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**A Tale of Two Townships:  
Race, Class and the Changing Contours of  
Collective Action in the Cape Town Townships  
of Guguletu and Bonteheuwel, 1976 - 2006**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the PhD**

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## **Declaration**

The author has been engaged in a Masters by research and PhD by research programme of full-time study in the Centre of African Studies under the supervision of Prof. Paul Nugent and Dr. Sarah Dorman from 2004-2011 at the University of Edinburgh.

All the work herein, unless otherwise specifically stated, is the original work of the author.

Luke Staniland.



# Abstract

This thesis examines the emergence and evolution of 'progressive activism and organisation' between 1976 and 2006 in the African township of Guguletu and the coloured township of Bonteheuwel within the City of Cape Town. In doing so it compares both how activism has changed over time (including as a result of democratisation) and how it differed between and within these two communities.

Whilst at heart an empirical study of activism it seeks to move beyond the specificities of the cases studied to also draw broader conclusions about the nature and causes of collective action and organisation. Drawing on both social movement and class theory it aims to shed some light on the fundamental question of the relationship between structure and agency - why do people act and what defines the form of action they take?

It combines a quantitative study of the changing relationship between race, class and state policy with qualitative studies of activism in Guguletu and Bonteheuwel. These two studies cover in detail: the development and unfolding of the riots of 1976; the great boycott season of 1979/80 which saw large numbers of Africans and coloureds across Cape Town drawn into school, bus and consumer boycotts; the development of activism between 1980 and 1985, including the impact of the United Democratic Front; the township unrest of 1985-7; the transition period between 1988 and 1994; and post-apartheid activism in the two communities.

It draws on theories of class which recognise the importance of peoples' positions within the state's distributional networks (citizenship), experiences and expectations of social mobility and the impact of historical experience of class formation on expectation (moral economy). In doing this it shows how differences in race, education, age and labour market position all interacted to pattern activism in the case studies. Struggles in Cape Town throughout the period 1976-2006 were not dualistic conflict between classes, races or between the oppressed and forces of

global capital, nor were they mechanistic responses to the opening and closing of political space. They were complex coalitions of competing and collaborating class forces which were defined by the underlying nature of the city's political economy and which emerged in interaction with changing opportunities for action.

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In South Africa many people helped make this thesis possible; indeed without their generosity and assistance there would have been little to write about.

I would like, therefore, to thank the people who helped me with my archival research. These include the staff at the University of Cape Town's Manuscripts and Archives Centre, the University of the Western Cape's Mayibuye Archive, the South African History Archive at the University of Witwatersrand and the Cape Town branch of the South African National Archive. Without their assistance, knowledge and photocopiers this thesis would not have been possible. Special thanks must also go to the member of staff at Cape Town High Court who allowed me to roam the basement, uncovering records of political trials amidst mountains of old case files.

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and contact, and above all invaluable support challenge and encouragement. Their assistance was invaluable and much appreciated.

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## **Glossary of Abbreviations Used**

ANC	African National Congress
ANCWL	African National Congress Women's League
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
BAAB	Bantu Affairs Administration Board
BC	Black Consciousness
BCA	Bonteheuwel Civic Association
BISCO	Bonteheuwel Interschool Congress
BMW	Bonteheuwel Military Wing
BYM	Bonteheuwel Youth Movement
CAHAC	Cape Area Housing Action Committee
CAYCO	Cape Youth Congress
CLPP	Coloured Labour Preference Policy
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DBAC	Disorderly Bills Action Committee

DEC	Department of Coloured Education
DET	Department of Education and Training
FCWU	Food and Canning Workers Union
GAA	Group Areas Act
GEAR	Growth Employment and Redistribution strategy
Joint SRCs	Joint Student Representative Council
LAGUNYA	Langa, Guguletu and Nyanga
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
NECC	National Education Crisis Committee
NP	National Party
NSM	New Social Movement
PAC	Pan African Congress
PTSA	Parent Teacher Student Association
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACOS	South African Council of Sport
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SANCO	South African National Civic Association

SASM	South African Student Movement
SAYCO	South African Youth Congress
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SRC	Student Representative Council
TOSCO	Township Student Congress
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UDM	United Democratic Movement
UWO	United Women's Organisation
UWC	University of Western Cape
UWCO	United Women's Congress
WCCA	Western Cape Civic Association
WECSCO	Western Cape Student Congress
WECUSA	Western Cape United Squatter Association
WFO	Women's Front Organisation



## A Note on Terminology

The apartheid system of rule that predominated in South Africa from 1948 until 1994 was predicated upon the division of the population into racially defined groups. Each of these groups – whites, Africans, Indians and coloureds<sup>1</sup> - was then incorporated within the apartheid political economy in a differential way. Whilst this will be discussed in greater detail later, it is important to note that apartheid provided for, as far as possible, the complete social and residential separation of racial groups away from the workplace. An individual's racial group also played a central role in distinguishing their life chances. Laws restricted the best employment opportunities for whites, whilst coloureds and Indians were privileged relative to Africans.

Whilst many in the progressive political movements sought to reject the artificiality of apartheid classifications, a process which is well exemplified in the adoption by Black Consciousness activists in the 1970s of the term black to describe all non-white South Africans, be they African, coloured or Indian, this did not prevent racial classification playing a significant role in individuals' lives. Being white under apartheid was a very different experience to being coloured, which in turn was different to being African. Outside of the progressive movements many people also internalised apartheid classifications as, for example, those defined as coloured came to see themselves as having a shared coloured identity.<sup>2</sup>









In the post-apartheid period racial group still plays a significant role as a predictor of economic status. Similarly, the experience of the 'new' South Africa and a feeling of African domination of the ANC amongst the minority racial groups has led not to

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<sup>1</sup> 'Coloured' was the term used to refer to all those South Africans of mixed heritage who were considered neither white, Indian, nor African.

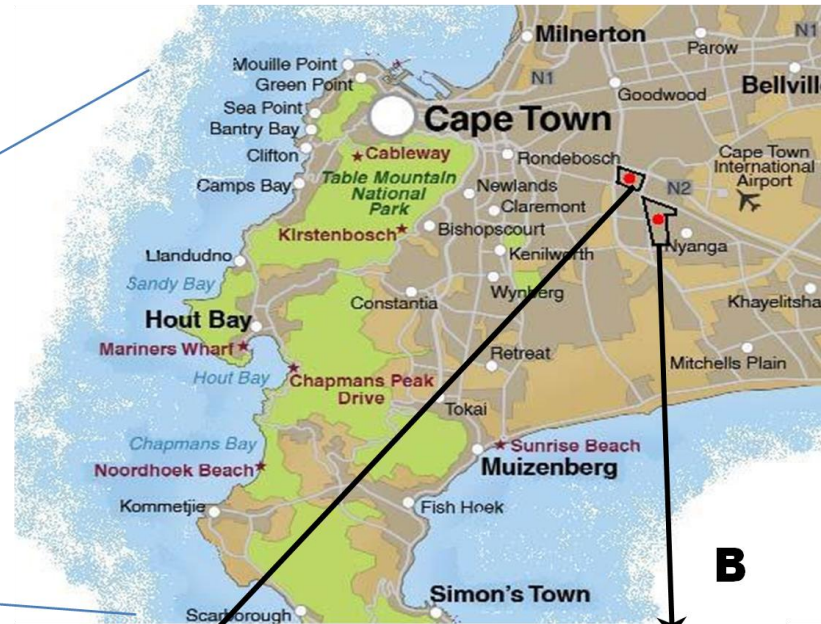
<sup>2</sup> Jensen, S, Claiming Community – Negotiating Crime: State Formation, Neighbourhood and Gangs in a Capetonian Township, PhD Thesis, (Roskilde, 2001)

a decline in racial identity, but in some cases to its amplification.<sup>3</sup> Indeed these classifications are also commonly employed by members of South African society to describe themselves and others. This does not mean that such identities subsume all others; however they are sufficiently salient to still have descriptive value. It is for this reason, not the unquestioning acceptance of apartheid conceptualisations of racial difference, that this thesis uses these terms.

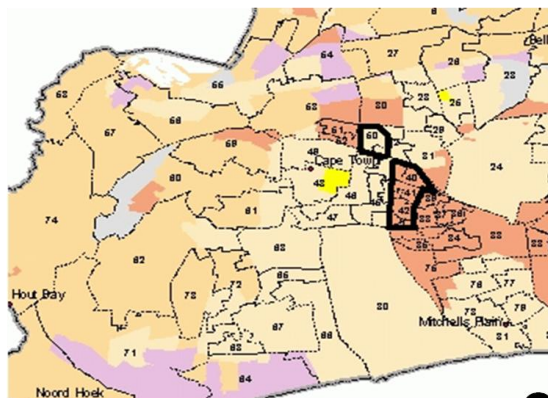
Map 1 (Overleaf). Location of areas studied. **A**, highlights the location of Cape Town within the Western Cape and South Africa. **B**, shows greater Cape Town. The two areas of study (Bonteheuwel and Guguletu) are outlined and shown with red dots. **C**, shows the 2005 Cape Town City ward boundaries, with the colours representing the majority racial population groups:  Coloured (Bonteheuwel),  Black African (Guguletu),  White,  Indian/Asian,  uninhabited,  Multiple races. **D** shows a detailed street map of Bonteheuwel and **E** shows a detailed street map of Guguletu (  formal housing,  informal housing)

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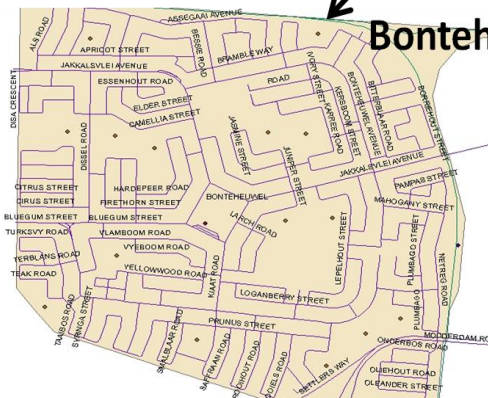
<sup>3</sup> Erasmus, Z & Pieterse, E, 'Conceptualising Coloured Identities in the Western Cape Province of South Africa', in (ed.) Palmberg, M, National Identity and Democracy in Africa, (Pretoria, 1999), p.171



Cape Town



XXI



Bonteheuwel



Guguletu





# Chapter One

## Introduction: Race, Class, and Collective Action in a South African City

### 1.1. Introduction

This thesis examines the emergence and evolution of 'progressive activism and organisation' between 1976 and 2006 in two townships (one coloured and one African) within the City of Cape Town. In doing so it compares both how activism has changed over time (including as a result of democratisation) and how it differed between and within these two communities.

Whilst at heart an empirical study of activism it seeks to move beyond the specificities of the cases studied to also draw broader conclusions about the nature and causes of collective action and organisation. Drawing on both social movement and class theory it aims to tackle the fundamental question of the relationship between structure and agency - why do people act and what defines the form of action they take? In addressing this question it accepts much of the current thinking within social movement theory that points to the importance of the broader political context and the resources available to individuals in shaping the emergence and success of social movements and protest. However, it also demonstrates that understanding how the broader context influences action provides only half the picture.

Activism in the two cases studies was not defined simply by the resources and opportunities available to activists and communities, as the same context was experienced and acted upon by individuals in very different ways. Instead, it argues that a full explanation of activism in the

two cases can only be understood by accepting that reactions to transforming context are mediated by their interactions with the broader political economy and people's positions therein. Black society within South Africa was not homogenous and a range of cleavages existed which fragmented people's responses to the broader political and economic context. The same opportunities were not experienced universally by people of different races, ages and levels of education. Similarly, experiences of urbanisation and access to state services also varied. These cleavages created different reactions because people had different material interests and were drawn into activism for different reasons. Political opportunity alone cannot, therefore, adequately explain collective action or social movements.

Consequently, this thesis argues that political opportunities can be seen to define the field within which collective actors mobilise, but the content and extent of that mobilisation can only be understood through studying the social differentiation within this field. Apartheid reproduced a complex range of social and economic relations and these relationships helped determine people's responses to similar circumstances. Drawing on theories of class which recognise the importance of peoples' positions within the state's distributional networks (citizenship), experiences and expectations of social mobility and the impact of historical experience of class formation on expectation (moral economy) it shows how differences in race, education, age and labour market position all interacted to pattern activism in the case studies. Struggles in Cape Town throughout the period 1976-2006 were not dualistic conflict between classes, races or between the oppressed and forces of global capital, nor were they mechanistic responses to the opening and closing of political space. They were complex coalitions of competing and collaborating class forces which were defined by the underlying nature of the city's political economy and which emerged in interaction with changing opportunities for action.

## 1.2. Thesis Rationale

When I started work on this thesis I did not have a clear theoretical position that I wanted to test. Instead I started from the position of wanting to understand how organisation and activism had developed and evolved in the City of Cape Town since the re-emergence of opposition to apartheid in 1976. However, I hoped to move beyond this empirical study to see what the South African experience could add to current understandings of collective action. There were therefore three main motivations behind the choice of study.

The first motivation for this study comes from the fact that despite being the home of South Africa's parliament and the country's third largest municipality Cape Town has attracted limited attention in studies of the anti-apartheid movement and protest during the 1970s and 1980s outside more general texts dealing with the period.<sup>1</sup> This thesis therefore addresses a gap in current empirical knowledge. A few published studies do deal with aspects of grassroots politics in the area, for example Josette Cole's work on the Crossroads squatter camp, Ineke van Kessel's work on the community newspaper *Grassroots*, Maseko's study of the Cape Area Housing Action Committee (CAHAC), and Bundy's study of student/youth protest during the 1985/6 unrest.<sup>2</sup> However, there is no study of anti-apartheid activism in the formal African townships. Crossroads was a squatter community, CAHAC only operated in the coloured communities, Bundy only studies the coloured student

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Seekings, J, *The UDF: A History of the UDF in South Africa 1983-1991*, (Oxford, 2000); Lodge, T & Nasson, B, *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, (London, 1991); Hirson, B, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash. The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Rebellion?*, (London, 1979)

<sup>2</sup> Cole, J, *Crossroads: The Politics of Reform and Repression, 1976-1986*, (Johannesburg, 1987); Van Kessel, I, *"Beyond our Wildest Dreams" : the United Democratic Front and the transformation of South Africa*, (Charlottesville & London, 2000); Bundy, C, "'Action, Comrades, Action!": The Politics of Youth-Student Resistance in the Western Cape, 1985', in (eds.) Wilmot, J & Simons, M, *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape*, (Cape Town, 1989), pp.206-217; Maseko, S, 'Civic Movement and Non-Violent Action: The Case of the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee', *African Affairs*, 96, 1997, pp.353-369

reaction and, whilst ostensibly a non-racial paper, *Grassroots* was overwhelming dominated by coloured activists and focused on the coloured communities. Furthermore, there is no existing study of the events of 1976 in the city in any community and there is also no study of student or youth politics outside of the two boycott periods of 1980 and 1985/6. Whilst the boycotts were important,<sup>3</sup> much organisational effort was expended outside these periods and, particularly after 1986, the Western Cape student movement was perhaps the strongest in the country.

The second motivation for this study comes from a broader questioning of existing methodologies employed to investigate activism in South Africa across the whole period of this study, which can be seen to revolve around three key concerns: the false division between apartheid and post-apartheid activism, the failure of an organisational approach to catch the multi-faceted and interlinked nature of activism and the failure of a 'big events' approach to allow for a full understanding of South African activism and provide a framework for comparisons over time.

Firstly, whilst post-apartheid activism in Cape Town has seen considerable attention, with a range of works focusing both upon the transformation of apartheid organisations in the city and the development of new social movements, most of these studies contain a similar weakness. Namely, whilst some are high quality<sup>4</sup> they rarely ground their analyses within a broader historical context and tend to treat apartheid and post-apartheid periods as analytically distinct.

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<sup>3</sup> Molteno, F, 1980: Students Struggle for their Schools, (Centre for African Studies, Cape Town, 1987); Bundy, C, 'Action Comrades, Action...'

<sup>4</sup> In this regard the work by Seekings and Oldfield stands out. See, for example, Oldfield, S, & Stokkes, K, Building Unity in Diversity: Social Movement Activism in the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, A case study for the UKZN project entitled: Globalisation, Marginalisation and New Social Movements in post-Apartheid South Africa (Durban, 2004); Seekings, J, 'No Home for Revolutionaries: The Structures and Activities of the South African National Civic Organisation in Metropolitan Cape Town, 1996-97', *Urban Forum*, 9/1, 1998, pp.1- 35; Cherry, J, Jones, K & Seekings, J, 'Democratisation and Politics in South African Townships' in, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24/4, December, 2000, pp.889-905

This is revealed most clearly in post-apartheid studies in which the new social movements protesting against service delivery are seen as simple reactions to the adoption by the ANC in 1996 of its 'neo-liberal' Growth Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) for economic growth, which included a focus upon cost recovery for services. These studies often make no reference to how new social movements relate to earlier traditions of mobilisation, despite considerable evidence of continuity with the apartheid period.<sup>5</sup>

The second concern emerged whilst I was researching for an MSc in 2003. In South Africa many studies of activism specifically focus upon individual organisations or forms of organisation such as the civics, the youth or the women's movement. However, whilst examining the civic movement in Cape Town it became clear that though I had limited my investigation solely to civic campaigns, activists did no such thing and their involvement was just one aspect of a far broader interaction with civil society structures. For example Daphne King – a leading figure in CAHAC – was during this period also involved in the United Women's Organisation, the Young Christian Workers, teaching literacy to domestic workers, study groups at UWC and a progressive Teachers Action Committee.<sup>6</sup> My study also showed, as have others, that whilst such organisations were able to mobilise large numbers at specific periods of time, at other times participation rapidly declined.<sup>7</sup> This led to a questioning of the extent to which an organisationally based approach to activism could accurately capture the complex dynamics at work. For example, as will be seen with regards to Bonteheuwel in chapter five, the collapse of one form of

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<sup>5</sup> For a well argued rejection of this approach in the case of the Treatment Action Campaign see: Mbali, M, 'TAC in the History of Patient-Driven AIDS Activism: The Case for Historicizing South Africa's New Social Movements', in (ed.) Gibson, N, Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-Apartheid South Africa, (Trenton & Asmara, 2006), pp.129-156. See also chapter seven.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Daphne King, May 2003, Cape Town

<sup>7</sup> Seekings, J, 'Civic Organisations in South African Townships', in (eds.) Moss, G, & Obery, I, South African Review 6, (Johannesburg, 1992)

organising (in this case the civic) accompanied a transformation in the nature of activism (in this case realignment towards a violent youth politics) and an examination of who remains active through this transition may have considerable significance. However, without combining an analysis of the civic, *alongside* an examination of youth politics, such trends are wont to be overlooked. Similar trends are also apparent post-apartheid. Some of the literature has specifically focused upon the novelty of the new social movements and their opposition to the ANC.<sup>8</sup> However the evidence presented here (chapter seven) shows how people involved in the new social movements are often also involved in the less confrontational civics and some are even ANC members. It is clear, therefore, that people use a range of channels through which to address their interests and the success of new social movements is often linked to the failures of other methods of representation.<sup>9</sup> An approach which simply focuses upon the new movements, neglecting other methods of organising, offers no means through which to elucidate these links.

The final methodological issue relates to the tendency amongst many studies to focus predominantly on 'big events.' An example already mentioned is the coverage of student politics in Cape Town, which is restricted to the 1980 and 1985/6 boycotts. Due to their prominence this is understandable; yet such a 'snap shot' can ignore the complex processes which provide the bedrock on which mobilisations are built. Focusing on high profile events also runs the danger of missing the fact that, despite academic interest in mobilisation and struggle, most South Africans remained inactive with regards to political struggles most of the time. Studies therefore show why in certain circumstances people became amenable to collective action but fail to discuss why in the face of

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<sup>8</sup> Desai, A, We are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post Apartheid South Africa, (New York, 2002)

<sup>9</sup> Staniland, L, "'They Know Me, I Will Not Get Any Job": Public Participation, Patronage, and the Sedation of Civil Society in a Capetonian Township', *Transformation*, 66/67, 2008 pp.34-60

considerable discrimination many South Africans remained quiescent.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the limited coverage of anti-apartheid activism in the Western Cape during the 1980s is in part a response to the fact that activism was less marked than in other areas and the area was peripheral to the central developments in the country's economy.<sup>11</sup> Yet explaining why people remain quiescent, or why they only become mobilised in certain circumstances, shines considerable light upon both collective action in general and specifically in South Africa.

The third and final motivation for this study was theoretical. As Seekings noted in a recent review of studies of apartheid activism, most studies of anti-apartheid activism have been overwhelmingly empirical and have not brought in broader social and political theory.<sup>12</sup> There is therefore scope for research which seeks to investigate experiences in South Africa within the context of the broader debates and theories surrounding collective action.

Overall, therefore, despite a range of studies looking at collective action in South Africa there remains considerable scope for a work which will plug gaps in current coverage whilst addressing some of the methodological and theoretical issues outlined above. It is this which this thesis aims to achieve. In order to succeed in its goals it will utilise a historical, comparative, geographical, case based methodology. Namely, it will study the evolution of civil society activism over the last thirty years in two townships – Guguletu and Bonteheuwel – in the Cape Town area of South Africa. In doing so it will not restrict its focus to either single

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<sup>10</sup> The exception to these rule is Jeremy Seekings' thesis: Seekings, J, Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation: South African Townships, 1978-1984, PhD Thesis, (University of Oxford, 1990)

<sup>11</sup> James, W G & Simons, M, 'Introduction', in (eds.) James, W G & Simons, M, The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape, (Cape Town & Johannesburg, 1989), p.vii

<sup>12</sup> Seekings, J, 'Whose Voices? Politics and Methodology in the Study of Political Organisation in the Final Phase of the "Struggle" in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 62/1, 2010, pp.7-28. As Seekings notes, there one study does exist which sets out an intention to apply theoretical understandings to the South African context. However, despite a detailed introduction sketching out much of the theory, the empirical data is presented primarily as narrative and it is not used to comment on broader theoretical debates. See: Bozzoli, B, Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid, (Edinburgh, 2004)



organisations or events but will instead aim to elucidate the changing forms of organisation and activism in which residents of these two communities, and the broader city, involved themselves across the full thirty years under investigation.

The choice of Cape Town and the cases selected, which include a formal African township, will fill current gaps in the empirical record of activism in South Africa. The focus on activism within a community and across time will provide data which can interrogate the distinctions between apartheid and post-apartheid periods that dominate many modern studies. Finally, this study will also seek to locate its explanations within the broader theoretical literature dealing with how and why people organise collectively and in doing use the Cape Town experience to interrogate current understandings of collective action and organisation.

### **1.3. Research Questions and Thesis Coverage**

Drawing on the above I developed some research questions to guide my study and defined the boundaries of this thesis. The main research question was:

- How and why did people involve themselves in progressive organisation and action at the local level in Cape Town and how did this change between 1976 and 2006?

Beneath this I defined some sub-questions which would provide me with the data through which to answer my main research question:

- What form did progressive organisation and activism take?
- Who was involved in progressive organisation and activism (what was the social base of organisation and activism)?
- Why were people involved in progressive organisation and activism?
- Why did progressive organisation and activism take the form it did?
- How and why did organisation change (or not) over time?

Having settled on my research questions I also had to define the limits of what I was studying, specifically what did and did not constitute 'progressive collective action and grassroots organisation'. I decided on a broad definition of the field of study to include those organisations, protest events, and activists that are locally based, inasmuch as they organise themselves within local communities and devote an amount of their time to addressing issues which arise at the level of the community; yet at the same time see the local issues that they address as being interlinked with, and only solvable by, redress through and/or transformation of, the broader political order. Such politics can therefore be seen as 'grassroots', as they focus at the local level, and are based within local constituencies. However, they are also 'progressive' in so far as they also attempt to impact upon the political process.<sup>13</sup>

Once the broad focus of my research had been decided upon I then needed to define my methodology. I decided to use a case study approach to answer these questions as this would allow me the context within which to

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<sup>13</sup> This definition broadly aligns itself with Charles Tilly's definition of a social movement as 'a sustained series of interactions between power-holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for change in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with demonstrations of support' see: Diani, M, & Bison, I, 'Organizations, Coalitions and Movements', *Theory and Society*, 33, 2004, p.281. However rather than focusing on social movements at a national level as Tilly and others have done, this study restricts itself to those organisations and activists that operate in a field of contestation that is geographically bounded at the level of a local residential township.

understand the shifting organisational forms and social base of activism. I settled on the coloured township of Bonteheuwel and the African township of Guguletu as the case studies I would examine. A more detailed discussion of the reasoning behind this approach is available in appendix A but the main reasons for selecting the cases are discussed below.

The selection of one African and one coloured community was deliberate and emerged from a desire to provide a context in which forms of activism could be related to the impact of the communities' different social, economic and political conditions under apartheid (see chapter two) and their different historical development. Within this framework Guguletu was chosen as the African case for three reasons. Firstly, whilst the nature of the community has changed over time Guguletu was, and has remained, primarily a township of formal housing units with some areas of hostel accommodation. As apartheid studies of Western Cape Africans have concentrated upon squatter politics, neglecting Africans with legal residence rights within the cities, it was felt that to include a formal housing area in the study would help address current imbalances in the literature.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, it represents a relatively standard formal African township in Cape Town, or what Yin would call a 'typical case.'<sup>15</sup> During apartheid Guguletu had a range of civil society organisations operating, some of which gained a degree of prominence, as well as experiencing a degree of protest and violent confrontation. However, the level of mobilisation was not exceptional or always sustained. In this way it represents many townships – including all the formal Capetonian townships – where activism did exist but was sporadic and only occasionally significant. Furthermore, its post-apartheid experience aligns broadly with trends throughout the country. After 1994 its civic organisations went into decline in a pattern that was replicated throughout South Africa.<sup>16</sup> It has also experienced some protest surrounding service delivery, but again it has not stood out as a hotbed of

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<sup>14</sup> I initially intended also to include a squatter community in the study but decided to drop this due to time constraints. For a full discussion of this see Appendix A.

<sup>15</sup> Yin, R, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, (London & Thousand Oaks, 1994), p.38

<sup>16</sup> Seekings, J, 'SANCO: Strategic Dilemmas in a New South Africa', *Transformation*, 34, 1997,

radicalism. It is therefore hoped that an examination of the dynamics at play in Guguletu will contribute to broader discussions of activism and protest both in the city and the country.

Whilst Guguletu was selected for its typicality, Bonteheuwel was selected in part for its uniqueness. Bonteheuwel was built in the 1960s to house coloureds both relocated under the apartheid government's group areas removals and those moved from the squatter areas which existed across the city. As an area of rental housing it was dominated predominantly by working class coloureds. Consequently it was in many ways typical of the new housing schemes built throughout apartheid for coloured people in the area to the South East of Cape Town known as the Cape Flats. However, despite having a similar socio-economic profile to many other townships Bonteheuwel gained a reputation during apartheid for political activism and militancy. Perhaps most well known in this respect were the activities of a group of radical youth known as the Bonteheuwel Military Wing (BMW) in the mid-1980s and the large number of people from the area who became involved in the ANC's military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK).<sup>17</sup> However, Bonteheuwel was also central in non-violent campaigns, including being the launching venue for CAHAC's 1981 maintenance campaign. It was this history of militancy which led to Bonteheuwel's selection and the reasons were twofold.

Firstly, many coloured areas of Cape Town experienced only limited organisation and involvement in political activism during the 1980s and sustained mobilisation amongst coloured communities was rare.<sup>18</sup> As a result it was necessary to select an area in which there was actually something to study and Bonteheuwel's profile made this possible. The second reason for selecting Bonteheuwel emerged

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<sup>17</sup> The activities of the BMW will be discussed later in this thesis but it is worth noting here that they received individual treatment in the deliberations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Also worth noting is the large number of people from Bonteheuwel involved in MK activities in the Western Cape. For example, two MK operatives from Bonteheuwel were killed in shootouts with the police in the late 1980s whilst another was killed attempting to detonate a limpet mine at the magistrates court in Athlone.

<sup>18</sup> Staniland, L, Struggling for Community: Civic Activism in the Coloured Townships of Greater Cape Town, 1980-86, (Edinburgh, 2005)

from the first. If organising was particularly successful in Bonteheuwel why was this the case and what light can this shed on the limited mobilisation elsewhere? A further aspect of Bonteheuwel's history also endeared itself to this study for whilst the area was noted for its militancy in the 1980s subsequently it was little different from any other coloured township. Just as coloured communities across the city rejected the ANC in 1994 so did the people of Bonteheuwel. Furthermore, its radicalism in the 1980s was transformed by a collapse in civil society structures post-1994. The collapse of progressive organising in an area once famed for its vibrant civil society activism allows, therefore, for a thorough examination of the post-apartheid dynamics which have affected civil society in coloured communities. Further details of the two townships are given below.

