. 16.

[127] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 2, Native Unrest in Durban - Affidavits and Statements, No.23, G. Dhlamini, 12 Nov. 1929.

[128] NA, SNA, 444, 3053/09, J. Dube to CNC, 7 Dec. 1927. Part of Sydenham fell under Chief Jono's area of jurisdiction. Significantly, he was

The processes of class-formation which threw urban gangs into being also served to mould emerging urban underclass identities and styles. The *abaqhafi*, for example, signalled their self-conscious urbanism through their dress - wide open shirts, coloured scarves and Oxford bags tied below the knee.[129] Reuben Caluza, who wove the *abaqhafi* into the lyrics of his songs, described them as 'modern men...who misbehave and no longer return home'.[130] Looking in from the polite edges of the urban social order, members of Durban's embattled African intelligentisia characterised the 'heterogeneous mixture of detribalised Natives' as a 'problem within a problem'.[131] Their unease was focused not simply on the rituals and symbols associated with the 'dangerous classes', but on the alternative values denoted by such patterns of behaviour. It was precisely the autonomy of the beer brewer, the restlessness of the *abaqhafi* and the rebellion of the amalaita which carried with them the potential for other kinds of collective mobilisation.

Indeed, in 1929 a Natal Native Congress meeting attended by 'several chiefs and respectable Natives' was interrupted by a stick-wielding amalaita gang which forced John Dube to make a less than respectable departure out of one of the windows they had smashed. The reason for the attack was apparently related to *Ilanga's* criticism of 'all night dances' and was organised by 'certain leaders and agents'. In short, by the 'riff raff of the Union' - ICU activists.[132] Then, a few months later, during the height of the beer boycott, black police informants reported that 'all the Lietas today are in league with the ICU'.[133]

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which amalaita gangs in Durban were incorporated into Union organisation during the turbulent 1929-30 period. Nor is it clear which gangs might have been drawn into the Union. Yet, embedded in the local context are numerous clues which suggest that this mobilisation could have been fairly extensive. As rural refugees, as artisans whose skills had been devalued and as victims of a racially-oppressive society the lower middle class leadership of Durban's ICU was well-placed to identify with the daily struggles of the town's predominantly migrant workforce. Posterity has cast A.W.G. Champion, the Secretary of the Natal ICU, in a variety of moulds: from "city boss" to upwardly mobile (and corrupt) urban entrepeneur. Yet his abilities as a cultural broker who was sensitive to the experiences and mental worlds of his constituency, have been largely ignored.[134]

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to provide a crucial link between ICU supporters in this area and Union officials in Durban in 1929.

[129] A. Vilakazi refers to the *abaqhafi* as the tsotsis of the twenties and thirties. In fact it would appear that the *abaqhafi* represented a self-conscious urban-based innovation on amalaita traditionalism. See *Zulu Transformations* (Pietermaritzburg, 1965), pp. 76-7. According to informants *abaqhafi* means "drinkers" or more evocatively, "drinkers of spirits" (white man's liquor). See Interview with Zondi.

[130] Lovedale Sol-fa Leaflets, 7C, *U Bhungca (ama Oxford Bags)*.

[131] *Ilanga lase Natal*, 5 April 1929.

[132] *Ilanga lase Natal*, 5 April 1929.

[133] CAD, JUS, K22, Box 2, Affidavits and Statements, No. 23, G. Dhlamini, 12 Nov. 1929. Also see No. 27, C. Nxaba, 12 Nov. 1929 and No. 34, T. Myeza, 13 Nov. 1929.

[134] I have attempted to draw this out in my 'Message of the Warriors'.

The success of the Union's populism hinged, at least in the short term, on its ability to create and provide for the expression of a common sense of identity amongst workers. The fiery political message of Union leaders' public speeches was reworked within the confines of the dancehall. Cultural idioms ranging from ragtime, brass bands and mission choirs to *isicatamiya* and *ngoma* served to both express and disguise emerging class distinctions within Durban's African population. Thus, the self-conscious mobilisation of traditional idioms by young male domestic workers through *ngoma* dance could underscore the populist message of the Union. It is also likely that an *ngoma* song performed by 'houseboys', some of whose words ran: 'Who has taken our country from us ? Come Out ! Let us Fight !', would have found a deep resonance well beyond their own ranks.[135] Significantly, too, it was at C.D. Tusi's dancehall that Champion held secret meetings with amalaita leaders, possibly to organise beerhall pickets.

At times the Union, at least in its public aspect, took on an appearance more in character with a popular militia than an organised trade union. Most Union meetings were stamped with the presence of stick-wielding groups singing regimental anthems (*amhubo lamabutho*) and also militias such as the ICU Mob Crowd and Women's Auxiliary, who 'dressed in uniform and carried sticks in military positions'. In a town where Union meetings could be postponed because of the inability of domestic workers to attend meetings, it is probable that repertoires associated with youth gangs were absorbed into popular culture.