### **1.3.1. Setting the scene: Guguletu and Bonteheuwel**

Guguletu and Bonteheuwel lie adjacent to each other about 20 kilometres to the east of Cape Town city centre along the N2 motorway on the windswept Cape Flats. Separated by a railway line and the N2 these two townships have stood since the 1960s when the apartheid state started building residential housing for coloureds and Africans in the city to both reduce overcrowding in the existing residential areas and implement its plans for racial segregation (see map 1 p. xxi).

Bonteheuwel was the first coloured, state rental township, to house people being forcibly removed under the group areas act. People from the recently declared white areas such as Claremont and District 6 moved alongside people from the many coloured squatter communities that dotted the city at this time. The housing that greeted them when they arrived was simple, single storey matchbox housing with asbestos roofs, although the township was electrified and plumbed. From these simple homes workers commuted into Cape Town to work as domestic workers in the homes of wealthy whites and in the city's restaurants and hotels, as plumbers and construction workers in the city's building sites, and as factory workers in the light industry of Epping Industrial Estate that bordered the township to the North.

With only three roads in and out of the township Bonteheuwel was built around a central shopping area and had three secondary schools, Arcadia High, Modderdam High and Bonteheuwel High. In 1980 it had a population of around 45,000, of which nearly half was aged 18 or under, and an unemployment rate of around 6%.<sup>19</sup> As the population expanded duplex houses were built in the 1970s in the backyards of existing homes, although overcrowding and poverty was still rife. Interestingly, unlike other coloured townships where large numbers of flats were built Bonteheuwel remained a low rise township of individual houses.

During the late 1980s Bonteheuwel experienced the upgrading of its facilities as the state sought to tackle political militancy through state spending. Roads were tarred and facilities upgraded. This gradual upgrading continued into the 1990s as a multi-purpose centre was built with money from the Reconstruction and Development Programme and moving into the 2000s a police station was built. However, Bonteheuwel remains a poor community bursting at the seams. The backyards of many formal houses house people living in shacks made of corrugated iron and wood. Democratisation also brought with it an explosion of crime as, particularly in the late 1990s, gangsterism took a deep hold on the community and led to many deaths. Drug abuse and alcoholism are also commonplace and the coming of crystal meth to the Cape Flats was a particular concern whilst I was conducting my fieldwork.

Like Bonteheuwel, the African township of Guguletu is also located on the Cape Flats. Before the increasingly harsh implementation of coloured preference policies in the 1960s Cape Town's African population had been expanding and Guguletu was built, along with Nyanga, to house people who could not be accommodated within existing housing at Langa. Like Bonteheuwel most houses were single story matchboxes, although there was limited electrification and plumbing and the roads were dirt tracks. Guguletu also housed several company hostels, which were physically and administratively separated from the formal

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<sup>19</sup> Data from population census, 1980

township, and were the homes of migrant workers from the Eastern Cape. Guguletu also came to be bordered by squatter camps (most notably KTC and Crossroads) during the 1970s as the African population of the city was swelled by illegal immigration.

The complete segregation of Africans from white society and the operation of apartheid policies in the Western Cape meant that the African population of Cape Town was employed in predominantly low paid and unskilled work. Africans went from the townships to their place of work and back home at night. Recreational facilities were minimal, restricted to the municipal beer halls that helped subsidise the running of the townships, and illegal shebeens. Schooling provision was also limited. Whilst Bonteheuwel had three high schools for a single township there were only three high schools for all the Africans in Cape Town before the mid 1980s. These were Langa High and in Guguletu I.D. Mkhize and Fezeka High.

In 1980 Guguletu recorded a population in the census of around 75,000, of which 40% were 18 or younger, and unemployment was about 7%. However these figures need to be treated with caution as the presence of many Africans in the city illegally makes them difficult to confirm.

Guguletu saw little upgrading under apartheid, although some private housing was built in the township's northern edge during the late 1980s as the state introduced leasehold rights for Africans. Schooling also expanded to cope with the growing youth population. However, it was not until the 1990s that any large scale developments were launched in the township. Democratisation has seen considerable development in Guguletu. Most of the township roads have been tarred, a new shopping centre has been built, and street lighting installed. Large private houses have sprung up amongst the state built matchboxes and bars and restaurants have opened. However, like Bonteheuwel, Guguletu too overwhelmingly a poor community. Back yard shacks abound, as does crime, unemployment and poverty.

However, despite being poor and full of social problems neither Guguletu nor Bonteheuwel are sad places. Children play in the streets, go to school, cry and are loved. People drink and fight but they also dance and laugh. People buy new kitchens and decorate their homes. Indeed there is an edginess and immediatism to life in the Cape Flats that is a far cry from the electrified fences and franchise restaurants of the city's Victoria and Albert waterfront. Amongst the poverty I found a real welcome which will stay with me well beyond the completion of this thesis.

## **1.4. Theories of Collective Action**

Before moving to consider current interpretations of collective action and struggle in South Africa, the existing broad theoretical approaches to activism will be outlined. The study of collective action and social movement theory can be split into two schools of thought which place focus on either the dynamics that push people into activism, or the dynamics that pull people into activism. Firstly, there are theories that focus on how the broader political, resource and ideological context pulls people into activism by changing the costs and likely benefits of protest and organisation for individual participants. Secondly, there are a group of theories that focus upon how the broader social structure and social cleavages influence activism by creating the underlying interests and identities that push people into activism.

Whilst these strands are sometimes presented as theoretically distinct, they are not mutually exclusive. Theories surrounding how a group organises to pursue its interests, how it reacts to its political context and the resources it employs, presume the existence of collective interests; an understanding of the interests underlying mobilisations are therefore essential. Inversely, whilst group interests and social cleavages may exist aside from their articulation through collective action, any understanding of collective action must examine how such interests and



identities assume an active form and in doing so the broader constraints placed on action by the political system and the resources available to groups become crucial. As Oberschall argues, a full understanding of why people act collectively demands an understanding of the social change that sits beneath activism, the beliefs and values that motivate people to act, the resources available to enable people to act and opportunities within the broader political context that make action more or less appealing.<sup>20</sup>

### **1.4.1. Political Opportunities, Resources and Rationality**

In the study of social movements and political mobilisation a central area of attention has been the impact of the broader institutional and resource context on the emergence, form and success of social movements. Drawing upon rational choice theories what unites these interpretations is a presumption that because inequality is endemic in all societies, and because societies with similar economic structures have very different histories of mobilisation and activism, the underlying motivation driving people to protest cannot be located within the social structure alone, but must instead be a consequence of the costs and benefits of organisation.<sup>21</sup> Consequently they focus not so much upon why people mobilise (although they recognise that organisation and activism must build upon some form of social cleavage, cultural symbol or dense social network)<sup>22</sup>, but how they mobilise: i.e. the circumstances under which individuals coalesce into collective social actors and the reasons why some groups manage to mobilise, whilst others do not.<sup>23</sup> The posited rationality of social actors is taken as a given and it is therefore presumed that

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<sup>20</sup> Oberschall, A, Social Movements: Ideologies, Interest and Identities, (London, 1995), p.17. For an international, comparative, study of how political opportunities are mediated by the nature of inequality in different countries see: Schock, K, 'A Conjunctural Model of Political Conflict: The Impact of Political Opportunities on the Relationship between Economic Inequality and Violent Political Conflict', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 30/1, 1996, p.128

<sup>21</sup> Tilly, C, 'Contentious Choices', *Theory and Sociology*, 33, 2004, pp.473-481;

Tarrow, S, Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics, (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 2; Kitschelt., H P, 'Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies', in *British Journal of Political Science*, 16/1, 1996, pp.57-85

<sup>22</sup> Tarrow, S, Power in Movement..., (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 19

<sup>23</sup> Foweraker, J, Theorizing Social Movements, (London 1995) p.66

involvement in collective action will only occur when these rational actors conclude that they have more to gain than to lose by involving themselves in a social movement.<sup>24</sup>

However, whilst there is a general agreement upon the rationality of individuals, there are differing focuses regarding the factors which are seen as central to turning individuals into collective actors. Three sub-trends within this broader school of social movement theorising can therefore be identified. These can be classified as resource mobilisation, political opportunity structure and framing theories.

Starting from the presumption that most people have grievances which could lead them to participate in collective action, resource mobilisation theorists seek to identify the resources which social movements need and use in order to mobilise such individuals, the presumption being that if people have the resources to mobilise around a social problem they will do so.<sup>25</sup> A range of different resources have been identified. These include: the emergence of leaders with sufficient political experience to organise individuals around their collective grievances, provide a coherent vision to unite them, and effectively project those grievances outwards to both potential participants and those in power;<sup>26</sup> the need for the existence of 'solidarity networks', or links between different organisations and/or individuals as the means through which social movements are organised and spread;<sup>27</sup> and, on a more basic level, the possession of material resources such as money and transport. Other less obvious resources are also highlighted. For example, media coverage has been identified as particularly important as it is

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<sup>24</sup> Della Porta, D & Diani, M, Social Movements: an Introduction, (Oxford, 1998), p.8

<sup>25</sup> Scott, A, 'Political Culture and Social Movements' in (eds). Allen, J, Braham, P & Lewis, P, Political and Economic Forms of Modernity, (Cambridge, 1992), p.148

<sup>26</sup> Zirakzadeh, C E, Social Movements in Politics: a Comparative Study, (London, 1997) p.12

<sup>27</sup> Della Porta, D, & Diani, M, Social Movements...., p.8

through the dissemination of information that potential participants become aware of the fact that social movements with relevance to their situations exist.<sup>28</sup>

The second approach influenced by rational choice scholars can be classified under the broad heading of political opportunity structure theory. Unlike resource mobilisation theorists, political opportunity structure theorists focus upon factors external to the social movements and see their existence and form as intimately linked to the political and institutional environment in which they operate and the opportunities, or lack of opportunities, that this provides. As Tarrow argues:

If collective action is a form of politics, then as in conventional politics, there must be a set of constraints and opportunities that discourage this kind of behaviour and lead it in certain forms rather than others.<sup>29</sup>

A range of political opportunities have been defined as affecting activism, some of which apply only to democratic societies, others which can be universally applied. The 'openness' or 'closedness' of the polity is often seen as significant. If the political process is open and responsive to competing viewpoints then social movements are considered unlikely to emerge, as there is little need for collective action to access or influence the policy making process.<sup>30</sup> Whilst at the opposite extreme, unwillingness by the state and elite groups to tolerate social movements tends to lead to repression, which if effective closes the political system to influence and stifles social movement success. However, repression can also be seen to enable social movements if it is ineffective and seen as illegitimate, as it can reveal the vulnerability of the state to collective action and enhance feelings of injustice.<sup>31</sup> Another important element of political opportunity theory is the concept of cycles of protest, or 'opportunity spirals.' This focuses on the way in which protest often

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<sup>28</sup> Koopmans, R, 'Movements and Media: Selection Processes and Evolutionary Dynamics in the Public Sphere', *Theory and Society* 33, 2004, pp.367-391

<sup>29</sup> Tarrow, S, 'National Politics and Collective Action...', p.429

<sup>30</sup> Diani, M, & Eyerman, R, 'The Study of Collective Action: Introductory Remarks', in (eds.) Diani, M, & Eyerman, R, *Studying Collective Action*, (London, 1992), p.6; Eisinger, P, 'The Conditions of Protest Behaviour in American Cities', *The American Political Science Review*, 67/1, 1973. pp.11-28

<sup>31</sup> Goldstone, J, "More Social Movements or Fewer? Beyond Political Opportunity Structures to Relational Fields", *Theory and Society* 33, 2004, pp.346-7

builds as the first movements and protests to emerge demonstrate the possibility of activism, whilst simultaneously reducing the costs of activism by having gone first. This draws more people into protest and organisation, which further reduces the costs of action and increases the likelihood of success. In this way activism forces open increasing political space for itself.<sup>32</sup>

The final theory within this broad approach is framing theory. This argues that a crucial element of any successful social movement or incidence of collective action is the emergence of shared explanations of injustice which can unite people behind common action. Benford and Snow, in their discussion of the 'frames' that are used to mobilise people behind collective action, argue that all such action relies on the existence of shared understandings of a social problem alongside agreement on who is to blame. It also relies on a proposed solution to this problem alongside a set of strategies for putting in place this solution. They also argue that the effectiveness of the frame to draw people into action relies upon how empirically credible it is (i.e. how well it explains people's experiences) and how central the target of the claim is to people's lives.<sup>33</sup>

All these theories provide useful insight into collective action and, as will be seen, resonate with empirical studies of South African activism. Unfortunately, however, they also have their limitations. Firstly, these theories have struggled to provide generalisable explanations for the growth of collective action and social movements. Whilst explanations based on class and social structure struggle to explain different forms of mobilisation in societies with similar class structures, rational choice theories struggle to explain why people act differently across or within countries with similar political structures or similar access to resources. As Meyer notes, 'political opportunities for organising can change dramatically – and differentially – for groups within the same movement, as authorities respond to the

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<sup>32</sup> McAdam, D, Tarrow, S & Tilly, C, Dynamics of Contention, (Cambridge, 2001), p.243

<sup>33</sup> Benford, I, & Snow, D, 'Framing processes and social movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 2000, pp. 611–39

range of groups that comprise a social movement.<sup>34</sup> Because no single political opportunity or resource can be seen to impact universally on collective action there has been a tendency amongst these theorists to simply add to the factors which are considered political opportunities.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, as framing theorists themselves have noted, effective frames may be crucial to the growth of activism but they cannot operate unless they resonate with people's day-to-day experiences, and these experiences are often linked to the underlying social structure.

Overall, the problems of identifying unifying themes which impact equally on activism has led to some of the central theorists in the field querying the search for a singular explanatory framework and instead focusing individually upon the 'smaller-scale causal mechanisms' (such as the presence of elite support, media sympathy, financial resources and so on) which contribute to contentious political action and which vary in presence and form across both space and time.<sup>36</sup> Whilst this is undoubtedly a sensible approach to the clear weaknesses that have emerged from their attempts to construct overarching theories, it is a far cry from a broad theoretical framework which could be applied universally to understand activism. The value of these theories, therefore, exists less in their ability to provide an all encompassing explanation for collective action and mobilisation, and more in their explanations of specific processes and their importance.

#### **1.4.2. Social Structure and Action**

The second significant approach to the study of collective action considers how the identities and interests around which people mobilise relate to the underlying structure of society and the impact of the transformation of that structure. The most significant of these has been the study of the relationship between economic position or 'class' and social action. Whilst class is commonly perceived as a

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<sup>34</sup> Meyer, D, S, 'Protest and Political Opportunities', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30, 2004, pp.125-45, p.141

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.135

<sup>36</sup> McAdam, D, Tarrow, S & Tilly, C, *Dynamics of Contention...*, p.74

division based upon occupation or status, within the Marxist and Weberian traditions that have dominated much social theory it is in fact seen as more than a simple hierarchy. Instead, many social scientists argue that social classes represent demarcated social groups based around shared social relations. For Marxists, class is defined around an individual's relations at the point of production – i.e. whether they own the means of production or produce surplus value which is expropriated by capitalists. For Weberians the precise divisions are less clear. However class is generally defined by shared life chances in terms of economic interests and the ability of individuals to possess goods and opportunities for income within the labour market. Class, therefore, reflects one's position in the labour market and all components making up this position including not only property but also skills and education.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst defining groups based on economic relations has descriptive value, class analysis moves beyond defining social classes to theorising how they relate to social action. At the heart of any class analysis, therefore, is the belief that in some way the social relations that define and demarcate classes also influence people's behaviour. This is most apparent in orthodox Marxism, which sees human consciousness as reflecting the material conditions of society and therefore seeks to both read off and predict social action based on individuals' relationships to production. Weberian analyses, although denying the primacy of class as a causative factor in social behaviour, also still aim to see how it relates to social action.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Compton, R, S, Class and Stratification: An Introduction to Current Debates, (Cambridge, 1998), pp.26-8 & 32

<sup>38</sup> For a Marxist approach to the class structure see: Wright, E, O, Class, Crisis and the State, (London, 1978); and for the evolution of this approach in response to criticisms, Wright, E O, Class Counts, (Cambridge, 2000). For a Weberian interpretation see: Erikson, R, & Goldthorpe, J H, The constant flux : a study of class mobility in industrial societies, (Oxford, 1993)

## 1.5. Organisation and Activism in South Africa and Cape Town: Current Understandings

A wide range of studies have been undertaken on South African activism, providing different explanations for the emergence, trajectories and forms of activism that have developed. However, whilst defuse they can be relatively easily divided into two groups: explanations of anti-apartheid activism and explanations of the emergence of post-apartheid social movements. Furthermore, whilst rarely explicitly stated, many of these explanations do relate to the broader debates around activism sketched above and can be considered in this light.

### 1.5.1. Activism and Apartheid

Under apartheid much of the opposition to apartheid was located within civil society. Unsurprisingly, therefore, research has been focused upon civil society organisations and the mobilisation they accompanied. Studies have been produced focusing specifically upon civil society organisations at the local level, such as the women's organisations, youth movements, student's associations and civic associations under apartheid.<sup>39</sup> Specific examples of apartheid era mobilisation and conflict have been examined<sup>40</sup> and a range of case studies of individual movements

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<sup>39</sup> A lot of work has been done in this field and an authoritative list would take considerable space. Furthermore, specific works will be discussed in individual chapters. However see for an introduction see: Seekings, J, Heroes or Villains? Youth Politics in the 1980s, (Johannesburg, 1993); Glaser, C, Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto 1935-76, (Oxford, 2000); Van Kessel, I, 'Beyond our wildest dreams...'; Seekings, J, "Civic Organisations ...

<sup>40</sup> Seekings, J, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation ...'; Hirson, B, Year of Fire, Year of Ash...;

produced.<sup>41</sup> Focus has also been brought to bear upon the national organisational structures, particularly the UDF.<sup>42</sup>

Taken together these studies provide several different answers to the fundamental research questions guiding this thesis. On the question of who became involved in activism the questions unsurprisingly vary over time and space, with ongoing debates around the extent to which the anti-apartheid struggle was able to spread from particularistic local struggles to create mass support. For example, during the 1976 uprising debates exist over the extent to which the revolt moved beyond school pupils to garner the support of the wider adult community.<sup>43</sup> Moving into the 1980s the picture becomes more complex as the terrain of struggle widened to include trade unions in the work place<sup>44</sup>, students<sup>45</sup>, out of school youth on the streets<sup>46</sup> and even elderly residents.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the intensity of struggle has also been shown to have varied geographically. In 1976 rioting started in Soweto before spreading elsewhere; in 1980 boycotts broke out first in Cape Town; in 1984 unrest started in the Vaal Triangle before spreading to the Eastern Cape and it was not until late 1985 that Cape Town became engulfed. Similarly, the strength of organisation varied. In the early 1980s there was considerable organisation in the coloured communities of Cape Town, however by the time the United Democratic Front had launched in 1983 this has been seriously weakened<sup>48</sup> and from 1984

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<sup>41</sup> For just one example, focusing on three different progressive organisations, see: Van Kessel, I, 'Beyond our wildest dreams ...

<sup>42</sup> Houston, G F, The National Liberation Struggle in South Africa: A Case Study of the United Democratic Front, (Aldershot,,1999); Seekings, J, The UDF: A History of ...

<sup>43</sup> Hirson, B, Year of Fire, Year of Ash..., p.287

<sup>44</sup> Adler, G & Webster, E, Trade unions and democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997, (Basingstoke 2000)

<sup>45</sup> Bundy, C, "'Action, Comrades, Action!' ....'

<sup>46</sup> Carter, C, 'Community and Conflict: The Alexandra Rebellion of 1986', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18/1, 1991, pp.115-142

<sup>47</sup> Seekings, J, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation ...'

<sup>48</sup> Staniland, L, Community Struggles or Struggling for Community: Civic Activism in the Coloured Townships of Greater Cape Town, 2980-1986, *University of Edinburgh Occasional Paper*, (Edinburgh, 2004)



onwards the focus of activism shifted from to the African Townships where struggles over rents and within the schools saw the emergence of sustained revolt.<sup>49</sup>

Moving from the 'who' to the 'why' of activism it is interesting that the complex pattern of activism over time and space has not always been reflected within interpretations of this period. Broadly speaking these interpretations can be drawn into four broad categories. The first sees activism as a simplistic political struggle for political rights. The second and third approaches are more closely aligned to theories that seek to uncover the underlying structural causes of action, although they differ in their focus with one defining activism in dichotomous terms as either a simple class or race struggle and the other locating activism in a more complex structural crisis that led to diffuse, yet overlapping grievances, which broadly coalesced into a challenge to the apartheid state. Finally, the fourth approach sees activism as a result of the changing opportunities for action and is most closely aligned to political opportunity and resource mobilisation theories.

The first broad approach sees activism at this time as a simplistic response to stark political inequality; discrimination, by denying blacks equal political rights was so unjust that it necessarily drew people into conflict. For example, Hopkins and Grange's study of the 1976 unrest dismisses the idea that student protesters were driven by opposition to apartheid education policy and instead locate their actions in an explicitly political desire for liberation.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, writing in the mid-1980s Brewer argued that because Africans had reached the stage where they were not willing to trade material gain for a continued denial of political rights, the anti-

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<sup>49</sup> Seekings, J, "'Trailing Behind the Masses': The United Democratic Front and Township Politics in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal Region, 1983-4', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18/1, 1992, pp.93-114

<sup>50</sup> Hopkins, P, & Grange, H, The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show: The Inside Story of the 1976 Uprising, (Cape Town, Zebra, 2001), p.82

apartheid struggle was clearly political and was not a response to material hardship.<sup>51</sup>

The second approach, which locates activism primarily in dualistic race or class divisions, shares with more politicised interpretations the view that apartheid necessarily created protest because of the depth of its injustice, however the material consequences of inequality are given more weight. Hirson views race as the main division in South African society and sees activism originating with this simple cleavage.<sup>52</sup> Swilling argues that although the UDF played a major role in strengthening opposition to the apartheid state by providing a unified political centre the driving force of resistance was still located within struggles from below which came from residents' 'abysmal urban living conditions'. These unspecified poor conditions then led to demands for political change as people realised that only with political change could their basic economic needs be met.<sup>53</sup> Martin Murray puts forward a similar interpretation for the whole period under consideration here. He argues that 1976 to the mid-1980s represented an 'unbroken chain of events' which 'reinforced the growing polarization along race and class lines.'<sup>54</sup> By 1984 he sees this as having created protest that had 'deeper roots in working-class dissatisfaction [than 1976/80]' and he argues that the civics that had grown up during the early 1980s were able to translate the grievances of residents 'into a broad political assault on all oppression and injustice in South Africa.'<sup>55</sup> This protest was, at heart, rooted in an organic crisis of capitalism that heightened popular struggle that was 'anti-capitalist.'<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Schlemmer cited in Brewer, J D, After Soweto: An Unfinished Journey, (Oxford, 1986), pp,46-7; for a similar view of the civic movement see: Mayekiso, M, Township Politics: Civic Struggles for a New South Africa, (New York, 1996), p.90

<sup>52</sup> Hirson, B, Year of Fire, Year of Ash..., p.6

<sup>53</sup> Swilling, M, 'The United Democratic Front and Township Revolt', in (eds.) Cobbett, W & Cohen, R, Popular Struggles in South Africa, (London, 1988), p.90

<sup>54</sup> Murray, M, South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny: The Upsurge of Popular Protest, (London, 1987) p.436

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.256

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17

Whilst providing attractively simple explanations of anti-apartheid activism, these arguments suffer from considerable weaknesses as they struggle to explain the heterogeneity of struggle in action. If the struggle was an inevitable result of political injustice then all people should be protesting all of the time. Similarly, if this was a simplistic class or race struggle rooted in an organic crisis of apartheid then why did responses vary over time and space? As van Kessel argues:

The idiom of *struggle*, in which all the *oppressed* are lumped together into the *underclass* or the *fighting masses*, paints an exaggerated picture of the homogeneity of black South Africa and the revolutionary fervour of black South Africans. It ignores the cleavages- economic, social, cultural, ethnic, generational and gender- within black Society.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, these interpretations also suffer from the fact that detailed case studies have often shown that protest was neither political nor necessarily based in overtly class or raced based identities. Seekings' study of the Vaal, for example, has show that protest against the local state was defensive rather than revolutionary, both in the grievances that underlay it and the political procedures that participants used.<sup>58</sup>

The final two approaches to apartheid activism seek to tackle this diversity in their explanations. Whilst still focusing in part on national change, several authors have developed interpretations which highlight the fact that underlying nationwide challenge was the simultaneous development of local struggles that, whilst becoming both organisationally and ideologically drawn into a national movement, remained grounded in the local political economy and/or shifting political opportunities.

A range of studies have noted the heterogeneity of the anti-apartheid struggle and the very different social groups, forms of protest and actions that it consisted of. Ineke Van Kessel describes a community newspaper produced in Cape Town by young, educated, politicised activists.<sup>59</sup> Jeremy Seekings has undertaken

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<sup>57</sup> Van Kessel, I, 'Beyond our wildest dreams'...p.184

<sup>58</sup> Seekings, J. Quiescence and the..., p.37

<sup>59</sup> Van Kessel, I. Beyond our Wildest Dreams...

extensive studies on the civic organisations that emerged across the country in black townships and shown how many participants in civic struggles became involved, 'because of their pragmatic reformism, not their ideological radicalism.'<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Colin Bundy studied student/youth unrest in Cape Town in 1985/6 and found a group driven by a distinct 'generational consciousness,'<sup>61</sup> as did Van Kessel in her study of the youth in Sekukhuneland,<sup>62</sup> whilst in 1976 Hirson located amongst student activists a clear student identity and a rejection of interaction with uneducated youths.<sup>63</sup>

Drawing all these studies into a single narrative of protest is problematic as most of these studies have tended to draw out the specific conditions that lay behind individual protests. However, at their heart is a recognition that these protests were part of a larger crisis of apartheid, resulting from its inability to sustain economic growth amid recession and rapid urbanisation, but that this crisis was experienced differentially. For example the considerable student involvement in activism is often explained as a consequence of the intersection of the urban black youth population with economic crisis as an expanding school population was denied both quality education and, as the country entered economic crisis, employment after matriculation.<sup>64</sup>

Because these studies see diversity as the one of the central elements of anti-apartheid protest, albeit conditioned by a broader structural crisis, they tend to see the emergence of political struggle not as a simplistic class or race struggle, but as an (often fragile) coalition of interests. As van Kessel says with regards to the development of grassroots organisation in the 1980s:

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<sup>60</sup> Seekings, J, 'Civic Organisations in South African Townships', in (eds.) Moss, G & Obery, I, South African Review 6, (Johannesburg, 1992), p.233

<sup>61</sup> Bundy, C, "'Action, Comrades, Action!'...'

<sup>62</sup> Van Kessel, I. Beyond our Wildest Dreams..., p.108

<sup>63</sup> Hirson, B, Year of Fire, Year of Ash..., p.287

<sup>64</sup> Bundy, "'Action, Comrades, Action!'...'", p.209;

Webster, D, Repression and the state of emergency, in (eds.) Moss, G, and Obery, I, South African review 4, (Johannesburg, 1987), p.154

The formation of community organisations was predicated upon the assumption that township residents shared a commonality of interests... For a short period during the 1980s the lack of social differentiation within the townships and the communal experience of repression from outside produced the conditions in which community organisations were successfully formed and maintained. The experience of repression and disenfranchisement also meant that mobilisation was less likely to occur along the lines of social class. However, once these commonalities receded the viability of the community organisations also declined.<sup>65</sup>

However, whilst generally highly insightful, as a result of their focus on local dynamics and cases these studies tend not to move beyond explanations of particular incidences of protest or particular forms of organisation to theorise more about the more generalisable dynamics driving protest.

The final theme in studies of apartheid activism, whilst not rejecting the importance of underlying structural conflicts, focuses on the fact that activism did not simply emerge from these conflicts, but was also influenced by the broader political, and ideological context. Indeed, several of the studies which focus on local patterns of activism also highlight the importance of the political context in shaping the style, form and development of this activism. Whilst rarely explicitly citing political opportunity theory, these interpretations draw on its central themes to explain the presence, or absence, of activism.

Repression is often seen to have played a major role in the emergence, or absence, of activism. A common explanation of the lack of protest before 1976 is that repression was so severe that it had effectively closed down all available space for organising and activism. Therefore whilst people may have been discontented, they were too scared and had little space within which to challenge.<sup>66</sup> Inversely, repression has also been used to explain why activism re-emerged in South Africa as the violent action of the police in suppressing protests is seen to have forced

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<sup>65</sup> van Kessel, I, *'Beyond our wildest dreams'...*, pp.151-2

<sup>66</sup> Hirson, B, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash...*, p.7

people into opposition by exposing the violent and unjust nature of the state, creating common grievances and forcing people to respond.<sup>67</sup>

The second major factor that is seen to have provided the political space and resources for activism is the emergence of organisations focused on challenging apartheid. Organisations are seen to have provided the networks that allowed people with similar ideas and experiences to come together and effectively organise their responses;<sup>68</sup> the ideologies and ideas that framed protest in a way that was understandable and attractive to participants;<sup>69</sup> and to have transformed diffuse protest with specific demands into a coherent challenge to state power.<sup>70</sup> As Jeremy Seekings argues with regards to the United Democratic Front (UDF):

Neither the UDF nor ANC could claim the credit for the formation of street committees and other manifestations of people's power. These were primarily a response to conditions on the ground, shaped by deep rooted traditions of localised self-government and self-help. But the UDF and ANC played a central role formulating and organisational strategy of people's power, both at a conceptual level and in terms of co-ordination and networking. The UDF provided organisational and conceptual links between disparate localised struggles and overall struggle for national political change, and thereby greatly boosted local-level developments.<sup>71</sup>

Interestingly, where activism was weak or non-existent a lack of organisation is also used as an explanation. Hirson, for example, saw the failure of the Soweto uprising to spread into a broad assault on state power as a result of ineffective organisation.<sup>72</sup>

Both repression and organisation are also seen, as well as being causes in their own right, to have fed into a wider expansion of political opportunities for activism by making apartheid seem challengeable. Just as the repression after Sharpeville closed down political space, the emergence of organisations, protests

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<sup>67</sup> Bundy, C, "'Action, Comrades, Action!'...", p.211

<sup>68</sup> Seekings, J, The UDF: A History...

<sup>69</sup> Carter, C, 'Community and Conflict...', p.131

<sup>70</sup> Houston, G F, The National Liberation Struggle..., pp.6&22;

Seekings, J, 'The Origins of Political...', p.68

<sup>71</sup> Seekings, J, The UDF: A History..., p.170

<sup>72</sup> Hirson, B, Year of Fire, Year of Ash..., p.253, italics mine

and challenges are seen to have slowly built a context within which people felt they could challenge apartheid.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, shifting relationships between the state and black South Africans are also seen to be significant. Seekings' study of quiescence and protest in the African townships of the Vaal was a key text in the development of this approach, and was later to form the basis of several articles. His argument also reveals the interaction of political opportunities with a deeper economic and structural crisis. Seekings based his thesis on the view that people's actions were heavily influenced by cost benefit calculations which mean that people who weigh up the costs of potential action, with the possibility for redress through the system, often accept a system in practice even if it is grossly unfair and illegitimate.<sup>74</sup> He therefore locates the shift to protest in changes within local financial relations and the political processes that mediated these. He argues that the devolution of powers to African community councillors and the promotion of township upgrading, whilst demanding that all such upgrades be self-financing, led to large increases in service charges and rents amidst considerable poverty. This caused the councillors to become seen as a cause of urban poverty and therefore their delegitimation in the eyes of their constituents. This delegitimation then provided the backdrop within which opposition to apartheid policies converged. When the government reacted to protest with repression these popular grievances became further politicised and attention shifted increasingly upon the need to access central political power.<sup>75</sup>

Turning to Cape Town similar themes to those sketched above can be identified in studies of apartheid era activism. Coloureds have been incorporated

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<sup>73</sup> Brewer, J D, After Soweto..., p.viii; Seekings, J, "'Trailing Behind the Masses' ..."; Matiwana, M, & Walters, S, The struggle for democracy: a study of community organisations in Greater Cape Town from the 1960's to 1985, (Bellville, 1986), p.33

<sup>74</sup> Seekings, J, Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation..., p.11

<sup>75</sup> Seekings, J, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation...', pp.59-75; Zweig's thesis on the township of New Crossroads in Cape Town covers many of the same themes as Seekings' thesis, although it does not explicitly seek to explain political action, as it shows how local arrangements developed for the distribution of resources. See : Zweig, P, The Lagunya Lacuna: Contestations of Legitimacy and Agency in Housing Allocation in a Black Local Authority, MA Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2005

into universal narratives of the struggle as a conflict between blacks and whites with Goldin, for example, seeing the boycotts of 1980 representing a turning point as coloureds began to see their future as one with Africans.<sup>76</sup> Other studies, which have acknowledged the limited support by coloureds, particularly older coloureds, for progressive activism, have focused on political opportunities such as: mass demoralisation as a result of the forced removals and the removal of the franchise;<sup>77</sup> an historic absence of progressive political organisations; and the limited involvement by the coloured population in radicalising labour struggles.<sup>78</sup> Ideological divisions, which are seen to have undermined strong organisation are also cited<sup>79</sup>, as is social conservatism as a result of religious orthodoxy.<sup>80</sup> Finally, Ineke van Kessel's more subtle study of *Grassroots* shows the limited social base of activism in the province and how racial and generational divisions influenced activism,<sup>81</sup> whilst Seekings makes reference to the importance of different group areas, experiences and educational systems in hindering the effective building of non-racial activism.<sup>82</sup>

### **1.5.2. Activism after Apartheid: Decline of the Old, Rise of the New (Social Movements)**

Moving into the post-apartheid period work has been done to explain the impact of democratisation upon civil society organisations that emerged in opposition to apartheid,<sup>83</sup> and to examine the growth of new forms of organisation and protest,

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<sup>76</sup> Goldin, I, Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa, (London & N.Y., 1987), p.208

<sup>77</sup> Hart, D, 'Political Manipulation of Urban Space,' in (eds.) Shamil, J & Soudien, C, The Struggle for District Six: past and present, (Cape Town, 1990), pp.128-129

<sup>78</sup> Van Kessel, I, 'Beyond our wildest dreams'..., pp.227-235

<sup>79</sup> Nasson, B, 'Political Ideologies in the Western Cape, in (eds.) Lodge, T & Nasson, B, All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s, (London, 1991)

<sup>80</sup> Van Kessel, I, 'Beyond our wildest dreams'..., pp.227-235

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Seekings, J, Heroes or Villains?..., p.41

<sup>83</sup> Hassim, S, Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority, (Madison, 2005); Adler, G & Steinberg, J, (eds.) From Comrades to Citizens: The South African Civics Movement and the Transition to Democracy, (Basingstoke, 2000);



specifically the New Social Movements (NSMs).<sup>84</sup> Like interpretations of apartheid era activism many of the themes from broader social movement theory can be located within the studies of post-apartheid activism. Studies of the demobilisation of existing civil society post-apartheid tend to explain this as a consequence of the declining need for civil society organisation due to a changed political context and declining access to resources. In contrast, studies of NSMs tend to locate their emergence in post-apartheid material concerns.

A range of scholars have looked at the move away from civil society from 1990 onwards and have sought to explain it as a result of shifts in the political opportunity structure and declining access to resources. Two strands exist within this broader framework. The first focuses on the fact that political transition reduced the attractiveness of civil society as a mechanism for achieving collective and individual goals. Cherry et al, for example, argue that the decline in political society is a direct result of the increased faith in political society as people now have new, more effective channels, for seeking redress.<sup>85</sup>

The second strand of interpretation explicitly rejects the view that people are not organising within civil society because of the increased responsiveness of the post-apartheid state (i.e. the increased openness of the political system to people's views) and instead locates decline in the closedness of the post-apartheid political system and the decline in resources available to civil society. Specifically, it sees the decline in activism as a result of explicit political decision making which has sought to close down the space for civil society to operate in. This trend is particularly prominent amongst those authors who characterise post-apartheid South Africa as a neo-liberal state which delivers little for its poorest citizens. Because these authors see little real change with the end of apartheid the reason for decline cannot be characterised as a result of a conscious choice by people to move away from

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<sup>84</sup> Gibson, N, (ed.), Challenging Hegemony...; Desai, A, We are the Poors...; Oldfield, S, State Restructuring and Urban Transformation in South Africa: A negotiation of Race, Place and Poverty, PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2000

<sup>85</sup> Cherry, J, Jones, K & Seekings, J, 'Democratisation and Politics...'

activism because their goals have been met. Post-apartheid quiescence has, therefore, to be a result of either a sort of false consciousness in which people have placed undue faith in the ANC and its discourse as a national liberation movement,<sup>86</sup> or because the ANC dislocated civic leaders from the masses by offering them positions, wealth and power and has therefore undermined their strength.<sup>87</sup> This view also echoes resource mobilisation and framing theories, as at its heart is the argument that people were, and still are, ready to protest. They just need an appropriate vehicle to lead them and ideology to draw them into action.<sup>88</sup>

Moving from the decline of apartheid era civil society to focus on the development of protest and activism outside of the old progressively aligned organisations more focus is placed on the relationship between post-apartheid material hardship and action, particularly the relationship between service delivery and protest. Within the study of NSMs two approaches emerge. The first sees participants in NSMs as rational actors, drawn into protest by poor living conditions and a calculation of the costs and benefits activism can deliver. As such these integrate both structural explanations for hardship with an understanding of the role that the broader political context has on action. The second is more simplistic and sees NSM activism as a more radical and politicised challenge to the state emerging from the clear inequalities and injustices of post-apartheid South Africa.

Patrick Bond is one of the more fervent supporters of the view that the emergence of NSMs represents a clear and political challenge to an unequal and unjust status quo. He argues, for example, that the growth of NSMs represents the generation of a 'coherent "independent left"' which has emerged from the

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<sup>86</sup> Gibson, N C, 'Calling Everything into Question: Broken Promises, Social Movements and Emergent Intellectual Currents in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in (ed.) Gibson, N C, Challenging Hegemony..., pp.34-5

<sup>87</sup> Bond, P, 'Johannesburg's Resurgent Social Movements', in (ed.) Gibson, N C, Challenging Hegemony..., p.116

<sup>88</sup> Ballard, R, Habib, A & Valodia, I, 'Introduction: From Anti-Apartheid to Post-Apartheid Social Movements', in (eds.) Ballard, R, Habib A & Valodia, I, Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa, (Scottsville, 2006), p.15

hardships of post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>89</sup> Even amongst authors who acknowledge that underlying most social movement activism are day-to-day struggles for basic service provision the very fact that people are protesting is seen to represent a political challenge to the state. Miraftab and Wills argue that social movements of the poor are somehow by their very nature involved in creating a citizenship concerned with 'civil, political, social and economic rights.'<sup>90</sup> Gibson argues that because these movements concern themselves with basic human needs such as land, food and housing they express a 'new humanism' and their very existence challenges the fact that there is no alternative to capitalist globalisation.<sup>91</sup> Barchiesi also identifies a clear link between poverty and politicised protest. Specifically, he sees a link between the poor living conditions and poverty of the 'multitude' of the poor and the development of a challenge to state policies which have defined a 'radical critique' of the ANC to the left of the ANC and its alliance partners.<sup>92</sup>

In contrast to these views stand an increasing number of studies that locate the new forms of activism within the more complex motivations of poor people struggling for everyday survival and challenge the idea of a coherent underclass reacting to the hardships of modern day South Africa. In this respect the work of Oldfield is particularly significant as it shows how local movements can often be exclusionary and unjust. For example she studies the 'door kickers', who illegally occupied houses intended for other (equally poor) people and mobilised to keep themselves in the houses and others out.<sup>93</sup> Similarly others, such as Egan and Wafer and Ballard et al have pointed out that there is no core narrative running throughout protests that are in many ways driven by local and particularistic

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<sup>89</sup> Bond, P, 'Johannesburg's Resurgent...', p.104

<sup>90</sup> Miraftab, F & Wills, S, 'Insurgency and Spaces of Active Citizenship: The Story of Western Cape Anti-eviction Campaign in South Africa', *Journal of Planning and Education Research*, 25, 2005, pp.200-217

<sup>91</sup> Gibson, N C, 'Calling Everything into Question...', pp.40-41

<sup>92</sup> Barchiesi, 'Classes, Multitudes and the Politics of Community Movements in Post-apartheid South Africa', in (ed.) Gibson, N C, *Challenging Hegemony...*, p.217

<sup>93</sup> Oldfield, S, 'The Centrality of Community Capacity in State Low-Income Housing Provision in Cape Town, South Africa', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24/4, 2000, pp.867-8

goals.<sup>94</sup> A key division, therefore, exists within studies of post-apartheid protest, which mirrors the division within studies of apartheid era activism. Was this action unified, political and purposeful and driven by a coherent social group universally suffering hardship, or was it driven by more complex and overlapping identities and structural cleavages beyond the control of activists and ideologies?

Finally, it is worth noting that whilst interpretations of post-apartheid transformation differ, almost all maintain agreement that the post-apartheid period differs qualitatively from the apartheid period. Radical critiques of the ANC tend to locate this difference in the adoption of GEAR by the ANC government in 1996 which both created protest by including, amongst other things, a movement towards cost recovery for service provision and sheared the bond between the poor and the ANC. Desai for example argues that it was the adoption of cost recovery policies by the government that drove conflict and created repression.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Dwyer sees a direct correlation between the adoption of GEAR and protest:

Ultimately, the major cause of tension between the government, labour, and people in organisations like the CCF [an NSM in Durban], is linked to GEAR and the consequences of GEAR policies on the life of CCF participants.<sup>96</sup>

Interestingly, this distinction even emerges amongst more subtle interpretations of post-apartheid transformation. By locating post-apartheid quiescence within faith in political society Cherry et al explicitly link civil society decline to national and local political change. Similarly, whilst Oldfield recognises the complex local dynamics

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<sup>94</sup> Ballard, R, Habib, A & Valodia, I, 'Conclusion: Making Sense of Post-Apartheid South Africa's Voices of Protest' in (eds.) Ballard, R, Habib A & Valodia, I, *Voices of Protest...*, pp.399-400; Egan A & Wafer, A, 'Dynamics of a "Mini-Mass Movement": Origins, Identity and Ideological Pluralism in the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee', in (eds.) Ballard, R, Habib A & Valodia, I, *Voices of Protest...*, p.57

<sup>95</sup> Desai, A, *We are the Poors...*, p.91

<sup>96</sup> Dwyer, P, 'The Contentious Politics of the Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF)', UKZN, *Centre for Civil Society*, Research Report 27, 2004, p.9

that drive activism these are seen to be exclusively the result of the interaction between local communities and post-apartheid state forms.<sup>97</sup>

## **1.6. Towards a Theorised Understanding of South African Activism: Race, Class and Rationality**

The discussion so far has highlighted the key themes in explanations of activism in South Africa and collective action more generally. Studies of South Africa have revealed the importance of political opportunities, resources and ideas in the emergence and evolution of activism. They have also revealed differing views of the relationship between structure and agency. Put simply, there exists a division between those studies which see protest as an almost inevitable response to material hardship and political inequality, and those that seek to provide a more nuanced view of the relationship between structural cleavages and political action, located in local conditions. Interestingly, however, especially given the importance of class as an analytical category in South African economics and historiography, the theoretical treatment of the relationship between class and action, particularly under apartheid, has remained relatively underdeveloped. Specifically, whilst a consistent theme in many explanations of activism has been to reject simple explanations of struggle based purely on race or class, less work has been done to consider how the activism emerging from the complex social milieu identified at the local level relate to the broader functioning of the apartheid political economy and its accompanying class structure. As this thesis progresses this will be seen to be a particular omission, as involvement (and lack of involvement) in activism in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel will be shown to have been heavily conditioned by people's position within the political economy. Furthermore, this relationship to the political economy

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<sup>97</sup> Oldfield, S, 'Local State Restructuring and Urban Transformation in Post-Apartheid Cape Town', *Geojournal*, 57, 2002, p.29

will be seen to have been located within identifiable structural cleavages, albeit more complex cleavages than those suggested in simplistic race and class interpretations of struggle.

The remainder of this chapter, therefore, will seek to develop a framework that will allow local reactions to material deprivation and political discrimination to be considered in relation to the broader context of the structural cleavages within the apartheid and post-apartheid political economy. It will start by discussing existing understandings of class in South Africa, including the relationship between race and class, and their use in current explanations of activism. It will then discuss theories that highlight the importance of consumption and moral economy in explaining action, using these to address some of the weaknesses in using traditional class analysis to understand South Africa. Finally, it will conclude by drawing together these class theories with theories highlighting the broader opportunity and resource context, to provide an explanatory framework which will be considered throughout the thesis.

### **1.6.1. Class in South African Scholarship**

The class structure of apartheid society has received considerable attention in academic discussion, and there have also been studies of how this has transformed post-apartheid. However, studies of activism have not consistently considered the outcomes of these debates in their explanatory frameworks.

Class has a long pedigree as an analytical category through which to understand the nature of apartheid. During the 1970s the opposing concepts of race and class formed the poles around which academics and activists congregated in attempting to explain the nature of South Africa's social, economic and political milieu. Focusing upon the relationship between apartheid labour policies and the country's economic growth a range of scholars sought to show that apartheid policy was either an illogical imposition of racist ideas which distorted the free market and

stunted economic growth or a central element, via the creation of a 'cheap labour supply', in capitalist accumulation.

Early interpretations of apartheid from what was to become crudely known as the 'liberal' camp pointed to the fact that apartheid, by placing restrictions upon the free movement of labour, inhibiting people's occupational mobility in terms of their race rather than their ability, and restricting the opportunities for skills acquisition by a predominantly migrant African workforce, increased the cost of labour, created skills shortages and ultimately damaged South Africa's economy.<sup>98</sup>

However, faced with South Africa's rapid economic growth in the 1960s, which it was argued was second only in the world to Japan, a group of scholars writing primarily from a Marxist perspective began to question the dysfunctionality of apartheid for capitalist growth. Whilst different nuances emerged within this 'radical' camp their core focus was the fact that because apartheid laws forced Africans into migratory, semi-rural, existences in which urban employment and residence was temporary, many of the cost of the reproduction of labour were displaced to the rural homelands. In this way much of the cost of reproducing the labour force was displaced from wages within the urban capital economy onto rural agricultural production and rural African social structures. This allowed capitalists to pay lower wages and these low wages formed the basis upon which South Africa's economic explosion in the 1960s was based.<sup>99</sup>

Interestingly, however, whilst the Marxists and liberals took opposing positions in terms of the function of apartheid, in many ways their interpretations led to similar treatments of social differentiation within the African population. For liberals Africans were oppressed because they were African, whilst for the radicals Africans were oppressed because of their centrality in the capitalist mode of

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<sup>98</sup> See for example, Horwitz, R, *The Political Economy of South Africa*, (London, 1967); Houghton, D, H, *The South African Economy*, (London & N.Y., 1967)

<sup>99</sup> Wolpe, H, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy Society*, 1/4, 1972, pp.425-456; Legassick, M, 'South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence', *Economy and Society*, 3/3, 1974, pp.253-291; Legassick, M, 'Legislation, Ideology and Economy in post-1948 South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1/1, 1974, pp.5-35

production. However, in both cases all Africans were seen to experience the same forms of oppression and few early liberals or revisionists questioned whether racial or class exploitation actually impacted differently on different sections of the black population.

Ultimately, the caricatured liberal and radical positions represented two ideal extremes and as such increasingly came under attack from the realities of apartheid in action. The fact that restrictions on the free market did not stunt economic growth and the fact that concessions were made by apartheid ideologues to economic realities eroded the viability of the pure liberal argument.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, the over simplistic understanding of apartheid as the handmaiden of capital fell down in the face of the constraints placed on economic growth by increasing skills shortages – in part a result of job reservation and influx control policies – as the apartheid economy moved into the late 1970s. In the light of these transformations more nuanced understandings developed regarding the purpose of apartheid and its relationship to race, class and capital.

It was realised that by focusing almost exclusively upon the migrant labour system and the removal of urban residence rights from Africans interpretations of apartheid oversimplified the position of Africans within South Africa's political economy. As Rich pointed out with regards to discriminatory policies in the 1910s and '20s, liberals tended not to investigate the consequences of racial discrimination on the ground, instead focusing simply upon its lack of economic logic. Similarly, radicals, by focusing upon the use of the reserves as centres for political control and

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<sup>100</sup> Moll, for example, argues that whilst overall apartheid policies did restrict economic growth their impact was not uniform and they tended to improve the profitability of labour intensive industries at the expense of technologically intensive industries. He also argues that to understand South Africa's post war growth it is also necessary to examine state policies in areas other than apartheid, such as their import/export strategies. Moll, T, 'Did the Apartheid Economy "Fail"?', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17/2, 1991, pp.271-291



the reproduction of cheap labour, failed to elaborate the position of Africans within the white areas and economy beyond their role as migrants.<sup>101</sup>

The role of urban Africans was therefore increasingly examined and it became clear that apartheid legislation created considerable differentiation not only between racial groups, but also within them. Whilst apartheid classified all Africans as temporary residents, in its implementation it actually created two legally distinct classes of urban Africans. Influx control legislation made an explicit distinction between temporary migrants who could only remain in the urban areas for more than 72 hours if they were in employment, and Africans who, because they were born within the urban areas, had worked there for an extended period of time, or through marriage, were allowed to remain in the cities indefinitely with or without employment. Drawing upon these distinctions led Hindson to argue that rather than simply creating a cheap labour force apartheid was best understood as reproducing not one, but two African labour forces: a temporary migrant population, predominantly working in unskilled occupations and paid low wages subsidised by agricultural production, and a proletarianised urban population which was reproduced purely within the context of the capitalist economy.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, he argued that these urbanised Africans gained preferential access to state services such as housing and to both employment in general and more skilled occupations in particular.<sup>103</sup>

Deborah Posel pointed out problems within Hindson's simple urban-migrant dichotomy by showing how a whole range of factors such as age, education, gender, ethnicity, social capital, language and employer preferences all impacted upon Africans' positions within the labour market.<sup>104</sup> However, in doing so she did not so much reject the importance of apartheid influx control legislation, as demand that the mediating role of other factors be considered. For example, she

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<sup>101</sup> Rich, P, 'Ministering to the White Man's Needs: The Development of Urban Segregation in South Africa 1913-1923', *African Studies*, 37/2, 1978, pp.177-179

<sup>102</sup> Hindson, D, Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat, (Johannesburg, 1987)

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, pp.62-3

<sup>104</sup> Posel, D, The Making of Apartheid: Conflict and Compromise, (Oxford, 1991), p.17

showed how employers refrained from employing young urban Africans because they were felt to be cheeky and workshy, preferring instead migrant labourers who would work harder for lower wages. However, in explaining this her analysis returns to the fact that migrant labourers, due to their need for employment in order to access the cities, were willing to do almost any job, whilst urbanised Africans were happy to remain unemployed or give up jobs with poor pay and conditions as to do so would not see their removal to the rural areas.<sup>105</sup>

Whilst apartheid created divisions between people classified as members of the same racial group it also created divisions between people of different racial groups. The economic and political superiority of whites, as guaranteed by legislation, is the most stark and well known example of this. However, between whites and Africans sat those South Africans classified as Indian and coloured. The contours of coloureds' positions within apartheid's political economy will be discussed in more detail in chapter two. However, it is worth noting that many of the legislative controls on Africans, such as influx control, did not apply to coloureds and Indians. Similarly, whilst prevented from entering many occupations by discriminatory legislation, coloureds and Indians were permitted access to a greater range of jobs than Africans and were allowed, albeit in segregated group areas, permanent rights of residence within the cities.

Interestingly, whilst attempts to identify the class structure of the South African economy were central to radical scholarship, attempts to relate class and the divisions within the black communities to political action within South Africa are less apparent. Wolpe and Legassick, in their re-evaluation of the cheap labour thesis do note that the divisions between the urban and rural areas hold within them the possibility of growing division within the black working class and relate this to conflicts that emerged between township youths and migrants during the 1976 uprising,<sup>106</sup> a position that was later shared by Ruth First.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Seekings

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., pp.169-80

<sup>106</sup> Legassick, M, & Wolpe, H, 'The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 3/7, 1976, pp.87-107

argues that during the unrest of the mid-1980s choices over tactics and approaches to struggle often coincided with educational divisions within the youth.<sup>108</sup> Goldin's study of coloured identity also noted how the articulation of a coloured identity represented a move by coloureds to maintain their economic positions in reaction to growing African immigration into the Cape around the turn of the twentieth century. However, he concludes that by the 1980s this coloured identity had evaporated as a political force as coloureds had come to see their future as intimately linked to that of Africans.<sup>109</sup>

Whilst noting the fact that class cleavages within the black population had the potential to influence responses to apartheid, the overall interaction between class, race and social action has remained relatively untheorised. Indeed, as seen earlier, explanations of political identities in South Africa tend to use descriptive concepts such as youth, student and race and where class is used as it tends to be conflated with race. This is not particularly surprising in a society where labour market and productive relations were cut across by state maintained racial discrimination. In South Africa an individual's class position, insofar as this meant that they owned the means of production or produced surplus value for a capitalist, had far less impact upon their life chances and experiences than the racial group stamped in their pass book. Consequently, focusing upon class in its Marxist incarnation offered little explanatory power.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> First, R, 'After Soweto: a Response', *Review of African Political Economy*, 5/11, 1978, p.95

<sup>108</sup> Seekings, J, Heroes or Villains?...

<sup>109</sup> Goldin, I, Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa, (London & New York, 1987)

<sup>110</sup> A whole range of theories were developed in order to explain the relationship between race and class. Perhaps the most influential was the interpretation, put forward by the South African Communist Party, that the South African situation represented 'colonialism of a special kind' (CST). This argued that South Africa was a colony, but that it was unusual because the colonisers – the white population – lived within the country and not in the metropole. Consequently all blacks were oppressed and all whites were oppressors and it was therefore necessary to embark on a struggle for national liberation – i.e. a non-racial political system which incorporated the bourgeoisie – before moving to the struggle for socialism. Whilst this was proposed by the Communist Party – which maintained that the African working class needed to assume leadership within the anti-apartheid movement – what is significant is that in practice CST portrayed the interests of blacks as broadly aligned *regardless of class*. In contrast theorists to the left of the ANC/SACP opposed CST, arguing that rather than being oppressed because of their race, blacks were oppressed because of their class.

## 1.6.2. Class, Citizenship, Consumption and Education

Whilst class as traditionally formulated cannot provide an overall explanation for action and identity in South Africa the central argument of this thesis is that there are clear links between peoples' positions within the political economy, their identities and how they perceive their interests. Race may have played a key role in defining peoples' life chances, yet as Hindson and Posel have shown, apartheid discrimination was not experienced uniformly within races. Similarly, young black South Africans may have suffered greater exposure to unemployment than their parents, but this exposure was not the same for all youth. Indeed, as will be seen in chapter two, as grand apartheid collapsed opportunities expanded for certain sections of the black population, in spite of growing unemployment and recession.

This thesis will therefore show that whilst class alone cannot be seen to be the only determinant of activism in Cape Town, socio-economic relations are crucial in explaining collective action. As Edna Bonacich argues, whilst many societies have marked ethnic and race divisions, these divisions do not reflect deeper 'primordial identities.' Instead, these racial divisions and the decision to mobilise on national, as opposed to class grounds, are intimately linked to the interests of the different classes within the separate racial groups.<sup>111</sup> Bonacich's key focus in South Africa is the pact between the imperial (i.e. white) bourgeoisie and imperial (white) proletariat in the exploitation of the colonised (black) proletariat in which they both benefited.<sup>112</sup> However, whilst accepting that in South Africa the proletariat was split in terms of race between black and white and the differential interests these groups

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As a result the removal of apartheid would not end oppression unless it was accompanied by the introduction of socialism. However, whilst this approach argued for the importance of class, in practice it often simply equated class with race. Consequently, the main point of practical disagreement between the left and the SACP surrounded whether white organisations could be involved in struggles and organisations, with those on the left opposing their involvement because as whites they were collectively privileged. The recognition that whites were privileged is not in itself questionable. However, in using race to mark the boundaries of organisational involvement the left denied the centrality of productive relations for the anti-apartheid struggle.