There might have also been contingent reasons for the infusion of more lumpen forms of criminal sub-culture into the Union. In August 1929 six prominent officials of the Union were arrested and sentenced to several months imprisonment for addressing a prohibited meeting. It may have been coincidental, but three months later rumours of an intended gaol mutiny broke out. Perhaps with the memory of a Ninevite combination in 1927 still fresh in their minds,[136] local police took the rumour seriously. Moreover, Union leaders had claimed that if imprisoned, they would 'commence a secret propaganda school' in gaol with the 'object of causing a mutiny'.[137] Perhaps there was some reason other than personal whim which encouraged Champion to glory in the name 'King of the Criminals' at the end of 1929.[138]

At the time of Champion's deportation from Natal by the Minister of Justice in October 1930 amalaita support for the ICU was invoked at mass meetings. Hamilton Msomi, for example, violently pronounced that: 'Champion was the leader of the Amlieta gangs in Durban and District [and] that in consequence of [his] removal these gangs [will] buy up all knives from the stores in Durban and use them freely'.[139] In the same breath Msomi announced that the ICU was 'firmly rooted in all the kitch-

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[135] See M. Perham, *African Apprenticeship* (New York, 1974), pp. 196-9.

[136] *Annual Report of the Director of Prisons for 1927*, UG. 42-28 quoted in C. van Onselen, '"The Regiment of the Hills": South Africa's Lumpenproletarian Army 1890-1920', *Past and Present*, No. 80, 1978.

[137] NA, DMR, 1/9/2/1, R.H. Arnold to District Commandant, SAP, 30 Oct. 1929.

[138] CAD, JUS, 922, 1/18/26, Part 24, Det. Hobbs to Dist. Commandant, SAP 25 November 1929.

[139] CAD, JUS, 923, 1/18/26, Part 28, Det. R.H. Arnold to Officer in Charge, CID, 6 Oct. 1930. Also see Statement of Det. Andrews, Oct. 1930.

ens'. The extent of amalaita involvement in ICU activities which fragmentary evidence suggests, needs to be tempered with a broader understanding of rank-and-file militancy. One cannot help noticing, however, one recurrent motif in the speeches of activists during late 1930: the 'houseboy'. For example, Johannes Nkosi, the ex-'houseboy' who became secretary of the CPSA in Durban, called on domestic workers ('slaves to women in kitchens') to: 'carry your puddings to us on Dingaan's Day...they do not belong to your missus, they belong to you who cooked it'.[140]

Of course there were sound political reasons for appeals directed at domestic workers. Durban's estimated 16 000 'houseboys' were still earning punishingly low wages of between £1 and £3.10 a month. Moreover, many very young newly-proletarianised workers entering Durban during the early stages of the depression must have been forced into the ranks of the unemployed.[141] One response to this situation was the formation of the Bantu Domestic Servants Association in 1930. Another was the establishment of organisation such as the Pathfinders, Wayfarers and Bantu Boys' League by members of Durban's African elite, as alternatives to 'criminal "clubs"'.

If anything amalaita gang activity, spurred on by depression, appears to have increased in the early thirties.[142] By the later thirties "moral panics" over urban African delinquents reached something of a peak. On the Rand this deepening anxiety was associated with massive proletarianisation, industrialisation and the incipient disintegration of the urban African family.[143] In cultural terms these transformations were symbolised by the emergence of the urban youth gangster - the tsotsi. In Durban, too, existing patterns of youth culture appear to have been ruptured. Between 1935 and 1940 the service sector of the local labour market was radically transformed.[144] As increasing numbers of African females entered domestic work thousands of young African males were forced into industry or unemployment. It was during this period that the *amacowboys* appeared on Durban's streets. As Fanyana Zondi recalls, it was the violence of the fist-fighting, and sjambok- and knife-wielding *amacowboys* which brought about the demise of the amalaitas.[145] It is unlikely that this transformation of youth culture was as dramatic as Zondi suggests. Yet clearly in some ways, the cultural repertoires of migrant youth were giving way to a world increasingly constituted around the four-inch blade of a clasp knife.

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[140] CAD, JUS, 924, 1/18/26, Part 29, Det. Hobbs to Officer in Charge, CID, 13 Dec. 1930.

[141] In the early thirties the number of youths entering domestic employment increased dramatically. Presumably a proportionate number were not able to find jobs. See Smith, *Labour Resources*, p. 60. For worsening conditions experienced by domestic workers in particular and workers in general, see U.W., CPSA, NEC, Minutes of Evidence, Durban, esp. pp. 6302-442; and pp. 6516-26.

[142] U.W., CPSA, NEC, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 6325-6328; and Box 12, Memo on Child Service.

[143] See Bonner, 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness'; C. Glaser, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League: Youth Organisation on the Rand in the 1940s and 1950s, unpublished paper, 1987; and more generally, Hellmann, *Urban Bantu Youth*.

[144] See Smith, *Labour Resources*, p. 60. Between 1935 and 1940 the proportion of Africans entering domestic service dropped from 28% to 19%.

[145] Interview with Zondi.