<sup>111</sup> Bonacich, E, 'Class Approaches to Ethnicity and Race', *Insurgent Sociologist*, 10/2, 1980, pp.9-23

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.13-14

had, this thesis will argue that a full understanding of the apartheid class structure needs to move beyond a black and white understanding of race and class to understand how apartheid policy and the differential impact of discrimination within and between the black population groups led to a range of different proletariats which were integrated into relations with the state, and each other. In doing this, this thesis draws on sociological theory which points to the importance of peoples' positions within the state's distributional networks (citizenship), their experience of social mobility and the impact of racial policies in inhibiting or promoting that mobility (trajectory) and the impact of historical experience on expectations (moral economy).

As a result of the growth of new forms of political mobilisation in post-industrial Europe from the mid-1960s (such as the growth of gender, race and student based social movements) alongside the decline of traditional class based organisations (such as political parties and trade unions) the centrality of class as defined at the point of production in explaining collective action has increasingly been reconsidered. Furthermore it has also been shown that class was not always the pre-eminent cleavage even in industrial societies. For example, in his excellent study of protest in 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris Gould shows how, in spite of the predominance of class based discourse, the participants in the Paris commune of 1871 came from a wide range of occupations and it was an identity based in geographical proximity and urbanisation which united them, not their class positions.<sup>113</sup> The recognition that class was not the only, or even the main, determinant of behaviour led to a range of studies which sought to reassess the relationships between class and social action. There is little space to investigate the full range of views here. However, two important aspects of this reassessment have particular relevance for South Africa.

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<sup>113</sup> Gould, R, Insurgent Identities: Class Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune, (Chicago, 1995)

The first development was the growing recognition that people's life chances were not simply defined by their occupation, but also by their relationship to, and the actions of, the nation state. In the context of the developed world the growth of new political identities and social movements expressing these identities was often located in the post-war growth in welfare provision and the role that the minimum standard of living this guaranteed had in reducing class conflict and allowing people to concentrate on interests beyond the workplace. Writing from a post-Marxist position, Resnick and Wolff make the point that whilst production creates wealth, much of this wealth is transferred from capital to groups who do not themselves own the means of production. In order to understand social stratification it becomes necessary, therefore, to also consider these 'subsumed' capital flows and the ways in which they benefit and disadvantage people.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, with the growth of welfare states since the second world war it has been realised that many people owe their livelihoods not to their ability to produce and earn but to their rights to access state provided income and services and that many people in the west – such as the unemployed and low paid – would be unable to provide their existing standard of living without state help.<sup>115</sup>

Recognising the importance of state intervention – or citizenship benefits – in securing people's livelihoods has been mirrored by a focus upon the social cleavages thus created. The idea of 'transfer classes' as groups who are defined by their position as recipients of state transfers rather than through their relationship to either production or the labour market has been put forward. Even amongst those in employment it has been suggested that state provision creates divisions and different interests. Focusing upon the growing withdrawal of the British state from welfare provision Saunders argued that rather than class being the main determinant of inequality in the UK, it was one's dependence upon state services, or position within relationships of consumption, that was significant. Specifically, he

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<sup>114</sup> Resnick, S A, & Wolff, R D, Knowledge and Class, (Chicago & London, 1987)

<sup>115</sup> Sitton, J F, Recent Marxian Theory: Class Formation and Social Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism, (N.Y., 1996), pp.124-5

claimed that those who could provide privately for their own needs were privileged in comparison to those who had to rely on state services and that this privilege was such that it created structural divisions which in turn accounted for political behaviour.<sup>116</sup>

Whilst the extent to which these 'consumption' cleavages structure social action has been questioned, the recognition that state provision can structure group action and identity cannot be easily dismissed.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, the importance of state welfare services and their impact on collective identities is well represented in the literature on South Africa's white working class. This shows how preferential state treatment lay at the heart of the compact between the white working class and capital and the corresponding quiescence of white labour.<sup>118</sup> However, despite the recognition of state welfare intervention in black communities its impact on collective identity has remained relatively unexplored, despite differential responses within the black population to political activism.

The second important modification of class analysis is located in the growing understanding that even if one accepts that workplace relations are crucial to explaining identity, it is difficult to reduce experiences of the workplace to one's current position within the labour market. This has two dimensions. Firstly, there is the need to recognise the potential for social mobility within the workplace. Secondly, there is a need to consider the life trajectories of people alongside their workplace position.

Regarding social mobility, it has been argued that for many class position is not permanent and class identities are consequently mediated by future expectations. An individual may be in a working class occupation but if he believes,

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<sup>116</sup> Saunders, P, Social Theory and the Urban Question, (New York, 1986), pp.289-351

<sup>117</sup> See for example the special edition of *Sociology*. Specifically: Busfield, J, 'Sectoral Divisions in Consumption: The Case of Medical Care', *Sociology*, 24/11, 1990, pp.77-96; Savage, M, Watt, P & Archer, S, 'The Consumption Sector Debate and Housing Mobility', *Sociology*, 24/11, 1990, pp.97-117

<sup>118</sup> O'Meara, D, Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948, (Cambridge, 1983)

and the workplace structure provides the possibility, that in future he will enter a different occupation he is in a very different position to an unskilled worker who has little likelihood of advancement. This has always been considered in Weberian class analysis, which considers the importance of education and skills in defining class, as education is often seen as the most important determinant of social mobility. However, other factors are also significant in this respect, such as mastery of the correct cultural codes necessary for certain occupations.<sup>119</sup>

Regarding life trajectories, it has been noted that people's perceptions of their current situation are often structured by the historical development of that situation. Whilst the son of a manual labourer may experience appointment as a clerk positively, the son of a teacher or lawyer may experience this negatively. Similar dynamics also need consideration beyond the workplace. For example, a poor rural South African may experience the provision of a small one roomed house as positive, whilst a wealthy South African who has to move to a similar house due to changed circumstances would most likely experience this negatively. Consequently it has been recognised that two individuals in the same social class may have very different identities and attitudes which are not deducible simply from their class positions.<sup>120</sup>

Particularly valuable in this regard is the development of the concept of 'moral economy.' Rather than simply arguing that people respond to economic factors, theories of moral economy argue that such factors are mediated through the existence of shared beliefs and values. Writing about the emergence of riots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century England Thompson claims that rather than simply relating riots to hardship in a form of 'crass economic reductionism' they instead need to be understood through examining their 'legitimizing notion' or morality. He goes on to say:

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<sup>119</sup> Bourdieu, P, Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste, (London & N.Y., 1986); Wright, E O, Class Counts..., pp. 15-21;

Wright, E O, Class, Crisis... 80-81

<sup>120</sup> Bourdieu, P, Distinction..., pp.110-2



By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community. On occasion this popular consensus was endorsed by some measure of licence afforded by the authorities. More commonly, the consensus was so strong it overrode motives of fear or deference.<sup>121</sup>

However, a moral economy does not exist in isolation from economic factors, but can be intimately linked to them. In his study of peasant protest in South East Asia Scott shows how people's expectations of, and reactions to, landlords, including their propensity to riot, were closely related to the historical nature of crop production in different areas which shaped people's views of how landlords should behave.<sup>122</sup> Understanding that historically developed value systems rooted in processes of class formation have an impact in conditioning reactions to current transformations shows again that whilst class needs to be reconsidered as a uniform causal factor, broader structural factors are crucial in influencing the development of a shared beliefs and values, as well as providing the context in which such values form the basis of mobilisation.

If the link between structure and agency cannot simply be reduced to a mechanistic link between productive relations and action then how is it best to be understood? Pierre Bourdieu provides an interesting view. Rather than simply defining individuals' social position by their relationship to the means of production he instead deploys the concept of a three dimensional space that he calls the social field. Position in this field is defined by ownership of different sorts of capital (as outlined by Bourdieu). For example, he makes a distinction between economic capital (money) and cultural capital (predominantly education). People with large amounts of economic or cultural capital are middle class, yet because of their different forms of capital they are in different positions in the social field, and

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<sup>121</sup> Thompson, E P, 'The Moral Economy of the Crowd in eighteenth century England', *Past and Present*, 50, (Feb 1971), p.78

<sup>122</sup> Scott, J, C, The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South East Asia, (London, 1976)

represent different class fractions.<sup>123</sup> In turn, proximity within the social field represents people with similar life experiences and social relations and this forms the basis for identifying social groups:

[As] sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances.<sup>124</sup>

Gould echoes this looser definition of interest groups as people with common experiences and positions in his work on France. For example, he notes that whilst it was geography not class which formed the common identity behind the Commune this political identity drew its strength from the fact that people experienced a similar set of social relations as a result of their shared physical location. It was this shared experience which in turn made the political identity articulated effective.<sup>125</sup>

### **1.6.3. Race, Class and Collective Action in a South African City**

Accepting a looser definition of class allows for an integration of social class as traditionally defined with the other social cleavages outlined above, namely those based around citizenship and trajectories, and their articulation within different moral economies. The central argument presented herein is that the interests and identities of people in the two communities under investigation were heavily informed by the different ways they were integrated into the apartheid political economy in terms of their class, their rights derived from citizenship (i.e. what the state did and did not provide) and their life trajectories, both actual and potential (i.e. their experiences of, and potential for, social mobility).

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<sup>123</sup> Bourdieu, P, *Distinction...*

<sup>124</sup> Bourdieu, P, 'The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups', *Theory and Society*, 14/6, 1985, p.725

<sup>125</sup> Gould, R, *Insurgent Identities: ...* p.20

The different position of people within the apartheid political economy led to very different identities and interests within and between the black population groups which influenced action. Coloured South Africans received some citizenship benefits in the form of housing provision and welfare payments. They were also privileged in the labour market relative to Africans. However, they were also disadvantaged in comparison to white South Africans. For those coloureds with high levels of education the artificial ceiling on advancement saw an increasingly realisation that apartheid was restricting their potential for personal advancement. In contrast, for coloureds that relied on citizenship benefits such as welfare payments, and were employed in jobs in which they were protected from competition by discrimination against Africans, a more ambiguous relationship with apartheid emerged. Similar dynamics also emerged within the African communities. Older Africans with urban residence rights had little formal education, were protected from competition for employment by migrant labourers and had limited access to welfare transfers, most notably housing. In contrast, younger Africans were increasingly well educated and experienced an even more severe ceiling on advancement than coloureds. This led to a strong opposition to apartheid amongst young urban Africans and more general quiescence amongst the older African generation. These cleavages were reflected in the social base of activism in the Western Cape. Older residents, both African and coloured, were involved in activism only in exceptional circumstances. In contrast it was a young, educated, elite that drove protest throughout this period.

However, these social cleavages alone cannot explain why activism occurred at some times and not others. To understand this it is also necessary to understand the broader political opportunities and resource context. The interests and identities set by apartheid interacted with the broader resource and political opportunity context, and this set limits to and defined the ways in which these interests were articulated in action.

It is also important to recognise that because quiescence relied not only on violence and repression, but also an acceptance of the benefits of the apartheid distributional structure, moral economies emerged to accompany quiescence. Poorer coloureds came to see themselves as more deserving than Africans and came to conceptualise their interests as opposed to those of Africans. Similarly, urban Africans developed identities that placed themselves above migrants and squatters from the Eastern Cape in a mirroring of apartheid discrimination. These moral economies then acted to reinforce distinctions derived from the underlying social structure as coloureds refused to support Africans and Africans turned against squatters more often than they did the state. Moving into the post-apartheid period these collective identities continue to have considerable salience. Post-apartheid protests have rarely emerged in response to a lack of provision; instead they have emerged because of what people see as unfair provision. Interestingly, the criteria used to judge fairness are a mixture of apartheid-era distinctions based on insider/outsider cleavages and new identities that have coalesced in similar ways around post-apartheid distributive mechanisms, such as council ward boundaries, as it appears that shifting patterns of distribution are slowly remaking the apartheid social field.

## **1.7. Thesis Structure**

This thesis comprises of eight chapters. As is already clear chapter one introduces the central arguments and cases, reviews current literature and sketches the methodology used.

Chapter two comprises of a predominantly quantitative analysis of the changing nature of distribution between Africans and coloureds in the Western Cape within both the labour market and by the state (in welfare and housing). It draws out the main cleavages within and between the black

communities in Cape Town which are later shown to correspond to differing responses to discrimination. It shows how under apartheid poorer and less skilled coloureds did receive benefits from their position within apartheid's discriminatory hierarchy, but that these benefits became increasingly eroded from the mid-1980s. In contrast it demonstrates that better educated coloureds experienced an artificial ceiling on advancement under apartheid which has slowly disintegrated with its abolition. With regards to the city's African population it shows how educated Africans were subject to a similar artificial ceiling to coloureds, which also eroded as state policy deracialised. It also reveals the complex relationship between poorer Africans and the state, which led people to receive some benefits from their urban insider status under apartheid. Post-apartheid, however, the erosion of these limited benefits is seen to have been more offset by the broader deracialisation of service provision.

The thesis then discusses and explains activism chronologically in the two case studies between 1976 and 2006. Chapter three deals with the unrest of 1976. It shows how in Cape Town 1976 was a reaction to an opening of political space caused by the outbreak of unrest in Soweto that resonated amongst the city's student population. However, it remained at heart a student movement driven by collective experiences within the schoolyard that did not chime with broader black society which was integrated into relationships with apartheid that discouraged protest.

Chapter four is crucial in underpinning one of the central views of this thesis – that whilst political opportunities are important for action, in the absence of widely felt structural contradictions action cannot emerge simply because there is political space. Specifically, it shows how during the early 1980s activists, particularly in the coloured communities, put considerable efforts into building organisation and providing space for people to articulate opposition. However, in the absence of commonly experienced

structural grievances these activists were unable sustain organisation and activism and whilst the public displays of support for progressive organisations during this time were impressive, the depth of this support was limited.

Chapter five then examines the unrest period of 1985/6. It locates the emergence of protest within a similar dynamic to that of 1976 – the opening of political space as a result of protest elsewhere. However, unlike 1976 growing recession is shown to have created a two tier response. Young educated blacks, both coloured and African, became drawn into protest because of the continued restrictions placed on their advancement within the labour market. However, less educated youths were also drawn into revolt as even the limited opportunities offered by apartheid began to collapse with economic recession and mass unemployment.

Chapter six then examines the transition from apartheid between 1988 and 1994. It looks specifically at how different groups reacted to this transition – African students, civic associations, the radical youth, coloured activists and the coloured population more generally. It shows how class cleavages that had conditioned different responses during the struggle against apartheid conditioned differing responses to the opening of political space that accompanied the unbanning of the African political movements and how these different reactions reflected not only the new political opportunities but also more deep rooted class interests.

Chapter seven looks at activism post-apartheid and shows how continuity and change within local distributional relationships have continued to define popular reactions to the state and politicians. It shows how coloured support for the National Party, the previous party of apartheid, depends not on simple racism but the impact that deracialisation has had on the distribution of scarce resources and the intersection of this with apartheid era identities. Similarly, it shows how support for the ANC in

the African communities relies upon the way in which the political system allows for the distribution of resources on the grounds of political loyalty. The thesis concludes with chapter eight that draws together the key themes, comparisons and conclusions across the whole time period.

# Chapter Two

## Apartheid Policy, Structural Transformation and the Shifting Contours of Differential Discrimination (1948 to 2006)

### 2.1. Introduction: Race and Class in South Africa

The central plank of National Party (NP) policy when it won the 1948 election was racial separateness, or 'apartheid'. Over the next two decades legislation was introduced transforming this loosely defined concept into a system of regulation in which someone's racial group, as defined through legislation, became central to their life chances and choices. This included regulating where people could live, who they could marry, what jobs they could do and for what wage.

Two interpretations dominated early discussions of the purpose of apartheid which can be crudely defined as the 'race' and 'class' positions. Race interpretations saw apartheid as a system of racial privilege which restricted the free market and damaged economic growth.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, class positions saw apartheid as beneficial (if not vital) to the growth of capitalism in the country as a result of the downward pressure coercion and the migrant labour system placed on wages.<sup>2</sup>

However, neither the pure race or class interpretations provided a complete explanation of the functioning of apartheid. The interpretation of apartheid as a cheap labour system homogenised the African experience and did not investigate

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<sup>1</sup> Horwitz, R, The Political Economy of South Africa, (London, 1967); Houghton, D H, The South African Economy, (London & N.Y., 1967)

<sup>2</sup> Wolpe, H, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy Society*, 1/4, 1972, pp.425-456; Legassick, M, 'South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence', *Economy and Society*, 3/3, 1974, pp.253-291; Legassick, M 'Legislation, Ideology and Economy in post-1948 South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1/1, 1974, pp.5-35



internal differentiation which emerged from the right of some, but not all, Africans to reside in the cities on a semi-permanent basis.<sup>3</sup> These texts were also quiet on the position of coloured and Indian South Africans who were granted an intermediate status under apartheid.

Consequently re-evaluations of the relationship between race and class, and between racial exploitation and discrimination began to emerge. During the mid 1970s several studies investigated the position of coloureds and how they benefited and suffered from discriminatory legislation.<sup>4</sup> However, possibly because of the radicalisation of scholarship following the Soweto uprisings and the fact that some studies suggested coloureds were receiving benefits from their position under apartheid little research in this field was subsequently produced.<sup>5</sup> The position of Africans was also re-examined. Hindson showed how apartheid, despite its rhetoric, actually produced an African working class highly differentiated by its access to urban labour markets.<sup>6</sup> Posel added further weight to the view of apartheid as a complex system of intertwined relations, rather than a dichotomous system of race discrimination, when she showed how the final shape of apartheid was actually the outcome of considerable conflict in which resistance by Africans and employers was as significant as any apartheid grand plan.<sup>7</sup>

Acknowledging that under apartheid race and class were not codetermining and that apartheid institutionalised cleavages within as well as between racial groups leads to two questions. Firstly, how were different non-white groups disadvantaged and advantaged under apartheid? Secondly, how did the ending of

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<sup>3</sup> Hindson, D, Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat, (Johannesburg, 1987)

<sup>4</sup> For example see the collection of essays in (eds.) Van de Merwe, H W, & Groenwald, C J, Occupational and Social Change Among Coloured People in South Africa: Proceedings of a Workshop of the Centre for Intergroup Studies at the University of Cape Town, (Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, 1976)

<sup>5</sup> The government did commission a major study of the coloured population of South Africa which reported right at the start of the period under consideration in these case studies. See: SAIRR, The Theron Commission Report : a Summary of the Findings and Recommendations of the Commission of Enquiry into Matters Relating to the Coloured Population Group, (Johannesburg, 1976)

<sup>6</sup> Hindson, D, Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat, (Johannesburg, 1987)

<sup>7</sup> Posel, D, The Making of Apartheid: Conflict and Compromise, (Oxford, 1991); Posel, D, 'Rethinking the Race-Class Debate in South African Historiography', *Social Dynamics*, 9/1, 1983, pp.50-66

apartheid impact upon these non-white South groups? In line with the focus of this thesis, this chapter seeks to answer these questions for Africans and coloureds living in the Western Cape by examining changing state policy and its interaction with economic transformation between 1948 and 2006 in the two key areas of welfare provision and the labour market.

Through its analysis it builds up a picture of 'differential discrimination' operating along three axes. Firstly, race played a key role in determining people's access to the labour market and citizenship benefits, such as welfare. Whites got more than coloureds, who got more than Africans. Secondly, whilst apartheid was predicated upon racial classification Africans with the right to remain semi-permanently in the cities had greater access to the labour market and welfare than Africans resident in the homelands who could only work in the cities as migrant labourers. Finally, the impact of racial discrimination was also mediated by class and educational cleavages. To present a simplified picture, the ordering of people by race, rather than ability, meant that for black South Africans who were most educated and most able apartheid created a ceiling beyond which they could not advance, as to do so would lead them into competition with the less educated and less able members of the racial group above them. Conversely, for blacks who were the least educated or lacking skills, apartheid functioned to protect them from competition from those classified below them.

Post-apartheid the removal of racially discriminatory legislation has unsurprisingly seen a shift from race to class as the basis for distribution. The impact of this has been to remove the ceilings at the top and bottom of apartheid's race categories. This has seen blacks with skills and education experience rapidly rising standards of living as the ceilings have been removed, but it has also seen negative impacts amongst those blacks who were protected by apartheid discrimination.

To demonstrate these arguments this chapter starts by examining the nature of discrimination in law since 1948. It then moves on to examine the position of

Western Cape Africans and coloureds within the labour market since the 1970s and finishes with a discussion of how the distribution of state transfers in terms of housing and welfare grants has changed. A range of primary and secondary sources have been used to develop the analysis in the chapter. For more details on the methodology and strengths and weaknesses of these sources see appendix A.

## **2.2. Restrictions, Reform and Abolition: The Changing Contours of Racial Policy in South Africa 1948-2006**

In 1948 the National Party did not have a clear plan of how to implement apartheid. However, by the late 1950s legislation had been introduced which had created one of the most racially segregated states in the world. Central to apartheid was the physical segregation of individuals and the differential granting of rights on the basis of race. In 1950 the government passed the Population Registration Act which provided for the classification of all South Africans into 1 of 4 racial groups: whites, Indians, Africans and coloureds. In the same year the Group Areas Act (GAA) was also passed, supplemented in 1955 by the Group Areas Development Act. These divided South Africa into racially exclusive spaces for occupation by the different population groups and allowed for the expropriation of land and forced removal of individuals to make this possible. This racial patterning of physical space was crucial for apartheid as it would have been impossible to implement many of apartheid's broader policies, such as segregated services, if communities were racially integrated.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst the GAA had the potential to apply to Africans, African urban residency was controlled by other legislation which built on policy predating the

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<sup>8</sup> Robinson, J, The Power of Apartheid: State Power and Space in South African Cities, (Oxford, 1996), p.1; Western, J, Outcast Cape Town, (London, 1981), p.93

Second World War. In 1921 Colonel Stallard summed up the government's position on urban Africans, which was also to form a central plank of apartheid thinking:

The native should only be allowed to enter the urban areas, that are essentially the White Man's creation, when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the White man and should depart therefrom when he ceases to minister.<sup>9</sup>

Before 1948 this policy had been pursued by the provision of rural reserves for Africans and had been only partially enforced. However, in power the NP transformed the reserves through their homelands policy. This policy stipulated that the reserves were to become ethnically defined self-governing territories and all Africans were to become citizens not of South Africa, but of their designated homeland. Conversely, all Africans in white South Africa were to become temporary, without permanent residency rights.

In 1955 the government expanded the 1945 Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act to African women, bringing all Africans under the pass system. This linked the right to reside in towns directly to employment and was policed by a system of passes, the possession of which was necessary to avoid removal to the rural areas. Africans were also denied the right to own property outside the homelands. Consequently, until the late 1970s, nearly all urban African housing was provided by the state and African areas were under the direct administration of local agencies of the central state.<sup>10</sup>

Apartheid also restated racial divisions within the labour market. Job reservation and the 'colour bar', which reserved specific occupations for whites, had been challenged during the boom years of the Second World War. However once in power the NP reaffirmed its commitment to these policies and issued a series of job reservation determinations in the manufacturing industry. At the same time laws such as the 1953 Industrial Conciliation Act were introduced. This made strikes by

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Western, J, Outcast Cape Town...., p.290

<sup>10</sup> McCarthy, J, 'Local and Regional Government: from Rigidity to crisis to flux', in (ed.) Smith, D M, The Apartheid City and Beyond: Urbanization and Social Change in South Africa, (London & N.Y. 1992), p.27

Africans illegal and limited their workplace representation to works councils, rather than trade unions.

Although apartheid ensured the predominance of whites within South Africa's political and economic life, legislation also differentiated within and between South Africa's black groups. Unlike Africans, coloureds and Indians were recognised as permanent urban dwellers and were not subject to the same restrictions in the urban areas. They were also allowed to move freely and own property, although only within those areas defined by the GAA. Coloureds and Indians could also occupy higher positions within the labour market than Africans, were allowed to organise in trade unions and were granted, albeit at a lower level than whites, access to resources such as pensions and welfare grants. Spending on coloured and Indian education was higher than on Africans, although lower than whites.<sup>11</sup>

Apartheid also discriminated within non-white groups, specifically the African population. Whilst all Africans were considered temporary urban residents, in practice legislation created clear distinctions between urban insiders and outsiders. Under section 10 of the 1945 Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act Africans were granted rights to permanent urban residence in certain circumstances. These became known as section 10 rights. These rights allowed for permanent residence in urban areas for people who: a) had lived in a specific urban area since birth; b) had worked continuously in the urban area for one employer for 10 years, or several employers for 15 years; and c) the wives or children under 18 of those qualifying under a) and b). All other Africans' rights to urban residence were heavily curtailed. Those working as migrant labourers were granted section 10 (d) rights. This permitted them to remain in the urban areas only for as long as they were employed and their families were not permitted to reside with them. All other Africans were only allowed to be in the urban areas for 72 hours at a time. Those

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<sup>11</sup> Seekings, J & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa, (New Haven & London, 2005), p.20; Webster, E, Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries, (Johannesburg, 1985)

caught overstaying this period were liable to arrest, fines and forced relocation to the homelands.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, whilst apartheid applied throughout South Africa, it was within the Western Cape that racial hierarchy found its strictest legislative embodiment. As the only region where Africans were a minority the Western Cape was designated an area of coloured preference. In 1955 the secretary of Native Affairs, Eiselen, outlined the aims of this policy:

Briefly and concisely put our native policy regarding the Western Province aims ultimately at eliminating natives from this region.<sup>13</sup>

The Coloured Labour Preference Policy (CLPP) was adopted in 1955. All businesses in an area to the west of what became known as the Eiselen Line were forbidden from employing Africans unless they could show it was impossible to secure coloured labour for the position. Simultaneously, it was decided no further housing was to be built for Africans and their numbers were to be periodically reduced, until they were removed entirely from the area.<sup>14</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s the South African state put in place a framework of discrimination that became known as 'grand apartheid.' From the mid 1970s this 'grand apartheid' was increasingly challenged by first economic, and later political, dynamics. From 1973 economic growth began to stall. Whilst recession was linked to global factors such as the oil crisis, apartheid itself was beginning to impact negatively. Policies capping the occupational and educational advancement of non-whites caused a growing skills shortage, leading to capital intensification and an

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<sup>12</sup> Unterhalter, E, Forced Removal: The Division, Segregation and Control of the People of South Africa, (London, 1987), p.152

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.67

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.68; Humphries, R., 'Administrative Politics and the Coloured Labour Preference Policy during the 1960s', in (eds.) Wilmot, J G, & Simons, M, The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape, (Cape Town & Johannesburg, 1989), p.173; Beinart, W, 'Recent Occupational Mobility of Coloured People in Cape Town', in (eds.) Van de Merwe, H W & Groenwald, C J, Occupational and Social Change Among Coloured People in South Africa: Proceedings of a Workshop of the Centre for Intergroup Studies at the University of Cape Town, (Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, 1976), p.90

increasing reliance upon semi-skilled workers and machine operators, rather than skilled (white) artisans assisted by unskilled (black) labourers. This limited the efficiency of capital whilst the collapse in demand for unskilled labour led to growing black unemployment and an artificial suppression of internal demand.<sup>15</sup> As the economy began to struggle the government also faced a resurgence of black political opposition following the 1976 Soweto riots. By the mid-1980s politically motivated stayaways, boycotts and unrest had become commonplace.

In response to these changes apartheid policy began to be reformed. In the economy the government relaxed labour market restrictions and sought to tackle the skills shortage. Job reservation became obsolete. There were no declarations made between 1972 and 1976 and by 1984 reservation had been almost completely abolished.<sup>16</sup> This led to the effective 'floating' of the colour bar, as whites were retrained and absorbed into higher paid managerial and supervisory jobs, whilst increasing numbers of non-whites were allowed to undertake semi-skilled work.<sup>17</sup> Training and education was also expanded for non-whites to provide skilled labour for the economy. In 1972 the government removed regulations which had seen spending on African education in the urban areas linked to levels of African taxation. This saw the ratio of African to White educational spending close for the first time since the introduction of Bantu education, from 18:1 in 1971-2 to 15:1 in 1975-6.<sup>18</sup> This was accompanied by the encouragement of vocational training for non-whites, such as when the government in 1976 began to offer 100% tax rebates on training costs for coloureds.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ünterhalter, E, Forced Removal...; Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour under Apartheid, (London, 1997); Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality...

<sup>16</sup> Schlemmer, L, 'The Social and Occupational Mobility in South Africa's Plural Society', in (eds.) Van de Merwe, H W, & Groenwald, C J, Occupational and Social Change ..., p.37; Moll, P, G, 'The Decline of Discrimination Against Colored People in South Africa, 1970 to 1980', *Journal of Development Economics*, 37, 1992, p.294

<sup>17</sup> Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour..., pp.43-8

<sup>18</sup> Hyslop, J, 'State Education Policy and the Social Reproduction of the Urban African Working Class: The Case of the Southern Transvaal 1966-1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14/3, p.469

<sup>19</sup> Moll, P G, 'The Decline of Discrimination...' , p.294

The government's position on influx control also began to be revised. Released in 1979 the Riekert Report reflected the government's economic and political concerns post-Soweto. Riekert argued that the skills shortage could be addressed by tightening influx control to force all Africans without with Section 10 (a) and (b) rights into permanent seasonal employment, whilst allowing those with such rights increased security and leasehold rights within the cities. The ultimate aim of Riekert was the reform of apartheid to provide a residentially and politically stable and prosperous African population which could be trained to fill the increasing number of semi-skilled positions, whilst displacing poverty and unemployment to the homelands.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst some aspects of Riekert were implemented, such as the granting of leasehold rights to Section 10 (a) and (b) Africans – a move which actually predated the report. However Riekert was ultimately abandoned.<sup>21</sup> From 1983 South Africa entered a period of deep recession which saw declining labour recruitment in the rural areas and a corresponding growth in illegal immigration into the cities as people sought employment outside legal recruitment channels. Government struggled to check this immigration and shack settlements mushroomed throughout the country.<sup>22</sup>

The breakdown of effective influx control undermined the enforcement of insider/outsider distinctions and state policy changed again. In September 1984 the government abolished the CLPP and simultaneously extended an earlier policy of granting Africans the right to own property on a 99-year leasehold into the Western Cape.<sup>23</sup> Then, on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1986 influx control was formally abolished. The Restoration of South African Citizenship Act returned South African Citizenship to those South Africans who qualified by virtue of birth, descent or naturalisation and

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<sup>20</sup> Ünterhalter, E, Forced Removal..., p.24 & p.35; Hindson, D, Pass Controls..., pp.83-7

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Mabin, A, 'Dispossession, Exploitation, and Struggle: an Historical Overview of South African urbanisation', in (ed.) Smith, D M, The Apartheid City and Beyond: Urbanization and Social Change in South Africa, (London & N.Y., 1992), p.19

<sup>23</sup> Ünterhalter, E, Forced Removal..., p.129



the Black Communities Development Amendment Act granted Africans full property rights in urban areas. This did not represent a complete liberalisation of apartheid. Separate group areas were maintained and those South Africans who were deemed citizens of the independent homelands were theoretically to be denied access to the urban areas. However, in practice the abolition of the pass system meant many Africans whose presence would have previously been illegal were able to remain in the urban areas.<sup>24</sup>

Then, in 1990, came the beginning of the end of attempts to maintain apartheid in the face of economic decline and political pressure. F.W. DeKlerk announced the unbanning of the African political movements and began the repeal of racially discriminatory laws. This reform was completed after 1994 when the ANC came to power in the country's first democratic elections and introduced many policies to empower previously disadvantaged groups. Welfare spending was equalised, labour market discrimination abolished and residential segregation ended. Service provision has also become increasingly targeted at the poor with the provision of means tested housing subsidies and township upgrading projects. Policies have also been introduced to expand black economic ownership of businesses and encourage the hiring of non-whites.

### **2.3. Shifting Patterns of Discrimination in the South African and Cape Town Labour Market, 1976-2006**

The economic impact of Apartheid on coloureds and Africans and their position in the labour market was complex and mediated by both racially discriminatory legislation and intra group cleavages. For many coloureds (particularly manual workers in the urban areas) the apartheid period, at least until the early 1980s,

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<sup>24</sup> Oliver-Evans, C, Employment and Urbanisation: The Abolition of Influx Control in the Western Cape, SALDRU working paper no.84, (Cape Town, 1993), p.13

represented a growth in prosperity and access to new occupations, whilst racial discrimination provided artificial protection from African competition. Conversely, the erosion of directly discriminatory policies coincided with a decline in economic fortunes, as competition and recession accompanied falling wages and growing unemployment. However, there were also many coloureds disadvantaged by apartheid and its privileging of whites. For these coloureds, particularly the growing number of students leaving school with matric certificates or gaining degrees at university, apartheid placed an artificial ceiling upon achievement. For this group the erosion of discrimination was therefore experienced very differently as a time of rising opportunities.

African labour market outcomes were also patterned by race and class. Under apartheid coloureds (and Indians) tended to monopolise new occupational opportunities, a pattern enhanced in the Western Cape by the CLPP. However, the growing skills shortage did see urban Africans experience access to new occupations and wage growth, whilst Africans with section 10 rights were protected by apartheid's displacement of unemployment into the homelands. However, as with coloureds, those Africans with higher levels of education were prevented from competing for more skilled posts. The removal of discrimination from the mid-1980s also had a mixed impact. Levels of unemployment began to accelerate, including amongst urban insiders. However occupational mobility also expanded and those Africans in work, particularly those with high education levels, could move into higher paid jobs.

### **2.3.1. Expanding Opportunities beneath the Race Ceiling: the Coloured Labour Market before 1984**

Within apartheid ideology it was coloureds (and Indians) who were best placed to benefit from the skills shortage that emerged with rapid economic growth before the

mid-1970s as they moved into new occupations ahead of Africans.<sup>25</sup> These growing opportunities led to three significant changes for coloureds before the mid-1980s. Firstly, coloureds increasingly moved into semi-skilled, skilled and artisanal professions and away from unskilled occupations. Secondly, because of this upward mobility and general skills shortage, coloureds experienced high wage growth. Finally, the demand for skilled and semi-skilled labour and the privileging of coloureds over Africans led to relatively low levels of coloured unemployment. More generally, however coloureds still had relatively low incomes and for those coloureds with higher levels of education the opening of new opportunities did not remove the clear barriers for their participation in the labour market at a level commensurate with their skills.

Whereas under early apartheid artisanal positions were reserved almost wholly for whites, during the 1960s and 1970s coloureds began to form an increasing percentage of the skilled workforce. By 1975, 41% of construction artisans and 13% of all manufacturing artisans were coloured.<sup>26</sup> This was even more pronounced in Cape Town where, in 1974, coloureds outnumbered whites in many training positions for skilled trades within the city (table 2.1).

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<sup>25</sup> Schlemmer, L, 'The Social and Occupational Mobility...', p 39

<sup>26</sup> Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour...,p.39

Table 2.1: Number of apprentices by Industry in Cape Town 25.7.1974 <sup>27</sup>				
Industry	Coloureds	Whites	Coloured % of apprentices	Total
Building	1656	175	90	1831
Furniture	216	5	98	221
Motor	296	828	26	1124
Metal Engineering	471	705	40	1176
Jewellery & Goldsmith	19	5	79	24
Hairdressing	-	106	0	106

This process also occurred in semi-skilled and white collar positions. Whilst the number of coloureds in unskilled positions between 1965 and 1985 barely changed, the number of coloureds in semi-skilled and artisanal jobs doubled and in semi-professional and white collar jobs the numbers tripled.<sup>28</sup> These changes are confirmed in a study by Moll which showed how coloureds had moved from predominantly unskilled occupations in 1960 to predominantly semi-skilled positions in 1980, whilst the percentage of coloureds in the higher occupational grades had also expanded (table 2.2).

<sup>27</sup> Data taken from: Van der Horst, 'Statutory and Administrative Measures...', p.151

<sup>28</sup> See tables in Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour..., p.141-151 & Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality..., pp.100-101

<b>Occupation (%)</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>
Managerial and Professional	0.1	3	6
Technical and supervisory	0.4	1	3
Sales	1	4	3
Clerical	2	7	6
Service	7	5	4
Craft, Operator	20	30	37
Transport Operator	5	5	8
Labourer	66	44	33
Total	100	100	100

Coloured women also saw expanded occupational opportunities at this time, with many moving out of unskilled employment, such as domestic service, into semi-skilled manufacturing jobs.<sup>30</sup>

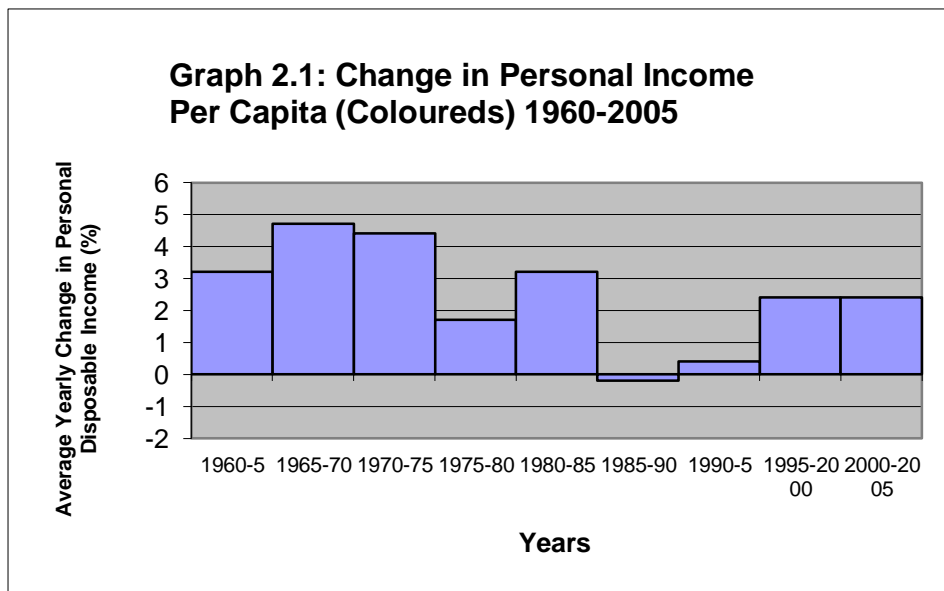
Alongside occupational advancement, coloureds also saw income growth and relatively low unemployment. During the 1960s, whilst starting at a low level, the wages of coloureds rose at 4.6% per annum. This was the largest expansion of wages of any racial group and saw the wage gap between coloureds and whites decline.<sup>31</sup> Despite a slight dip during the late 1970s, as a result of recession, personal income per capita for coloureds continued to grow until the mid 1980s (graph 2.1).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Moll, P, G, 'The Decline of Discrimination...', p.291

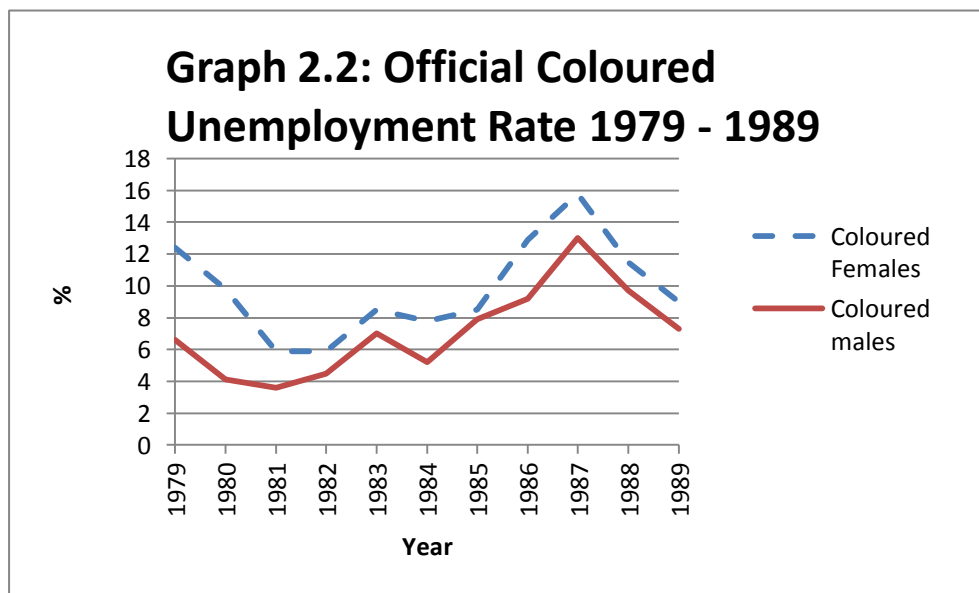
<sup>30</sup> Beinart, W, 'Recent Occupational...', p.88

<sup>31</sup> Thomas, WH, 'Socio-Economic Development of the Coloured People', in (eds.) Van de Merwe, H W, & Groenwald, C J, Occupational and Social Change..., p.59; Lemon, A, Apartheid: A Geography of Segregation, (Farborough, 1976), p.134; Webster, E, Cast in a racial mould, p.166

<sup>32</sup> Based on data from: Van Wyk, H de J, National Personal Income of South Africans by Population Group, Income Group, Life Stage and Lifeline 1960-2007, Bureau of Market Research, UNISA, Research Report 333, (Pretoria, 2004), p.30



Before the 1980s coloured unemployment was also low. The 1970 population census registered coloured unemployment of only 1.7% and unemployment, particularly for coloured men, remained relatively low compared to later trends until the mid 1980s (graph 2.2).<sup>33</sup>



<sup>33</sup> South African Population Census, 1970. Data for graph taken from: South African Central Statistics Service, South African Statistics, (Pretoria, 1995)

These relatively low unemployment rates appear to be linked to apartheid policies which encouraged the hiring of coloureds. Lemon points to the fact that as a result of the CLPP between 1962 and 1973 the number of coloureds that were employed by South Africa's state departments and municipalities increased by 82%. He also showed that in Cape Town the share of non-white private sector jobs taken by coloureds increased from 77% in 1962 to 82% in 1973 and that in manufacturing coloureds comprised 95% of the entire workforce.<sup>34</sup> Coloured unemployment was also reduced by large scale government employment within the Department of Coloured Affairs and by the fact that the growing number of skilled and educated coloured youths being produced by an expanding education system was being absorbed by a still growing economy. The overall role of the state in keeping unemployment low was such that in 1976 Beinart concluded that:

It would seem that the government is using the public sector to minimise coloured unemployment in the same way it was used, and is still being used, to protect unskilled whites.<sup>35</sup>

However, whilst coloureds saw occupational and wage advancement before the 1980s, this did not mean discrimination was nonexistent. In general wages remained low. In 1970 4/5<sup>ths</sup> of coloureds had incomes below the poverty datum line for sole earners of multiple households.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, a study in 1980 of income levels amongst coloured households in eight areas around Cape Town found up to half of coloured families earned under the minimum household subsistence level.<sup>37</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> Lemon, A, Apartheid: A Geography..., p.133

<sup>35</sup> Beinart, W, 'Recent Occupational Mobility...' p.97. See also, p.106

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, W, H, 'Socio-Economic Development of the Coloured People', in (eds.) Van de Merwe, H, W, & Groenwald, C, J, Occupational and Social Change Among Coloured People in South Africa: Proceedings of a Workshop of the Centre for Intergroup Studies at the University of Cape Town, (Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, 1976), p.59; Lemon, A, Apartheid: A Geography of Segregation..., p.134

<sup>37</sup> Dewar, D & Watson, V, Public Housing Rents: Some Issues, UPRU Working Paper No. 22, (Cape Town, 1982), p.19

general story for coloureds at this time, therefore, was one improving occupations and wages within an overall context of continuing poverty.

However, not all coloureds had the same experience of apartheid. Those coloureds suffering some of the most significant discrimination were those with the highest levels of education. These coloureds experienced an occupational and wage ceiling through which they were unable to progress because to do so would place them in direct competition with whites. This ceiling was maintained and experienced in several ways. High educational requirements were placed upon coloureds if they wished to move into apprenticeships. The industrial relations mechanisms allowed white trade unions in closed shop agreements to restrict entry of racial groups into their professions. Formal job reservation, whilst limited in the occupations it affected, created an impression amongst employers that certain job grades were to be reserved for whites. Finally, a range of other legislation indirectly created discrimination, such as the demand that separate facilities such as toilets and canteens had to be provided for different racial groups.<sup>38</sup>

The impact of apartheid policies is revealed in the pattern of coloured earnings taken from the 1980 population census (graphs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5).<sup>39</sup> The graphs compare personal income distributions by age and education as reported by working coloureds living in urban areas of the Western Province. When the graphs are compared it can be seen that for all educational groups the youngest age band – those aged 15-24 – earn the lowest wages and the income distribution shifts up the scale for people aged 25-34. For the next age group, those aged 35-44, however, income distribution moves slightly higher for those with less than standard 8 education and considerably higher for those with standard 8 education. However,

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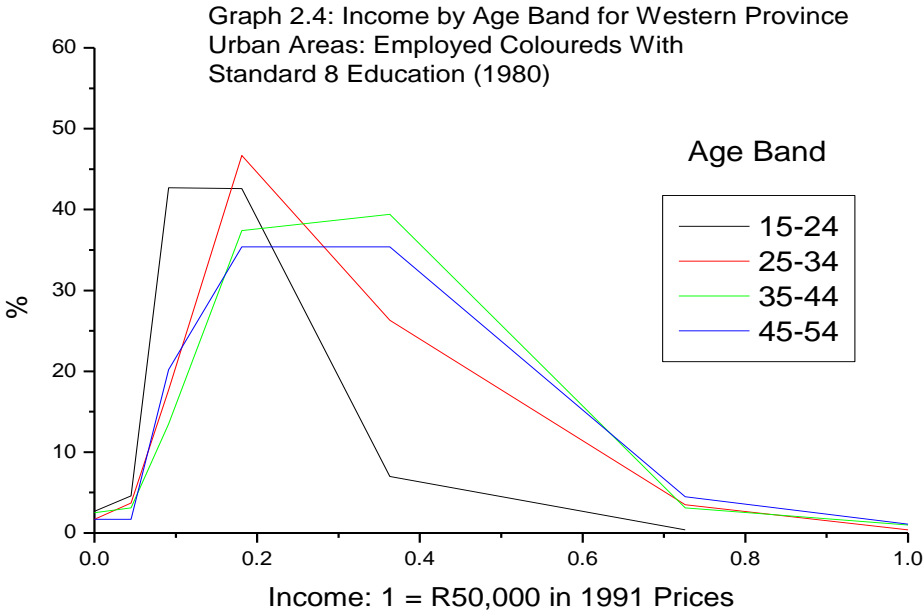
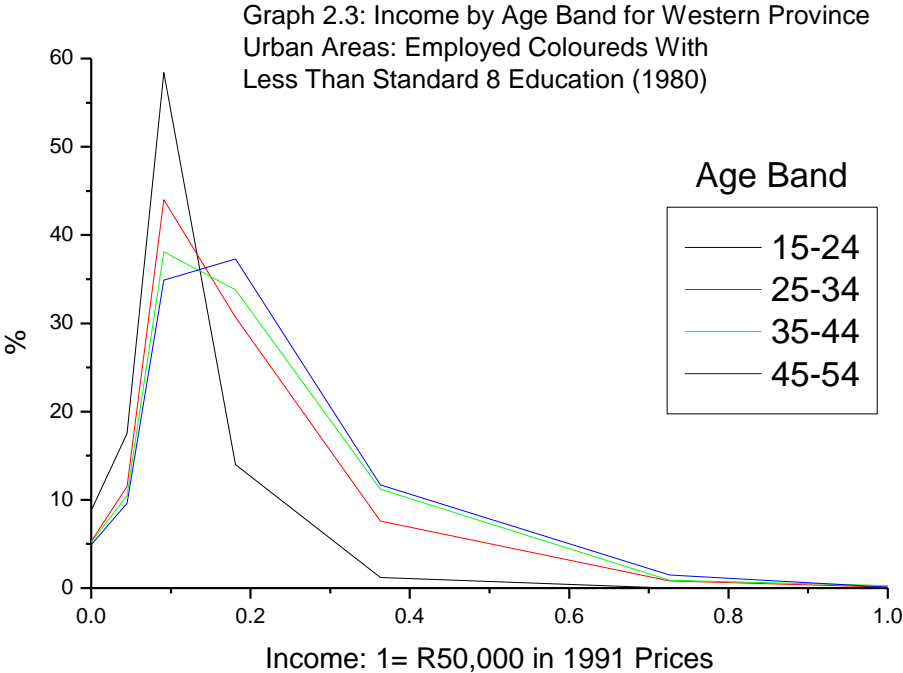
<sup>38</sup> Moll, P, G, 'The Decline of Discrimination...', p.293

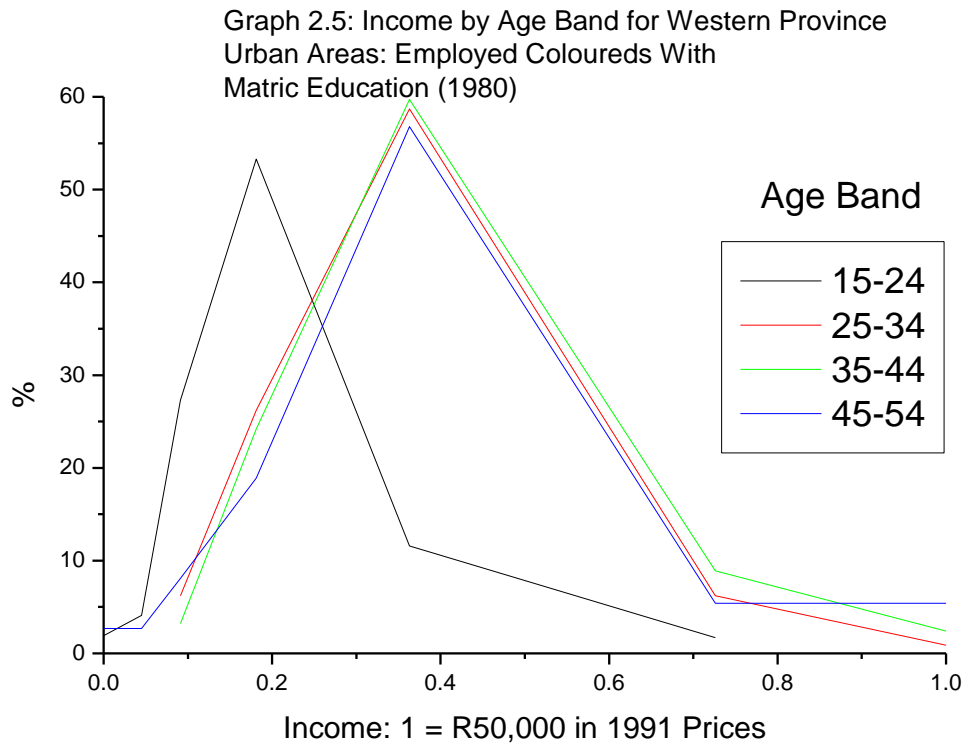
<sup>39</sup> Graphs based on analysis of Census 1980 data for the Western Province area of South Africa. This area is smaller than the present day Western Cape Region and excludes the Southern Cape, but includes Cape Town and its surrounding area (the data collected varies relatively little compared to national income distributions for coloureds).

Only cases where an individual was working and reported an income (including if the reported income was 0) were included for analysis. Because income in the census was provided in bands it has been normalised along a scale of 0-1 with 1 representing all incomes above R50,000 a year in 1991 prices.



for coloureds with matric there is almost no change in income distribution and this is the same for coloureds with matric aged 45-54. The fact that people with matric education saw little increase in earning power after age 24-34, but those with standard 8 did, suggests that there was a wage ceiling through which matric educated coloureds could not progress – they could go so far but further promotions were not possible because these higher paid jobs were reserved for whites. In contrast, for people with standard 8 education the labour market continued to offer opportunities across people’s lifetimes.





Overall, therefore, coloureds had mixed experiences within the apartheid labour market before the mid-1980s. For many wages and opportunities were expanding, in part as a result of apartheid policies. Indeed, the transformation during this time period was such that Moll claimed, not unduly, that between 1970 and 1980 young coloureds had experienced a decline in their overall level of discrimination.<sup>40</sup> However, for coloureds with the highest levels of education apartheid placed clear limits on advancement. The overall experience for coloureds within the labour market before the mid-1980s was, therefore, of simultaneous advancement and curtailment mediated not simply by race, but also education.

<sup>40</sup> Moll, P, G, 'The Decline of Discrimination...', p.305

### **2.3.2. Insiders and Outsiders: the African Labour Market before 1984**

Just as coloureds experienced rising wages and occupational opportunities as the apartheid labour market transformed before 1984, so too did many Africans. However, whereas coloureds were treated as a single group within apartheid, Africans were internally differentiated on the basis of their legal right to remain and work within white South Africa. These internal divisions, alongside differences in education, played a crucial role in determining whether individuals were able to take advantage of the expanding opportunities that the gradual deracialisation of apartheid was offering. Put simply, Africans with Section 10 (a) and (b) rights were better placed than Africans without such rights in apartheid's labour market and, simultaneously, were also protected from having to compete with such Africans for employment. However, like with coloureds, those Africans with higher levels of education were particularly discriminated against.

Due to the expansion in semi-skilled employment and African education in the late 1960s and early 1970s most Africans entering the labour market at this point did so at a time of expanding occupational opportunities and rising real wages.<sup>41</sup> Hindson estimates that between 1969 and 1985 the number of Africans in skilled and semi-skilled positions doubled from 1 to 2 million, making these the numerically superior section of the African working class.<sup>42</sup> These conclusions are supported by Crankshaw, whose study of data collected by the South African manpower surveys reveals that whilst the number of unskilled Africans working in unskilled labouring positions remained relatively constant under apartheid, increasing from 805,411 in 1965 to just 935,762 in 1990, the number of semi-skilled African machine operatives more than doubled from 682,148 to 1,378,416.<sup>43</sup>

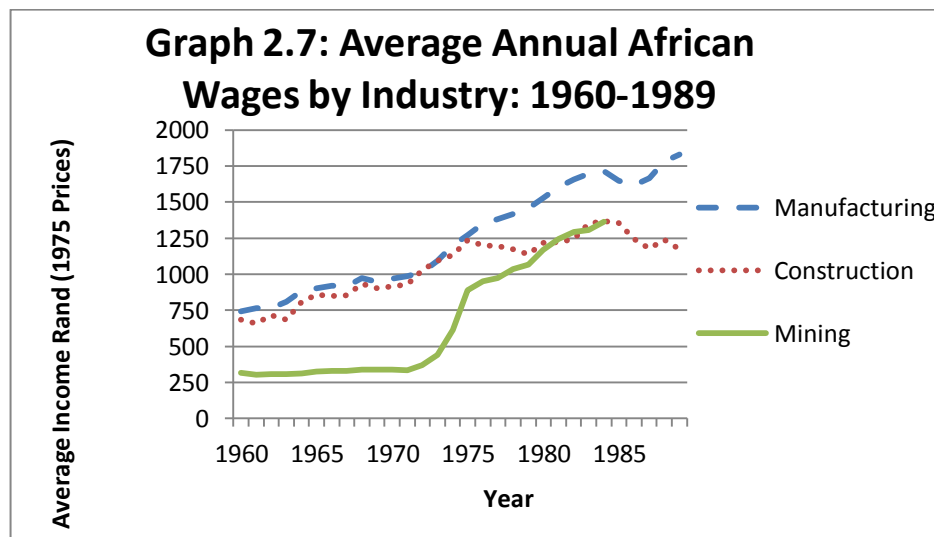
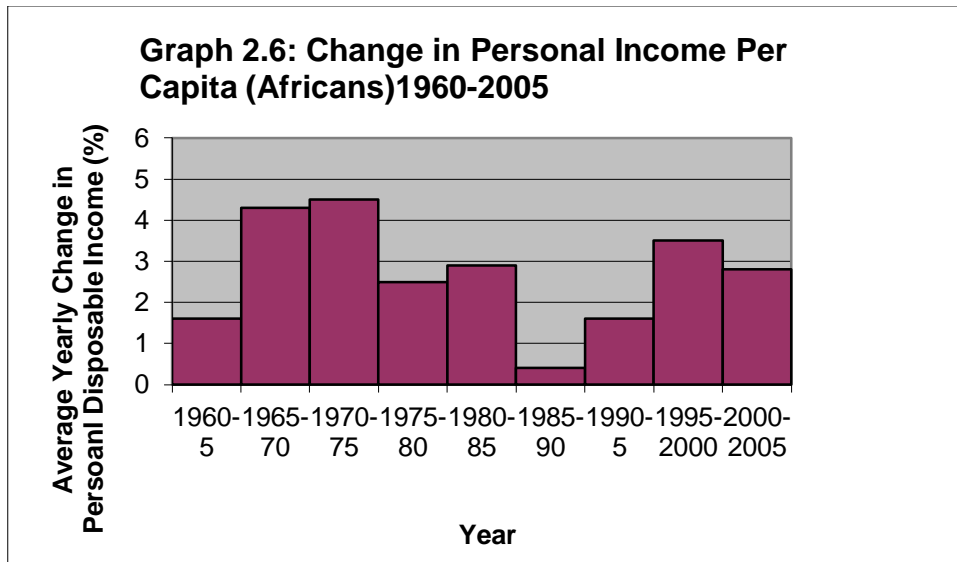
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<sup>41</sup> Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality..., p.106

<sup>42</sup> Hindson, D, 'The Restructuring of Labour Markets in South Africa: 1970s and 1980s', in (ed.), Gelb, S, South Africa's Economic Crisis, (Cape Town, 1991), p.230

<sup>43</sup> Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour..., p.149

Alongside, and in part a result of increased occupational mobility, Africans also saw growing wages and it is estimated that real African wage levels doubled between 1975 and 1982.<sup>44</sup> Whilst the levels of growth were to fall slightly during the recession of the 1980s, particularly in the construction industry, real income for Africans, both per capita and in terms of wages, experienced notable growth throughout the apartheid period (Graphs 2.6 and 2.7).<sup>45</sup>



<sup>44</sup> Jones, S, 'The History of Black Involvement in the South African Economy', in (ed.) Smollan, R, Black Advancement in the South African Economy, (Johannesburg, 1986), p. 16-18

<sup>45</sup> Data for graph 2.6 taken from: Van Wyk, H de J, National Personal Income of South Africans..., p.30. Data for graph 2.7 taken from Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour..., p.167

However, whilst overall Africans experienced increasing wages and occupational advancement this was not uniform. As more opportunities in skilled and semi-skilled work were opening up there was a converse decline in the relative demand for unskilled labour. This led both to rising levels of unemployment and falling wages in unskilled occupations, despite overall wage growth.<sup>46</sup> As Crankshaw argued:

[T]hese dual processes of upward mobility and unemployment did not affect all Africans in the same way. The changing structure of demand meant that unskilled workers were increasingly worse off than more skilled African workers both in terms of unemployment and lower wages.<sup>47</sup>

This growing differentiation interacted with, and compounded, the insider/outsider differentiation created by apartheid. Firstly, urban insiders came to dominate the better jobs within the labour market. Semi-skilled positions needed a more educated and stable workforce and as urbanised Africans were not liable to removal to the rural areas they came to be preferred in the new semi-skilled jobs.<sup>48</sup> Because Africans with section 10 rights were allowed to remain in urban areas, even without employment, they were also able to avoid the worst occupations and could seek out better wages and working conditions. Examining the findings of the Riekert Commission and research undertaken by management in the metal industry, Webster suggested that urban Africans in the late 1970s and early 1980s avoided certain jobs, particularly the most arduous manual work.<sup>49</sup> Conversely migrants, whose urban residence depended upon their possession of employment, were willing to do poorly paid and unpleasant jobs to gain access to wages unavailable back home.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality..., p.160. It is worth noting that from the early 1980s unskilled wages began to rise again as the new trade unions started to have an impact upon wage levels.

<sup>47</sup> Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour..., p.95

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.110

<sup>49</sup> Webster, E, Cast in a Racial Mould..., p.204

<sup>50</sup> Possel, D, 'Curbing African Urbanisation in the 1950s and 1960s', in (eds.) Swilling, M., Humphries R, & Shubane, K, Apartheid City in Transition, (Cape Town, 1991), pp.23-4

Secondly, unemployment was displaced to the homelands as migrants were dismissed before urban Africans. This also reduced competition for employment and therefore the downward pressure that would have occurred on their wages had a free labour market existed.<sup>51</sup> This benefit for insider Africans was recognised by Natrass and Seekings who noted that:

Late in the apartheid era, deracialisation meant that the growing urban black population became the partial beneficiaries of a distributional regime premised on the social exclusion of large number of unemployed people in rural areas.<sup>52</sup>

However, just as with the coloured population, whilst Africans saw rising incomes and job mobility before the mid-1980s, to characterise this as a positive experience even for Section 10 (a) & (b) Africans would be excessive. Putting aside the political and social discrimination Africans experienced, wage rises and occupational mobility took place from a very low starting point. Furthermore, whilst there was some advancement as strict job reservation was dismantled, apartheid continued to severely limit the occupations Africans could undertake. Indeed, for Africans this discrimination placed a lower ceiling on advancement than it did for coloureds. For example, Crankshaw notes that whilst between 1965 and 1975 Africans moved into semi-skilled positions, very few were able to move into artisan positions.<sup>53</sup>

Overall, therefore, those Africans granted section 10 rights were put in an advantageous position compared to other Africans as influx control, the growing demand for more skilled labour and rising unemployment all made it increasingly difficult for non-urban Africans to gain access to the urban labour markets. However, even for Africans with Section 10 rights this advantage placed them below the other racial groups, with coloureds and Indians moving into many of the more skilled positions and whites still experiencing considerable advantage.

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<sup>51</sup> Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality..., pp,139-4

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.164

<sup>53</sup> Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour... p.39

Whilst Africans throughout South Africa experienced considerable discrimination at this time, apartheid policies in the Western Cape disadvantaged Africans more than elsewhere and their experiences within the labour market before 1984 were therefore different to those in the rest of the country. The CLPP provided few opportunities beyond unskilled work for Africans, even those with education or Section 10 rights. Consequently there was no clear divide between urban and rural Africans in the labour market. However, because unemployment affected migrant labourers before Africans with Section 10 rights, insider Africans were insulated from rising unemployment before the mid-1980s in a way they would not have been had there been a free labour market.

Hubbard's study of the Cape Town labour market presents a range of evidence to suggest Africans in the city were not experiencing the expanding opportunities of elsewhere. Surveys of employers revealed that the CLPP caused problems for employers seeking to recruit and promote Africans; many Africans with standard 8 education were being employed in unskilled positions where their education was not used; and opportunities for upward occupational mobility were restricted, primarily limited to the teaching professions.<sup>54</sup> This picture was confirmed in Goldin's study of 20 medium and large employers in the Western Cape, employing between them approximately 22,000 workers. He showed how, in comparison to the picture nationwide, the vast majority of Western Cape Africans were still employed in unskilled positions (table 2.3).

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<sup>54</sup> Hubbard, cited in Beinart, W, 'Recent Occupational Mobility', p.93

	Unskilled	Semi-Skilled	Skilled	Managerial
<b>Africans</b>	87 %	7 %	6 %	-
<b>Coloureds</b>	25 %	54 %	18 %	3 %
<b>Whites</b>	-	22 %	33 %	45 %

This interpretation is supported by data from the 1980 census (graphs 2.8 and 2.9).<sup>56</sup> In 1980 Africans with standard 8 education had an earnings distribution that was slightly higher than Africans with less than standard 8 education. However wages were still low, concentrated at the bottom of the wage band. Equally, whilst the wages do move up for the older age bands, this movement is relatively limited across the age range and is most notable between 15-24 and 25-34 and is less notable between ages 25-34 and 35-44. This suggests that for Africans with Standard 8 education, like for coloureds with matric, there was a wage ceiling that was reached early in life and beyond this there was little opportunity for advancement.

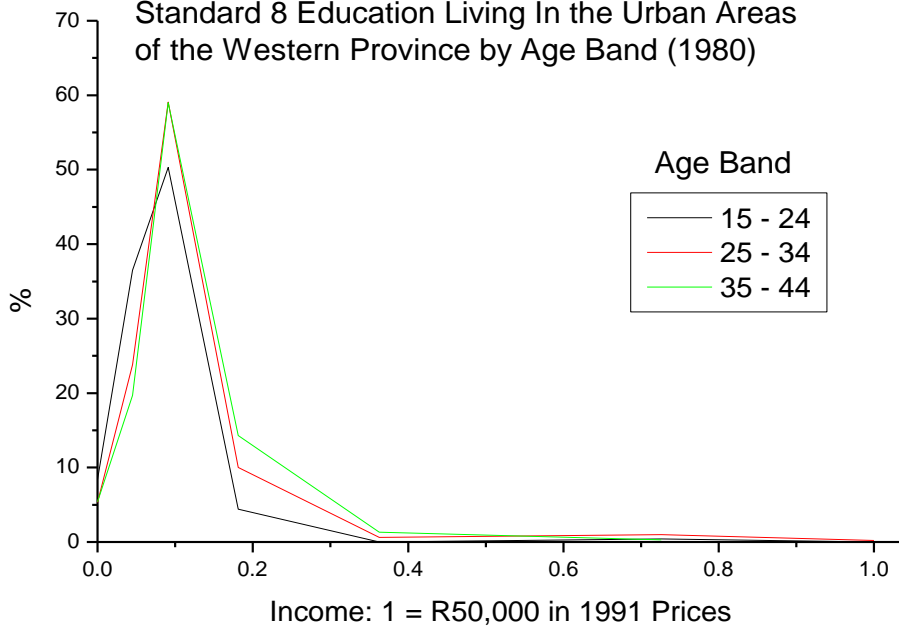
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<sup>55</sup> Goldin, I, The Poverty of Coloured Labour Preference: Economics and Ideology in the Western Cape, SALDRU Working Paper no.59, (Cape Town, 1984), p.46. These figures were confirmed by a survey of African Cape Town township residents in which 82.5% of people in employment reported working in unskilled work: Ibid., p.65

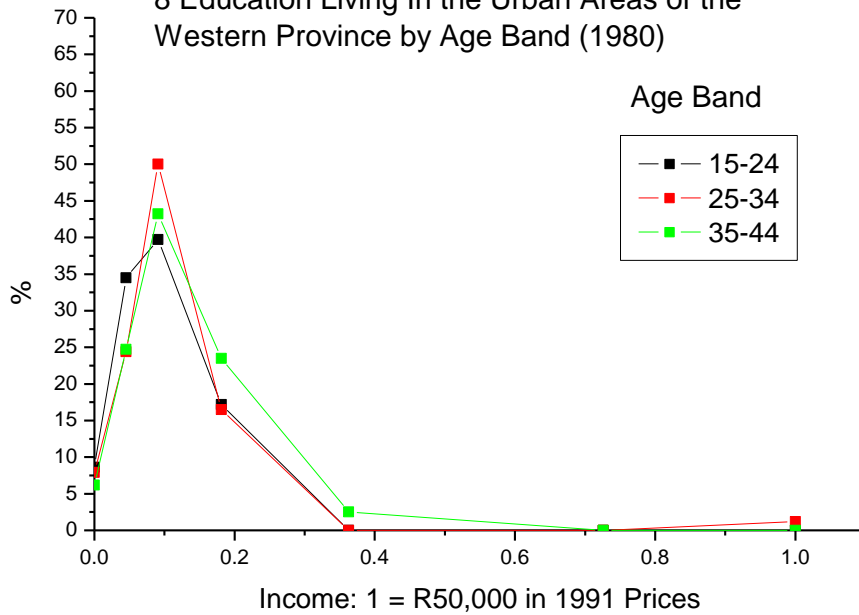
<sup>56</sup> Graphs based on analysis of Census 1980 data for the Western Province area of South Africa. This area is smaller than the present day Western Cape Region and excludes the Southern Cape, but includes Cape Town and its surrounding area. Only cases where an individual was working and reported an income (including if the reported income was 0) were included for analysis. Because income in the census was provided in bands it has therefore been normalised along a scale of 0-1 with 1 representing all incomes above R50,000 a year in 1991 prices.



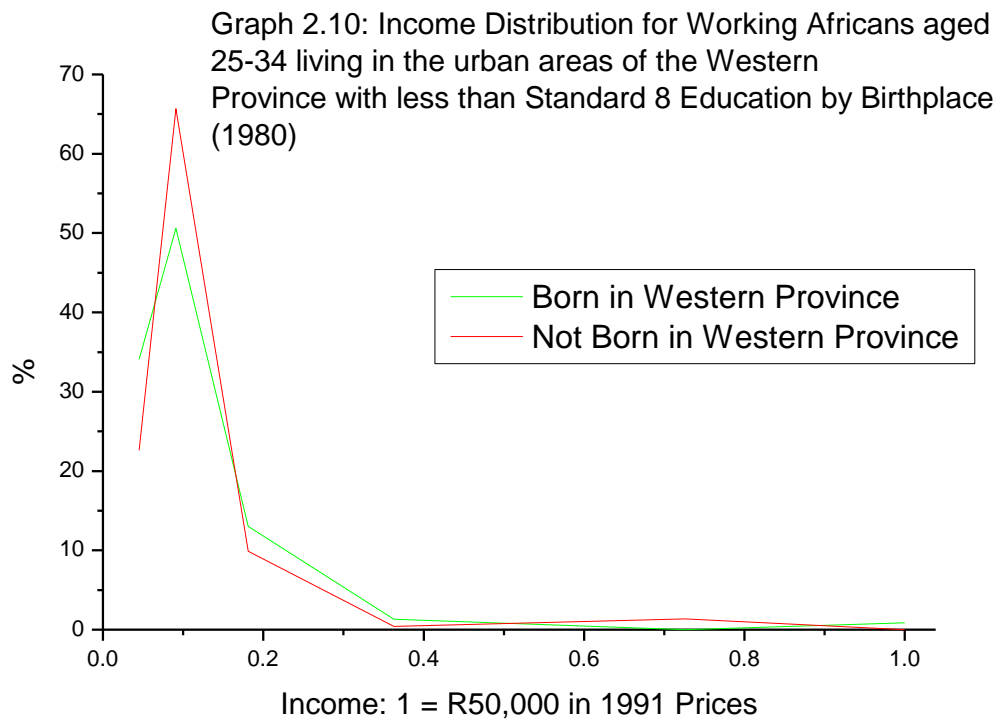
Graph 2.8: Income Distribution of Africans With Less than Standard 8 Education Living In the Urban Areas of the Western Province by Age Band (1980)



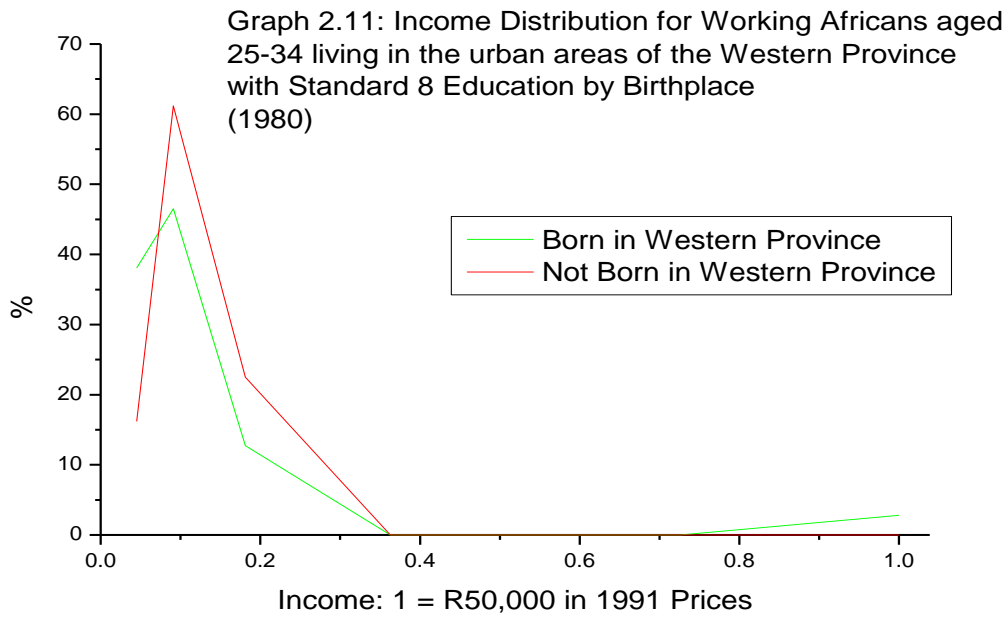
Graph 2.9: Income Distribution of Africans With Standard 8 Education Living In the Urban Areas of the Western Province by Age Band (1980)



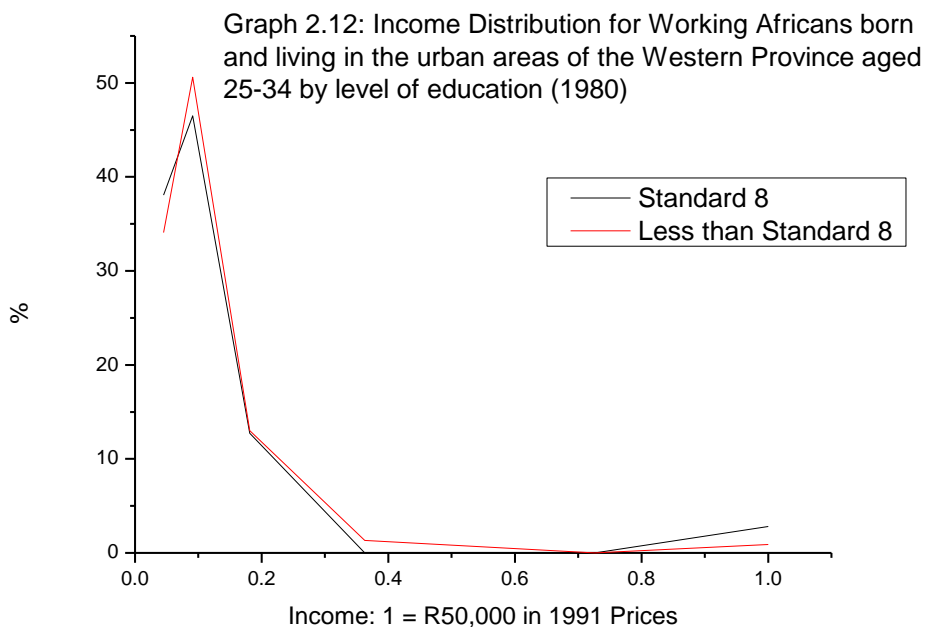
Interestingly, in the Western Cape, insider status appears to have done little to mediate the impact of labour market discrimination as section 10 rights had little impact upon wages for Africans. The graphs below (2.10 and 2.11) show the different income distributions of employed Africans who reported an income over R0 in the Western Province region of South Africa for Africans aged 25-34 depending upon birthplace. Whilst this is not an exact substitute for section 10 rights, nearly all Africans born in the Western province would have qualified for such rights, whilst few younger Africans born elsewhere would have done so.<sup>57</sup> These graphs are interesting because they show Africans born within the Western Province, regardless of education, were more likely to be on low wages than those born outside the province.



<sup>57</sup> This group has been used for comparison because the oldest African in this age group would have been born after the introduction of influx control and the CLPP in 1955. For these Africans, therefore, it would have been very unlikely that they could have qualified for section 10 rights unless they were born within Cape Town.



Furthermore, education also appears to have almost no impact on the incomes of people born and working in the Western Province (graph 2.12) as the wage distribution is similar for Africans with, and without, standard 8 education, apart from a slightly higher proportion of Africans with standard 8 education at the top of the distribution.



There is no clear explanation of these phenomena. It is possible that the larger proportion of low wages amongst Africans born in the Western province was as a result of part time work, which migrants would not have been eligible for, or because migrant domestic servants would have lived in the white areas, whilst section 10 domestic servants may have commuted and lived in the townships. However what it does clearly show is that Africans with Section 10 rights in the Western Cape did not experience the same advantages within the labour market as have been noted in national studies, even when they had education. It is not unreasonable to conclude, therefore, that whilst Africans across South Africa experienced a low ceiling on advancement, in the Western Cape this was far lower than elsewhere.

The benefits of Section 10 rights in the Western Cape under apartheid were, therefore, even more limited than elsewhere. However, one area where insider status had some impact was access to employment. Data from the 1980 census shows that unemployment amongst people born and living in the Western province stood at 12.1%. Whilst relatively high, there was almost no competition for work from Africans born outside the province, as unemployment amongst this group was just 1.2%.<sup>58</sup> This suggests a relative success of state policy preventing Africans without section 10 (a) & (b) rights being in the city legally without employment (although it is difficult to assess the extent to which illegal squatting was eroding this). Therefore, whilst this did not result in a low unemployment rate for urban Africans it is possible that had a free labour market existed unemployment could have been higher.<sup>59</sup>

Overall, therefore, Africans in the Western Cape, even with section 10 (a) & (b) rights, benefited little from the changing division of labour under apartheid.

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<sup>58</sup> Data taken from 1980 population census.

<sup>59</sup> It is important to note that using census data at this time to track the fortunes of Africans without section 10 rights is problematic because it is unlikely that Africans illegally present in the area would be willing to present themselves to census enumerators, especially as the common experience of government officials was one of pass rates and forced removals. However, at the very least the data shows that unemployed Africans without Section 10 rights could only be in the city illegally and therefore protection did exist against competition from those without Section 10 rights.

Although increasing numbers of semi-skilled occupations were opening up in the Western Cape it was coloureds, not Africans, who benefited. Wages remained low, chances for occupational advancement limited and the vast majority of Africans remained employed in unskilled occupations. However, in one respect apartheid still provided some benefit for those Africans who could claim urban residency, for it prevented the presence of unemployed Africans without such rights.

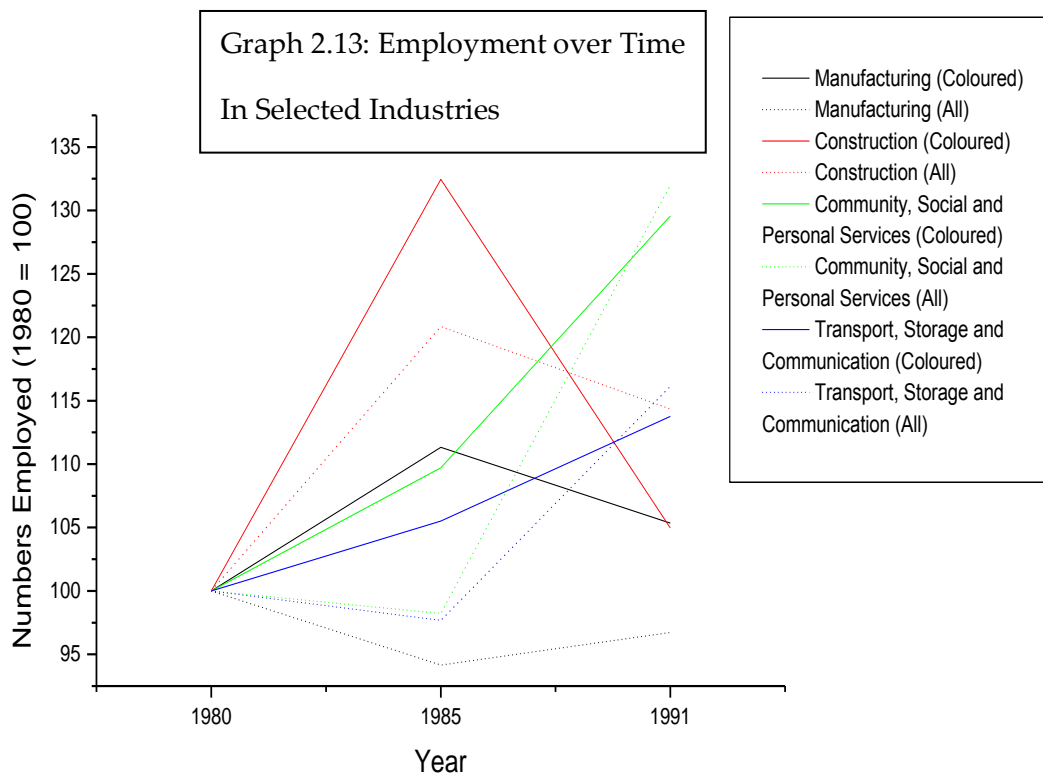
Furthermore, the fact that most Africans in the Western Cape worked in low paying, unskilled positions, would have meant that this protection was particularly valuable, as their lack of skills meant they could be easily replaced with other workers.

### **2.3.3. Deracialisation, Unemployment and Growing Differentiation: the Coloured Labour Force 1984-1990**

In 1984 the CLPP was repealed and in 1986 influx control was abolished. No longer were coloureds guaranteed preferential access to employment and all urban dwellers, coloured and African alike, became exposed to increasing competition from migrants from the rural areas. However, alongside increased competition, this was also a time of expanding opportunities as increasing numbers of occupations became available to non-whites. The impact of this was an inversion of the dynamics of the previous period as people who had been most restricted by apartheid, notably more educated blacks, were able to take advantage of these new opportunities whilst, conversely, those who had benefited from the artificial tightening of the labour supply began to suffer as they were exposed to competition for positions and wages.

Overall coloureds suffered from the removal of discriminatory legislation. The economy entered recession in the early 1980s and employment declined in relative and absolute terms in many industries between 1980 and 1985. Before preference policies were abolished, however, coloureds were protected from this

downturn; after their abolition this protection was removed. Graph 2.13 shows change over time in the total number of coloureds employed in four key industries.<sup>60</sup> In all four industries the absolute numbers of coloureds employed between 1980 and 1985 rose, despite an overall fall in employment in all but one of these industries. Even in construction the rate of employment growth for coloureds outstripped the average. The fact that increasing numbers of coloureds were absorbed into industry at a time when hiring was declining suggests that within the labour market, before 1985, they did not experience the full force of the growing unemployment crisis.<sup>61</sup>

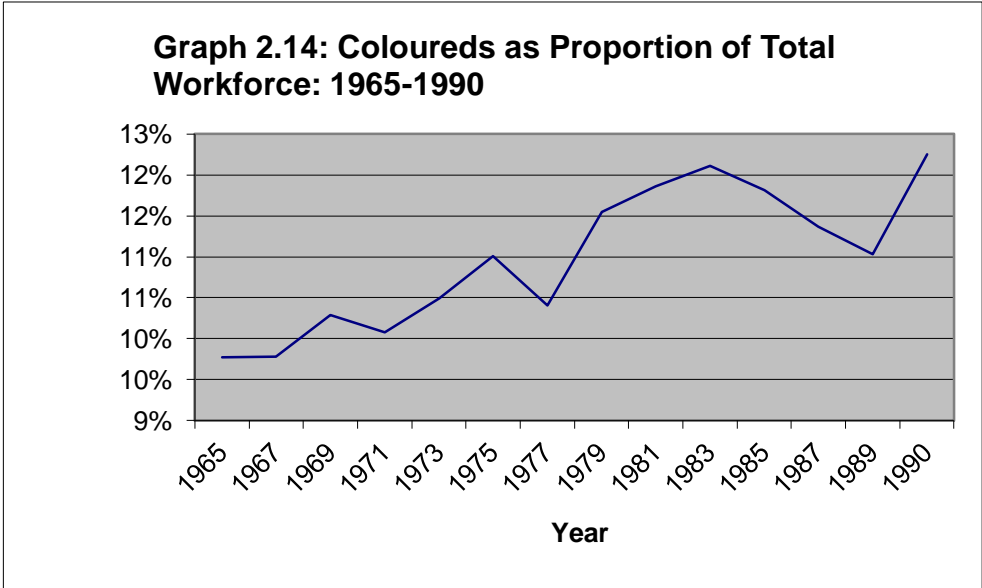


Further evidence to support the fact that coloureds were insulated from rising levels of unemployment before 1985 comes from an analysis of the proportion of the

<sup>60</sup> Data taken from Statistics South Africa, *South African Statistics 2000*, (Pretoria, 2000), p.74

<sup>61</sup> As coloureds were concentrated in the Western and Northern Cape, which had a different industrial base to elsewhere in South Africa, it is possible that these figures in part represent the nature of the recession rather than absolute protection for coloured workers. However, what is undeniable is that at the same time as preference policies were abolished, coloured unemployment began to rise (see graph 2.2)

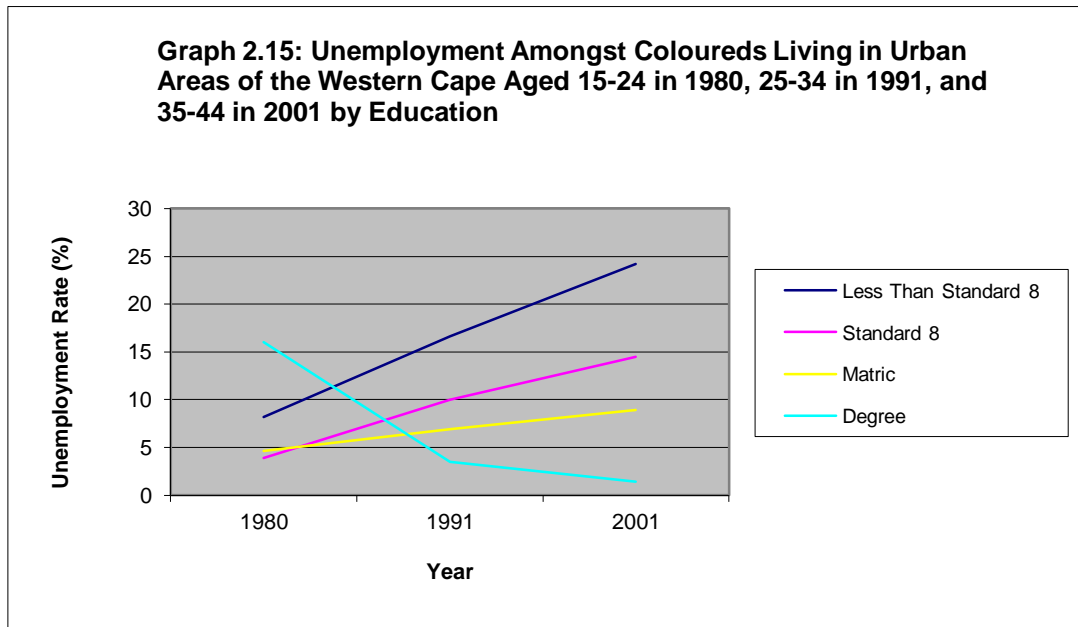
overall workforce that was comprised of coloureds (graph 2.14).<sup>62</sup> Between 1977 and 1985 – a period when unemployment rose – coloureds came to make up an increasing proportion of the overall workforce. Again, the fact that coloureds took a rising proportion of overall employment at a time when overall employment opportunities were declining shows they were less affected by such a decline than average.



However, whilst before 1985 coloureds experienced protection from the growing recession, subsequently they were particularly hard hit. In an inversion of the trend between 1980 and 1985, the period between 1985 and 1991 saw absolute employment rise across most economic sectors, yet coloureds experienced either a decline in total employment or, where employment did rise, it did so slower than the overall rate (graph 2.13). Similarly, the coloured percentage of the overall workforce also declined, falling back to 11% in 1989 (graph 2.14), showing that, as employment levels picked up after the mid-1980s, coloureds were less likely than average to move into these new positions.

<sup>62</sup> Data taken from: Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour...

Just as discriminatory policies impacted differently upon different coloureds so did their removal. Graph 2.15 shows the unemployment rate amongst coloureds aged 15 to 24 in 1980, 25 to 34 in 1991 and 35 to 44 in 2001 living in urban areas of the Western Cape.<sup>63</sup> Whilst not exact, it roughly represents the changing fortunes of a single age cohort over time.



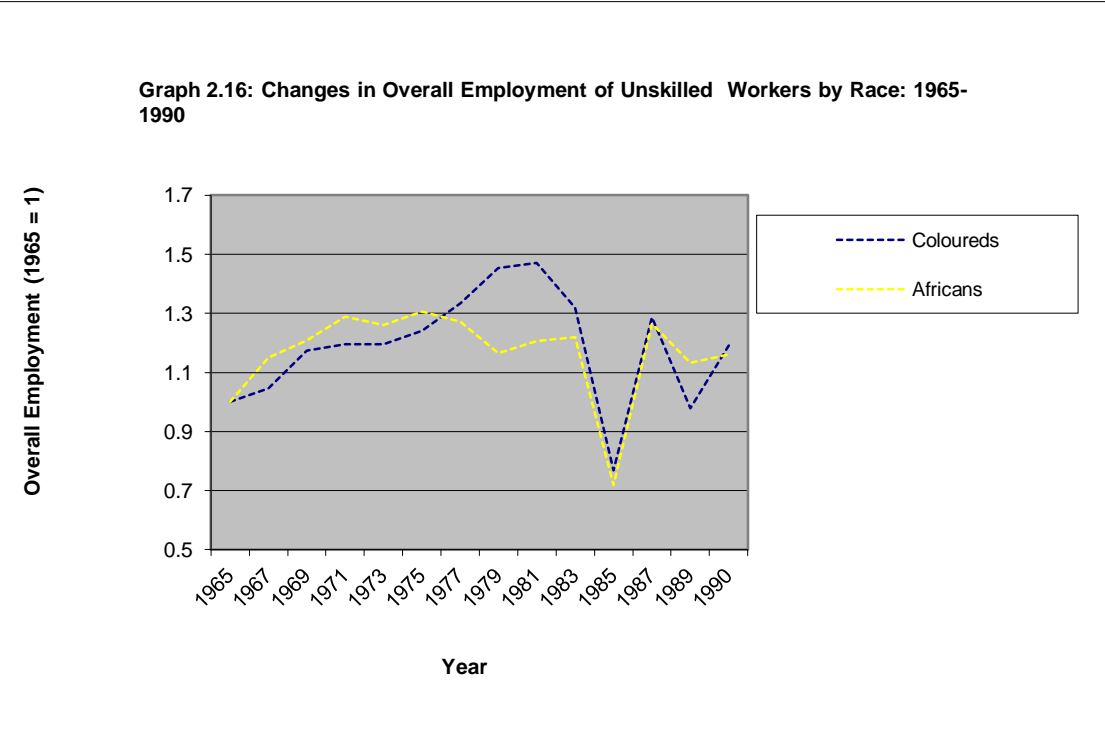
Graph 2.15 reveals that between 1980 and 2001 coloured unemployment increased most rapidly for people with less than Standard 8 education, least rapidly for people with matric and declined for people with degrees. People with lower levels of education were, therefore, most affected by the rising unemployment that accompanied deracialisation. Unsurprisingly given these trends, the shedding of jobs after 1985 hit unskilled coloureds particularly badly. Graph 2.16 shows changes in the numbers of coloureds and Africans working as unskilled labourers over time.<sup>64</sup> The experience of unskilled labourers before 1985 appears to fit the model

<sup>63</sup> Data was used from the 1980, 1991 and 2001 population censuses. The ILO definition of unemployment was used and cases were only included where respondent was reported as coloured. For the 1980 census people living in urban areas of the Western Province region of South Africa were used. For the 1991 Census urban areas of Development Region A were used. For the 2001 Census urban areas of the Western Cape were used. All these areas cover a roughly approximate geographical area, apart from the Western Province, which excluded the Southern Cape. However, analysis of Western Province data for coloureds alongside national data showed there was little variation with the nationwide picture.

<sup>64</sup> Data taken from: Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour...



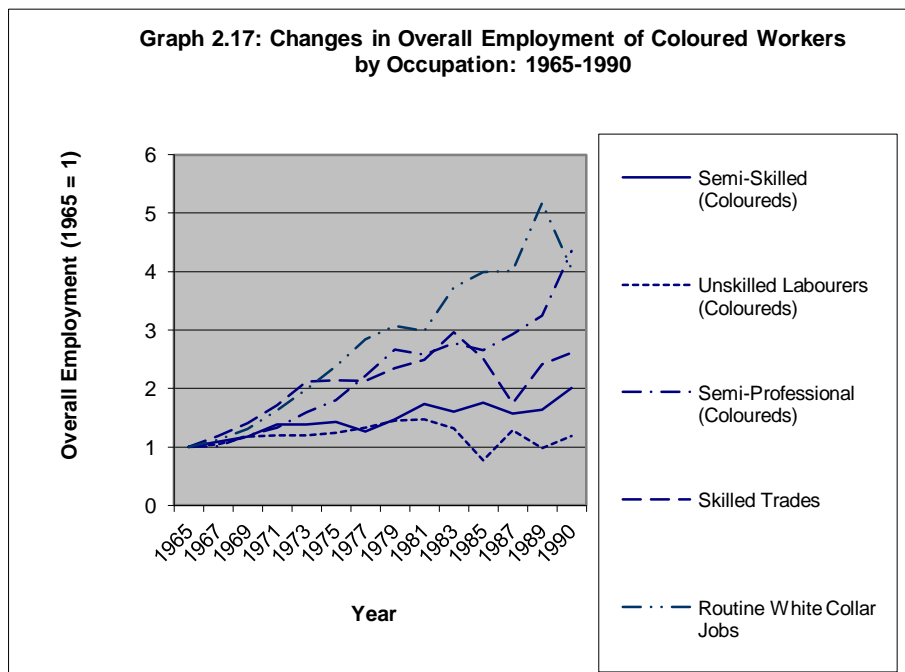
that would be expected if the government was using influx control and coloured preference policies to protect coloureds from competition from Africans. After the onset of recession in the late 1970s the number of coloureds employed in unskilled work continued to rise, whilst the number of Africans fell, suggesting that within the context of a falling demand for unskilled employment coloureds were preferred over Africans. However, from 1985 the picture changes dramatically and the number of unskilled coloured workers falls faster than Africans, reaching a low in 1987. Subsequently coloured and African unskilled employment shows comparable variation. This suggests that after the removal of influx control and preference legislation in the mid-1980s, coloureds were removed from unskilled positions at a faster rate than Africans as competition increased, then once the removal of coloured preference policies had worked through the labour market Africans and coloureds began to have similar labour market experiences.



Unskilled coloureds were not the only group to suffer from the removal of influx control, and coloureds were also decreasingly able to access skilled manual

professions. Changes in the distribution of coloureds across the labour market are shown in graph 2.17.<sup>65</sup> This shows how the number of skilled coloureds expanded rapidly between 1965 and the mid-1980s. However, after 1985 the number of coloureds in these occupations fell markedly.

In contrast, the number of coloureds employed in grades requiring higher levels of education continued to expand rapidly, with the number of routine white collar workers and semi-professional workers, expanding even during the recession (graph 2.17). Furthermore, it would appear that the ceiling on incomes that existed in 1980 began to be eroded as the income distribution for coloureds with matric began to shift upwards over time (graph 2.18).<sup>66</sup>



<sup>65</sup> Data taken from: Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour...

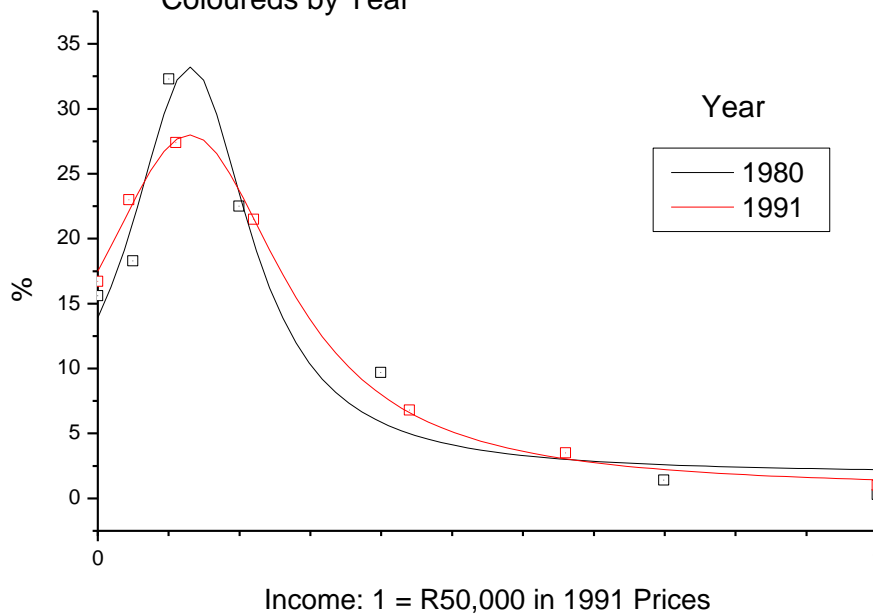
<sup>66</sup> Based upon analysis of all coloureds reporting an income and working in the 1991 population census.



Overall, therefore, the removal of influx control and the coloured labour preference policy accompanied a marked change in the position of coloureds within the labour market. Coloured predominance within positions that did not demand educational qualifications began to wane and coloured unemployment rose. However, for those coloureds with higher levels of education, unemployment rose far slower and people were able to move into a widening range of occupations. This overall transformation is perhaps best reflected in the changing income distribution within the coloured population (graph 2.19).<sup>67</sup> Between 1980 and 1991 the distribution of coloured incomes widened considerably with growing numbers of people reporting wages at the top and bottom of the income distribution and a consequent growth in inequality.

<sup>67</sup> Analysis based on the personal income of all coloureds reporting an income and classed as employed or self-employed in the 1980 and 1991 population census. Incomes were reported in bands. Prices were normalised to 1991 levels and new bands defined to be as close as possible to each other across the data sets. A Lorentzian curve was fitted to the data to show income distribution. The Half height width of the two curves was 0.18723 for the 1980 data and 0.29731 for the 1991 data, revealing a considerable increase in the distribution of incomes over the time period.

Graph 2.19: Income Distribution for All Working Coloureds by Year

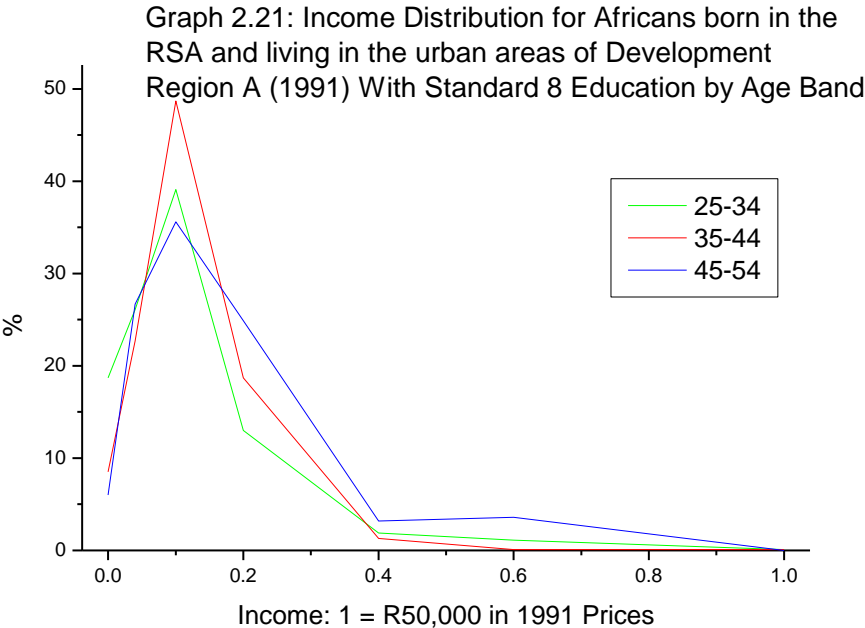
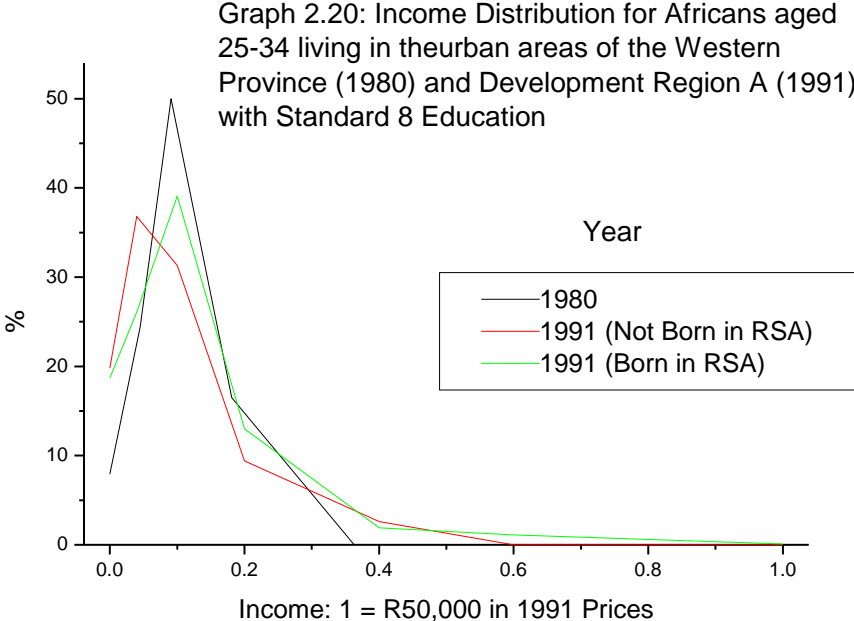


Overall, therefore, the removal of apartheid discrimination was not experienced uniformly. Opportunities for coloureds in unskilled and skilled positions (those where they were most protected by apartheid legislation) declined. However, new opportunities arose for coloureds in occupations they had formerly been unable to access. Deracialisation did not, therefore, represent a universal upturn for coloureds. Instead it increasingly differentiated the coloured population on the basis of education and skills.

### 2.3.4 Unemployment, Inequality, Education and Opportunity: The African Section 10 Labour Force in the Western Cape, 1984-1990

Africans with longstanding urban residence appear to have experienced similar changes to coloureds during the 1980s. Unfortunately data to analyse the specific experience of Africans outside of census years does not exist, as Section 10 status was never recorded. However, a comparison between data from the 1980 and 1991

censuses in the Western Cape can be used to get a broad picture of changes during this period (graph 2.20 and 2.21).<sup>68</sup>



<sup>68</sup> Data taken from 1980 and 1991 censuses. Areas used for comparison are the Western Province region of South Africa in 1980 and Development Region A in 1991. For 1991 Africans have been divided into people born in the Republic of South Africa as then defined (i.e. white South Africa), and people born in the homelands. The use of people aged 25-34 (people who were born after 1955 and therefore after the introduction of influx controls) means that all people born in the RSA would have qualified as section 10 (a) & (b) rights holders, whilst few of those born outside would have.

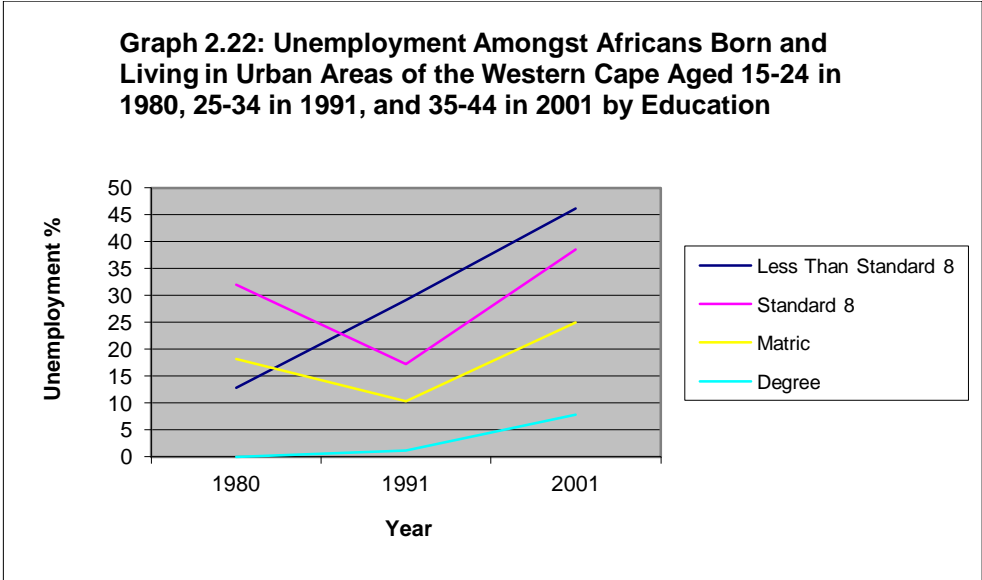
Just as with coloured workers there was a growth in the proportion of Western Cape Africans reporting incomes at the top and bottom of the income distribution between 1980 and 1991, revealing a growing internal differentiation that suggests both increased access to higher paying occupations and falling wages for people in less skilled positions. Simultaneously, the data also suggests that there was increased occupational mobility for people throughout their working life. Whereas in 1980 age had only a minimal impact on wage distributions for Africans (graph 2.9), by 1991 the incomes of Africans with standard 8 educations did increase with age (graph 2.21). That this is not simply the result of the increasing levels of educational attainment, particularly at matric level, driving down wages for those with lower achievement in the younger age group is demonstrated by the fact that increases in income are apparent between the 35-44 and the 45-54 age band, whereas in 1980 there was little clear difference between the 25-34 and 35-44 age band. Furthermore, by 1991 a clear distinction had emerged in the wage distributions of Africans that had been born within the urban areas of South Africa (those who would previously have qualified for Section 10 Rights) and those who were born within the former homelands, with Africans from the homelands being more likely to be receive lower incomes.

Data on unemployment also confirms this growing differentiation, and shows that people with the least skills experienced the most marked downturn in fortunes in the late 1980s. The relationship between education and deracialisation is particularly illustrated by the changing employment fortunes of Western Cape Africans who were aged 15-24 in 1980 (graph 2.22).<sup>69</sup> For this group there was actually a decline, albeit from a high level, in unemployment between 1980 and 1991

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<sup>69</sup> Data was used from the 1980, 1991 and 2001 population censuses. For the 1980 census people living in urban areas of the Western Province region of South Africa were used. For the 1991 Census urban areas of Development Region A were used. For the 2001 Census urban areas of the Western Cape were used. All these areas cover a roughly similar geographical area, except the Western Province which excluded the Southern Cape. However, the CLPP meant it was unlikely large numbers of Africans would have lived in the Southern Cape in 1980. The graph shows the unemployment level over time amongst Africans born in and living in the Western Province (1980), Development Region A (1991) and the Western Cape (2001). This represents a rough approximation of Africans that would have qualified for Section 10 (a) & (b) rights.

for those with standard 8 and Matric level education, whilst unemployment for people without standard 8 education grew substantially – a finding which runs counter to the general picture of South Africa as experiencing rising unemployment throughout the period.



The fact that young Africans with better educations experienced a fall in unemployment during a period in which both nationally and locally overall unemployment rose suggests that the removal of discriminatory legislation coincided with improving occupational opportunities for young South Africans with the education to take advantage of the removal of coloured preference policies. Conversely, the large increase in unemployment amongst Africans with low levels of education suggests that deracialisation, by increasing competition from other Africans, actually disadvantaged this group.

### **2.3.5. Changes in the Apartheid Labour Market 1984-1990: the Role of Discriminatory Legislation**

Between 1980 and 1990 both Africans and coloureds with low levels of education experienced declining access to employment. Unfortunately data is not available on the changing occupational distribution of Section 10 Africans, but for coloureds it is also clear that in those occupations where apartheid legislation created incentives to employ coloureds (notably manual occupations) the removal of discriminatory legislation accompanied a corresponding decline in employment. Conversely, in those occupations where apartheid restricted employment, the removal of discrimination saw expanding opportunities. Whilst it cannot be conclusively proved that the removal of apartheid legislation was responsible for these transformations, the changes in the labour market closely mirror what could be expected given the shifting legislation. Furthermore, even if legislation was not the key driver of these changes, people experiencing rising or declining opportunities were doing so within a broader context of the deracialisation of state policy.#

### **2.3.6. Equal Opportunities in an Increasingly Unequal Society: The Post-Apartheid Labour Market**

The end of apartheid, whilst of considerable political significance, has seen continuity with the late apartheid labour market. The ANC government has looked to a high productivity, high wage plan for economic growth, which it has partially achieved. However, it has failed to reverse high levels of unemployment and has continued to favour capital intensive industries.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the opening of the economy to international competition has placed increased pressure upon national industries, further contributing to unemployment. Unemployment has affected all population groups both nationally and in the Western Cape but has particularly

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<sup>70</sup> Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality..., p.351



affected people with limited education and skills. Conversely, the final removal of apartheid restrictions has actually accompanied expanding occupational mobility for black South Africans with the right skills and education. Overall, therefore, this period has been one of equalising access to opportunities within the labour market as skills and education have started to replace race as key for people's employment prospects. However, simultaneously, the labour market itself has seen an overall growth in inequality as the gap between those in and out of work, and those with and without skills, has widened.

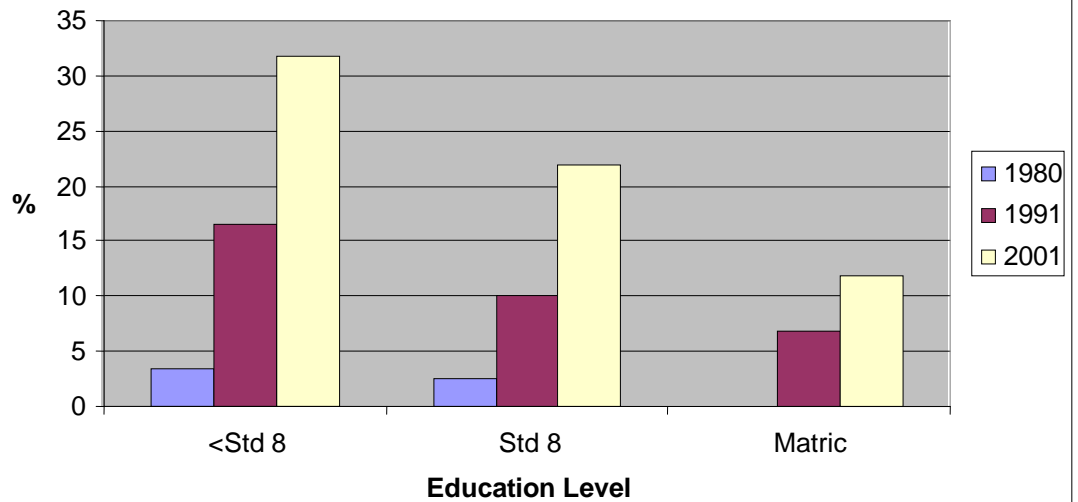
For coloureds the post-apartheid labour market has been characterised by three dynamics: rising unemployment, growing intra-group inequality and a continued decline in employment within manual occupations. Unemployment amongst coloureds nationally has risen markedly from around 12% in 1996 to around 17% in 2004 and during the same period from around 10% to nearly 15% in the Western Cape.<sup>71</sup> However, unemployment has not affected all groups equally, with education playing a role in mediating access to employment. Graph 2.23 shows unemployment amongst coloureds aged 25-34 in urban areas of the Western Cape.<sup>72</sup> It is clear here that whilst unemployment has expanded for all coloureds in the region, those with the least education have been particularly badly hit.

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<sup>71</sup> Data from the October Household Survey and Labour Force Survey.

<sup>72</sup> Data taken from 1980 and 1991 censuses. Areas used for comparison are the Western Province region of South Africa in 1980, Development Region A in 1991 and Western Cape 2001.

**Graph 2.23 Unemployment by Education and Year for Coloureds Aged 25-34 Living in the Urban Areas of the Western Cape**



Alongside the continued importance of education for employment, the decline in the manual coloured workforce (i.e. jobs not requiring education) noted during the late 1980s has also continued (graph 2.24).<sup>73</sup>

**Graph 2.24: Coloureds as Proportion of Manual Occupation Groups, 1995-2005**



<sup>73</sup> Data from the October Household Survey and Labour Force Survey.

Alongside rising unemployment and decreasing employment opportunities, wages for lower earning coloureds have also fallen. Table 2.4 provides a breakdown of the mean income for coloureds reporting a salaried income living in urban areas of the Western Cape by income decile between 1997 and 2004.<sup>74</sup> Overall there is little fluctuation in mean real wages for all coloureds, except for a slight rise in 2001 and a sharp drop in 2003. However this hides a picture of increasing differentiation. Apart from coloureds in the lowest decile there has been either very small increases in real wages of 2 percent or less, or falls, for the lowest earning 70% of coloureds, whilst for the top decile wages have risen 23%. This suggests that alongside rising unemployment, the wages of coloureds not in the highest paid jobs have also decreased post-apartheid.

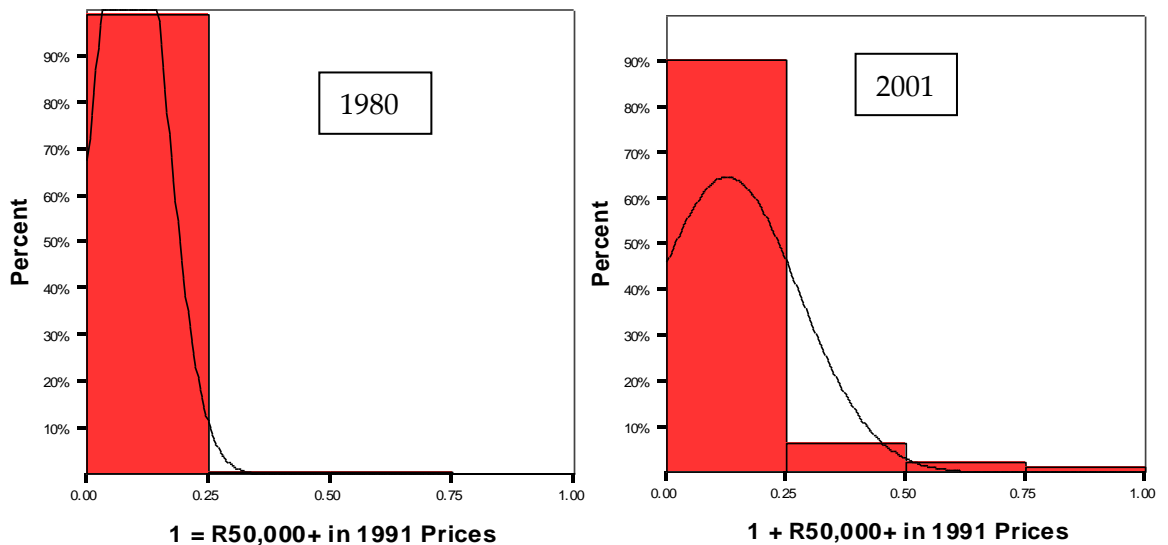
	1997	2000	2001	2003	2004	Change 1997 - 2004
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	4034	3157	4932	4497	4405	9%
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	8046	7675	8767	7755	8193	2%
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	11134	10410	12024	10015	10154	-9%
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	13993	13882	14444	12387	12533	-10%
<b>5<sup>th</sup></b>	17479	16291	17231	14750	15290	-13%
<b>6<sup>th</sup></b>	20105	18833	20176	17543	18193	-10%
<b>7<sup>th</sup></b>	21826	21748	23526	20317	22331	2%
<b>8<sup>th</sup></b>	26014	27476	28409	24888	27444	5%
<b>9<sup>th</sup></b>	34581	36154	38476	33348	36732	6%
<b>10<sup>th</sup></b>	63115	77112	79530	59282	77595	23%
<b>Total</b>	23421	23601	25267	19554	23401	0%

<sup>74</sup> The data for this was taken from the October Household Survey and Labour Force Survey. Only cases where specific incomes were provided were used to perform the calculations. The deciles are population group specific, that is they represent 10% divisions of coloured incomes rather than all incomes.

Like coloureds, Africans have seen growing unemployment and opportunity coexisting post-apartheid. Similarly, employment has come to depend even more on education and intra-racial inequality has grown. By 2000 it was estimated that Africans comprised between 25 and 31% of South Africa's top income decile and between 55 and 61% of the second, in comparison to only 9% of the top decile and 22% of the second in 1991. However, this social mobility has not been universal, and many Africans have experienced falling incomes and access to wages as unemployment has continued to grow and new job creation has been limited.<sup>75</sup>

Data from the Western Cape mirrors national patterns. The histograms below show normalised income distributions of working Africans living in the Western Province and Southern Cape regions of South Africa in 1980 and the Western Cape Province in 2001 (graph 2.25). For working Africans in the Western Cape mean wages have risen by about 50% in real terms. However, this growth has been accompanied by an expansion in the gap between lowest and highest earners.<sup>76</sup>

**Graph 2.25: African Income Distribution by Year in the Western Cape, 1980 and 2001**



<sup>75</sup> Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, *Class, Race, and Inequality...*, p.306-8

<sup>76</sup> Data was taken from the 1980 and 2001 population surveys. Prices were normalised to 1991 levels and 7 new bands defined to as close as possible to each other across the data sets. These 7 bands were used as the basis for calculations. Africans not working were excluded from the calculations. The histogram for 1980 shows a very tight distribution of wages, reflected by its standard deviation of just 0.07166. Whilst, in 2001 the distribution is far broader, with a standard deviation of 0.15133, over double its value in 1980.

Whilst wages grew between 1980 and 2001 much of this growth occurred amongst high earners (see table 2.5). If mean and median incomes are calculated for working Africans it becomes clear that whilst the mean income for working Africans has nearly doubled, the median wage has risen by only about 10% in real terms,. Furthermore, if the mean and median incomes are calculated for all Africans aged 15+, regardless of employment status, the growth in mean income between 1980 and 2001 falls considerably, whilst , the median income plummets in real terms to just R1517.

Table 2.5: Mean and Medium Wages for all people aged 15+ calculated by income band mid points in Urban Areas of the Western Cape by Population Group and Work Status in 2000 Prices <sup>77</sup>				
	1980 Mean	1980 Median	2001 Mean	2001 Median
African Working	12241	11333	21345	12502
African Total	8713	7843	9087	1517

The collapse of the median African income in the Western Cape points to the growing African unemployment which has left a large proportion of the population with no income. By 2001 African unemployment stood at around 50% if people who have given up looking for work are included. Interestingly, it also appears that longstanding urban residency no longer impacts upon unemployment in the Western Cape. An analysis of the 2001 census reveals that unemployment amongst Africans both born and living in the Western Cape was running at 51%, and was only slightly higher for Africans born outside the area at 52.8%.<sup>78</sup> Instead, age and

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Analysis of the Census 2001 data set. Unemployment based on an expanded definition including people who would work but have given up looking for work as well as people actively looking for work.

education were far more significant in affecting access to employment than birthplace.<sup>79</sup>

The conclusions which can be drawn for Africans post-apartheid are similar, though not identical, to those regarding coloureds. The removal of discriminatory legislation has allowed Africans to move into increasingly well paid jobs and to move up the occupational ladder, leading to increasing wages for those able to take advantage of these new opportunities. However, there has been a corresponding decline for those Africans who were privileged as urban insiders during apartheid unable to take advantage of these opportunities. This is starkly revealed in the explosion of unemployment that has taken place amongst all Africans in the Western Cape.

## **2.4. Beyond Employment: Apartheid, Discrimination and Welfare Transfers 1948-2006**

As Natrass and Seekings note, assessing the changing nature of discrimination in South Africa demands not only a consideration of the labour market, but also (re)distribution through welfare spending and taxation.<sup>80</sup> As much collective action, both apartheid and post-apartheid, coalesced around service provision the changing distribution of state spending is of particular relevance to this study. Two areas of state service provision are used here to present a snapshot of changing state strategies of distribution – social welfare grants and housing provision. Social welfare has been selected because it is one of the starkest examples and one of the easiest measures of how state priorities and discrimination translate into policy,

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<sup>79</sup> 1980, 1991 and 2001 censuses. Urban areas of the Western Province (1980), Development Region A (1991) and Western Cape (2001).

<sup>80</sup> Natrass, N, & Seekings, J, 'Democracy and Distribution in Highly Unequal Economies: The Case of South Africa', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 39/3, 2001, p.479

privilege and discrimination. Housing has been chosen because, in the face of considerable shortages, it remains a highly contentious political issue.

### **2.4.1. From Race to Universality: Changing Pattern of Redistribution through Welfare Payments**

Whilst labour market discrimination was complex, depending not simply upon racial classification but factors such as education and demands from business, social security provision under apartheid was defined directly by the government and was, until 1993, related simplistically to racial classification. Similarly, unlike in employment, where structural advantages gained under apartheid (such as superior education) continued to confer advantage after the ending of discrimination, changes in social welfare were immediate. Whilst a range of social grants were paid by both apartheid and post-apartheid governments, two areas of welfare spending are examined here. Firstly the old age pension – a non contributory pension paid to all people aged over 65 – and secondly child support grants. These two grants have been chosen because they are widely received, means tested and non-contributory. Consequently, they involve considerable redistribution to large numbers of poorer South Africans.

Social security is one area where the apartheid state's preferential treatment for coloureds, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, is obvious and where the ending of this preference, particularly for those coloureds on low incomes with children, had a dramatic impact. Equally, the limited social assistance for Africans until towards the end of the apartheid period, and the subsequent expansion of welfare provision in both terms of numbers, and for some benefits value, was a notable gain for Africans.

The state pension was introduced in 1928 as a means tested grant and whilst its value was racially determined it did, from its inception, cover coloureds, as did

child maintenance grants, first introduced in 1937.<sup>81</sup> However, these grants specifically excluded Africans, and when the pension was extended to Africans in the 1940s, it was at a considerably lower rate than for other groups. This pattern of provision was to continue under apartheid. Through the 1960s to the early 1980s welfare provision was expanded for coloureds whilst Africans were excluded from maintenance payments and continued to receive only a limited pension. It was not until the late 1980s that deracialisation of state policy saw declining provision for coloureds and a converse increase in provision for Africans. These changes were compounded post-1994 as welfare payments became standardised for all South Africans regardless of race.

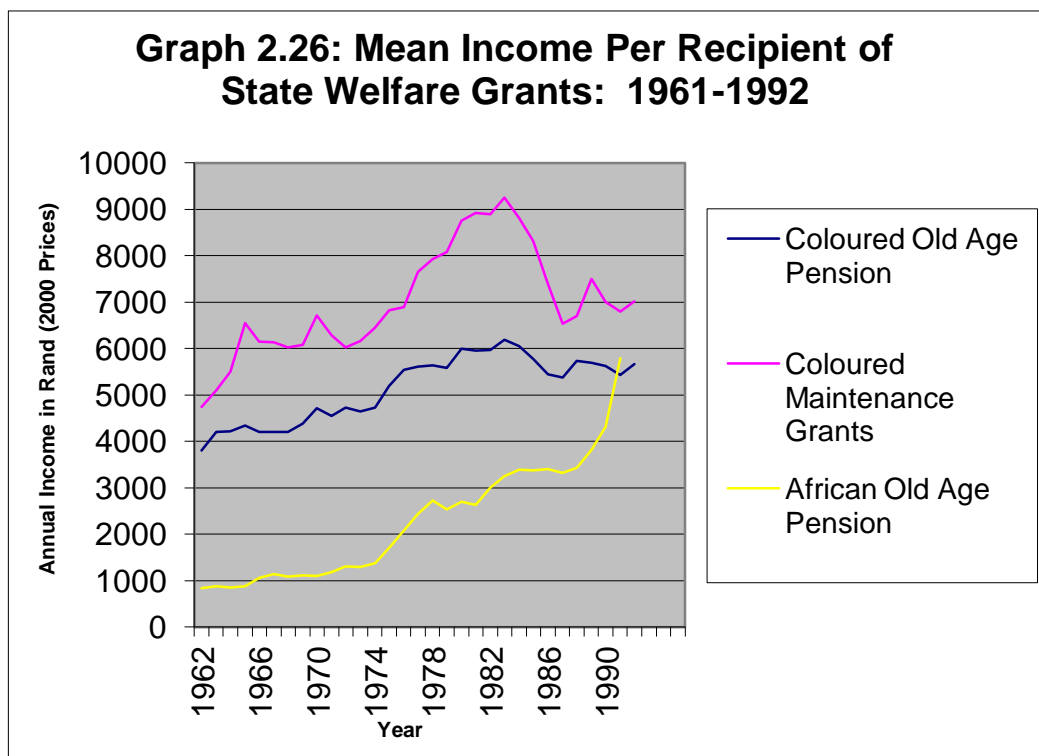
The maximum value of the old age pension payable to coloureds increased until the early 1980s in both real terms and in relation to the pension paid to whites (table 2.6). At the same time, per pensioner spending grew considerably in real terms. From the late 1980s, however, the value of the coloured pension fell, whilst the value of the African pension was increased (graph 2.26).

Year	Whites	2000 Prices	Coloureds	2000 Prices	% White Pension
1960	254.4	8480	87	2900	35.4
1970	394	10103	183.8	4713	46.6
1983	1824	11329	1116	6932	61.2

<sup>81</sup> Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality..., p.83

<sup>82</sup> Abedian, I, 'Economic Obstacles to Black Advancement', in (ed.) Smollan, R, Black Advancement in the South African Economy, (Johannesburg, 1986), p. 89

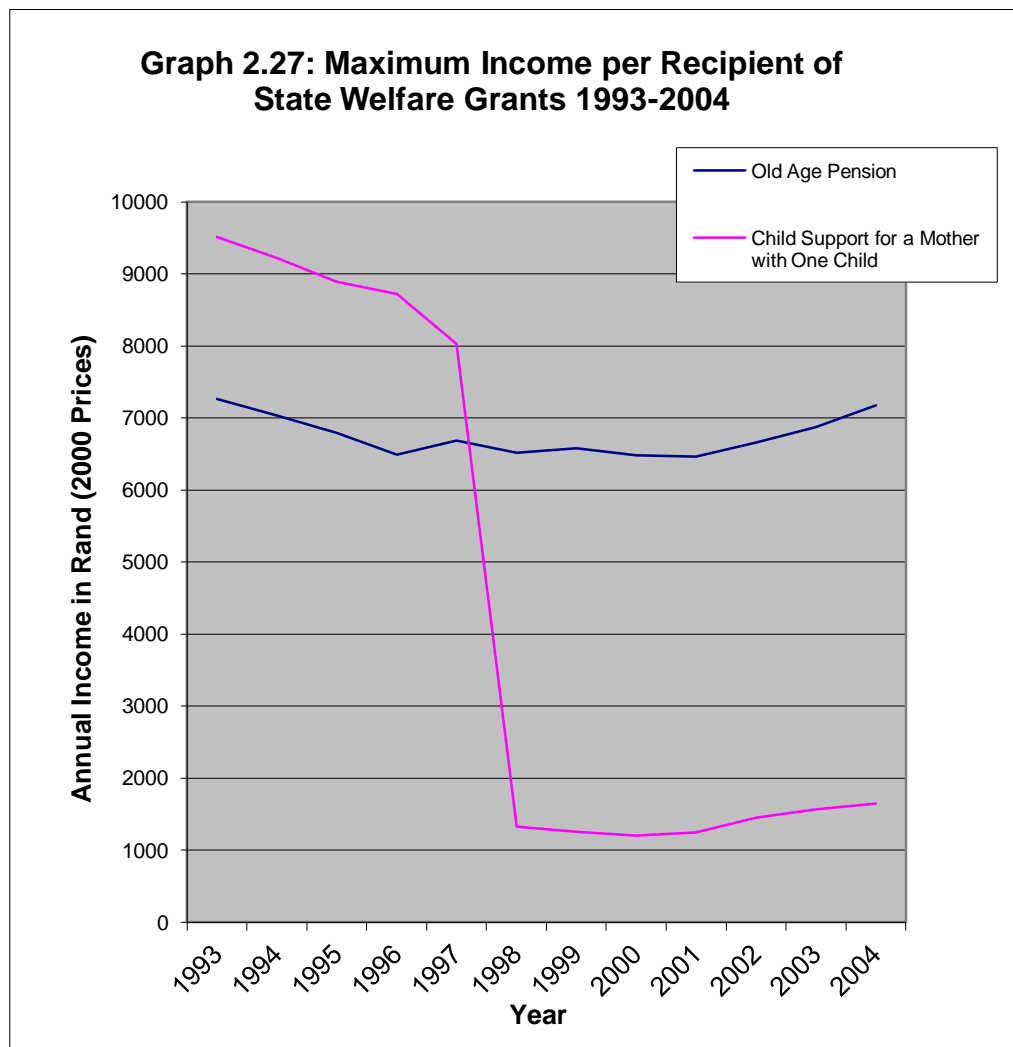




The same trend is replicated amongst coloured recipients of the state maintenance grant. Before 1998 the state provided child support via a means tested grant paid to mothers, supplemented by a payment for the first and second child, until the child turned 18. Whilst the level of payment was racially defined, coloureds were eligible for the grant and it provided a relatively generous income. Graph 2.26 shows the average income per coloured claimant of the state maintenance grant between 1962 and 1992. As with the old age pension, until the early 1980s state payments to the lowest income coloureds expanded rapidly, whilst after this the value of grants fell. Unlike coloureds, Africans were excluded from maintenance grants until 1993.

The ending of apartheid saw continuity rather than change in trends within welfare provision. In 1993 the government equalised payments between racial groups and the state pension and maintenance grants became available to all. Initially this had a limited impact upon coloureds as the equalising of grants simply involved the uprating of payments and an extension of certain existing grants to include Africans. However after 1994 welfare payments declined. The decline in

state pension was limited, and has to some extent been reversed in recent years. However, changes to child welfare grants have been drastic (graph 2.27). In 1998 the state maintenance grant system was replaced with a new child support grant. Whilst the motives behind this decision are complex and open to debate, the impact upon mothers who had been receiving state maintenance grants was not. Unlike the maintenance grants, which were paid until the child reached 18, the child support grants were initially introduced only for children aged under 10, subsequently expanded to include all children under 14. The level of the grant was also lowered. In 1997 a single mother with one child claiming a state maintenance grant could get support of up to R8028 a year in 2000 prices. By 1998 this had fallen to R1332.



The impact of changes to the welfare system varied by race and coloureds were particularly badly affected. In 1994 nearly 60% of all welfare grants were paid to coloured families, and only 20% to African families.<sup>83</sup> If the number of coloureds receiving grants is compared to the number of coloured women likely to have children it appears that around 1 in 14 coloured families with children received this income in 1991 (table 2.7).

Year	Number of Recipients	% of Women aged 16 to 55
1960	6632	-
1965	12222	-
1970	20969	4.5
1975	30537	-
1980	48504	7.1
1985	53213	6.6
1991	63514	7.3

For many Africans, however, the equalising of grants since 1993 and the provision of child support have been positive experiences. Whilst Africans experienced the stagnating of state pensions in the late 1990s and early 2000s, this came after the considerable increases which took place at the end of apartheid. Similarly, whilst those Africans claiming state maintenance grants for their children would have had similar experiences to coloured claimants, very few Africans were receiving this grant; in 1994 a total of 200,000 children and 150,000 mothers were

<sup>83</sup> Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality..., p.360

<sup>84</sup> South African Statistics Service, 1995, Population censuses: 1970, 1980, 1985 and 1991

receiving state maintenance grants, in July 2003 the number of child support grants being paid had expanded beyond three million.<sup>85</sup>

Africans and coloureds, therefore, have had opposite experiences of state welfare provision since 1948, particularly if pensioners are excluded from consideration. For coloureds the early and mid-apartheid period was a time of expanding state assistance, whilst apartheid's last years represented a contraction which accelerated after 1994. Conversely, whilst welfare provision under early apartheid was highly prescribed, the late and post-apartheid periods saw considerable financial gains for many Africans as welfare payments were increased and access expanded.

#### **2.4.2. Forced Removals, Shortages and Race Privilege: Housing under Apartheid**

Estimating the extent of the housing shortage and housing provision in South Africa under apartheid is difficult. Many Africans living in the urban areas were doing so illegally, whilst legally resident Africans and their families often existed in situations of extreme overcrowding. Government policy in the urban townships also forbade the construction of informal housing, even in the backyards of existing properties. Whilst this did not prevent the explosion of squatter settlements and backyard housing, these dwellings were never officially recognised. Nor were illegal residents likely to show up in large numbers in government surveys. Therefore a wide range of official sources, census and survey data and estimates have been used to try to piece together the changing nature of housing provision in South Africa and the Western Cape.

Whilst apartheid housing policy permitted coloureds to live within the urban areas this did not translate into the provision of adequate housing for all. Indeed, housing shortages and overcrowding were, and still are, widely

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<sup>85</sup> Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality..., pp.361-3

experienced. By the early 1970s the shortage of coloured housing was hard to ignore. The 1970 census reveals that the mean number of people per room (excluding bathrooms and garages, but including kitchens and other outside rooms) in coloured households in formal housing stood at 2.0644 and that if kitchens were excluded this figure rose to 2.9954. Furthermore, large numbers of coloured people were living in informal housing and squatter settlements. Whilst exact figures are unavailable estimates, most of which were based in Cape Town, concur on the extent of the problem. In 1972 Cilliers estimated that there were 173,388 coloureds living in squatter conditions in and around Cape Town, a figure which represented 22.6% of the city's total coloured population.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, a report issued by the Cape Town Divisional Council in 1974 provided a figure of 175,000 coloureds living in squatter conditions in the Cape Peninsula.<sup>87</sup> The number of coloured shacks registered in Cape Town between 1976 and 1982 also remained relatively constant at around 27,000.<sup>88</sup>

This housing problem, particularly in the Western Cape, was compounded by the forced removal of large numbers of people as a result of group areas legislation. Central to the collective memory of oppression amongst the coloured people of Cape Town, group areas proclamations saw not only minority communities removed from areas such as Claremont in the Southern Suburbs, but also the rezoning of inner-city areas which were home to large numbers of coloured people, most notably District 6.<sup>89</sup> The impact of the Group Areas Act was considerable. Horner has estimated that between the mid-1960s and early 1980s, 261,332 coloureds were moved under the legislation. According to the 1980s census this represented approximately 30% of the total coloured population.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, the state had to expand housing provision for the people it was

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<sup>86</sup> Cited in Lemon, A, *Apartheid: A Geography...*, p. 127

<sup>87</sup> Western, J, *Outcast Cape Town...*, pp.179-185

<sup>88</sup> Horner, D, (ed.), *Labour Preference, Influx Control and Squatters: Cape Town Entering the 1980s*, SALDRU Working Paper 50, (Cape Town, 1983), p.7

<sup>89</sup> For an in depth study of the impact of the Group Areas Act on a coloured community see: Western, J, *Outcast Cape Town...*

<sup>90</sup> Horner, D, *Labour Preference...*, p4

removing. In 1975, when many of the group areas removals had already been completed, there were 18500 coloured families on the waiting list for economic housing in Cape Town and 5700 waiting for sub-economic housing.<sup>91</sup> However, in 1976 Lemon calculated that if segregation and relocations were to be continued then a further 10,000 houses would have to be built just to house people being removed from the white areas, many of whom already had accommodation.<sup>92</sup>

However, whilst housing provision for coloureds under apartheid was limited, and the implementation of the Group Areas Act brutal, evidence exists that many coloureds saw growing access to housing under apartheid, and much of this was a result of state funding. The apartheid government constructed large new housing estates with both economic and sub-economic units for rental to people with differing incomes throughout the country, a trend which accelerated after 1983 when the tricameral parliament prioritised started spending in visible areas, such as housing and education.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, the amount of money spent on coloured housing was disproportionate to their overall share of the population.<sup>94</sup> Census data reveals the improving access to housing for coloureds. It is difficult to estimate the number of coloureds living in informal housing, as censuses did not explicitly enumerate such dwellings until 1991. However, it is possible to count the number of households enumerated as living in formal dwellings and their household size (table 2.8).

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p.9

<sup>92</sup> Lemon, A, Apartheid: A Geography..., p.74 & p.128

<sup>93</sup> Parnell, S, 'State Intervention in Housing Provision in the 1980s', in (ed.) Smith, D M, The Apartheid City and Beyond: Urbanization and Social Change in South Africa, (London & N.Y., 1992), p.55

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

Table 2.8: Coloured Households by Housing Type <sup>95</sup>		
Year	1970	1991
Flats and Houses	337606	536668
Total Recorded Population	2050937	2929354
People per House	6.07	5.46
Mean Household Size of Coloureds Living in Formal Housing	5.2	4.9

Table 2.8 shows that between 1970 and 1991 the number of coloured households in formal flats and houses increased by nearly 200,000 whilst the number of people per house decreased. National Building Research Institute figures also confirm this pattern. In 1986 they provided statistics that suggested that some inroads had been made into the coloured housing shortage, with 62,000 houses built for coloureds between 1980 and 1985. Within this context the housing shortage was reported to have declined from just under 52,000 units, to around 44,000 units.<sup>96</sup>

The same trend is apparent in the Western Cape. Large scale government expenditure on housing estates in areas such as Atlantis and Mitchells Plain did reduce the housing shortage for coloureds.<sup>97</sup> If figures on coloured squatting in the 1970s are compared with data from the 1991 census the impact of apartheid house building programmes for coloureds is revealed – 27,000 coloured shacks were registered in Cape Town between 1976 and 1982, however in the 1991 census only 5542 shacks with coloured household heads were reported in the whole of what was then called development region A, a geographical unit roughly comparable to the present day Western Cape. Similarly, the 1991 census reported only 20,888 and 83,878 coloureds living in shacks in development region A and the whole country respectively.

<sup>95</sup> Data taken from the 1970 and 1991 South African Population Censuses

<sup>96</sup> Kentridge, M, Housing in South Africa..., p.6

<sup>97</sup> Horner, D, Labour Preference..., p.8

For Africans apartheid housing provision was undeniably inadequate, even for those with urban residency rights. House building in the urban areas was frozen during the late 1960s and 1970s, with the intention that housing would be built in commuter towns on the borders of the homelands. This led to growing housing shortages and overcrowding amongst urban Africans which continued into the 1980s.<sup>98</sup> Housing data on Africans before 1991 is patchy. However estimates from the 1980s provide some indication of the level of the crisis. In the same 1985 survey which reported a declining coloured housing shortage it was estimated that the urban African housing shortage had more than doubled to 583,000 units. Similarly, the 1991 population census showed that 23.5% of Africans in urban areas outside the homelands were living in shacks.

Africans in the Western Cape experienced even less provision than Africans elsewhere. Ünterhalter calculates that between 1972 and 1980 the African population in the Western Cape increased by 62.9%, from 108,360 to 183,360.<sup>99</sup> However, between 1966 and 1976 not a single house for Africans was built. Access to housing, therefore, was only possible through reallocation of existing dwellings. Whilst in the late 1970s policy shifted slightly, the impact was miniscule. In 1977 the official shortage of housing units for (legal) Africans stood at 1700. Despite this there were only 5 Houses built and 9 hostels converted to 18 family units in the whole year. The situation worsened moving into the 1980s in spite of increased building. By 1981 the legal housing shortage had risen to s 7135 family units and 1000 hostel beds.<sup>100</sup>

The African housing shortage was further compounded by the presence of large numbers of Africans in the Cape Town area illegally. In 1981 Piet Koornhof, Minister of Community Development, claimed that 85,436 Africans in Cape Town,

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<sup>98</sup> Mabin, A, 'The Dynamics of Urbanisation Since 1960', in (eds.) Swilling, M, Humphries, R & Shubane, K, Apartheid City in Transition, (Cape Town, 1991), pp.38-9

<sup>99</sup> Ünterhalter, E, Forced Removal..., p.87

<sup>100</sup> Ellis, G, 'Africans in the Western Cape 1900 to 1982 : A Chronology', in (ed.) Horner, D, Labour Preference, Influx Control and Squatters: Cape Town Entering the 1980s, SALDRU Working Paper 50, (Cape Town, 1983), pp.109-10



or 42% of Cape Town's entire African population, were there illegally.<sup>101</sup> These Africans had no formal right to housing and were liable for arrest if discovered. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to presume that they represented an unrecorded demand for housing which dwarfed that presented in official government statistics. Indeed, the African housing shortage in Cape Town is perhaps best measured by the explosion of squatter camps, in spite of government repression, in areas such as Modderdam in the 1970s and Crossroads and KTC moving into the 1980s. This was of such proportions that as early as 1977 it was estimated that 51,000 Africans were squatting in Cape Town.<sup>102</sup>

However, whilst all Africans experienced the housing shortage legal status did help define access to housing. Limited census data from 1980 hints at how significant Section 10 (a) and (b) rights were in this respect. Of those Africans enumerated in the Western Province area of South Africa and reporting their birthplace as magisterial districts within the current Western Cape, 86.5% reported living in formal housing, flats and huts and 0.9% in hostels. However, of those Africans born outside the Western Cape only 28.5% were reported as living in formal housing, flats and huts and 17.5% in hostels – and many, if not all of these, would have been people who would have qualified for urban rights in spite of being born elsewhere. Whilst it is impossible to know where the remaining Africans, most of which were classed as living in 'other' dwellings in the census were residing, clearly urban insider status was closely related to access formal housing.

By the 1980s, therefore, housing shortages for Africans had reached crisis proportions. Faced by growing opposition and unable to provide for the housing demand the state, from the late 1970s, turned increasingly to the private sector. This included both extending of leasehold rights to Africans to allow them to build their own houses, and in the 1980s selling rental properties to sitting tenants. This led to

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<sup>101</sup> West, W, 'Influx Control in the Cape Peninsula', in (ed.) Horner, D, Labour Preference, Influx Control and Squatters: Cape Town Entering the 1980s, SALDRU Working Paper 50, (Cape Town, 1983), p.18

<sup>102</sup> Western, J, Outcast Cape Town..., p.279

an increasingly market driven housing policy. Khayelitsha, the new township built for Africans on the outskirts of Cape Town from 1983 onwards, provides an example of this change. Initially 5000 core rental houses were built. However, rather than expand rented provision two new housing options were made available. People could either buy a site and service area, where basic services such as water and sanitation were provided but the construction of a dwelling was left to the resident, or they could buy formal housing built by private companies and for sale at a market rate.<sup>103</sup>

It has been argued that as policy changed in the 1980s so did the relationship between urban insider status and housing access. Crankshaw exemplifies this with his view that the move away from influx control and towards private provision led to fundamental shifts in the spatial composition of apartheid cities and the distribution of housing to Africans therein. He argues that the removal of state subsidies meant that it was mainly the African middle class and the upper working class which could afford the new privately built homes. Conversely, many poor Africans and unskilled and semi-skilled workers, lacking access to the limited stock of state provided housing, formed the majority of residents in the squatter areas that developed at the edge of the cities and around the site and service sites. In this way the growing differentiation within the labour market came to be reflected within the spatial composition of the townships.<sup>104</sup>

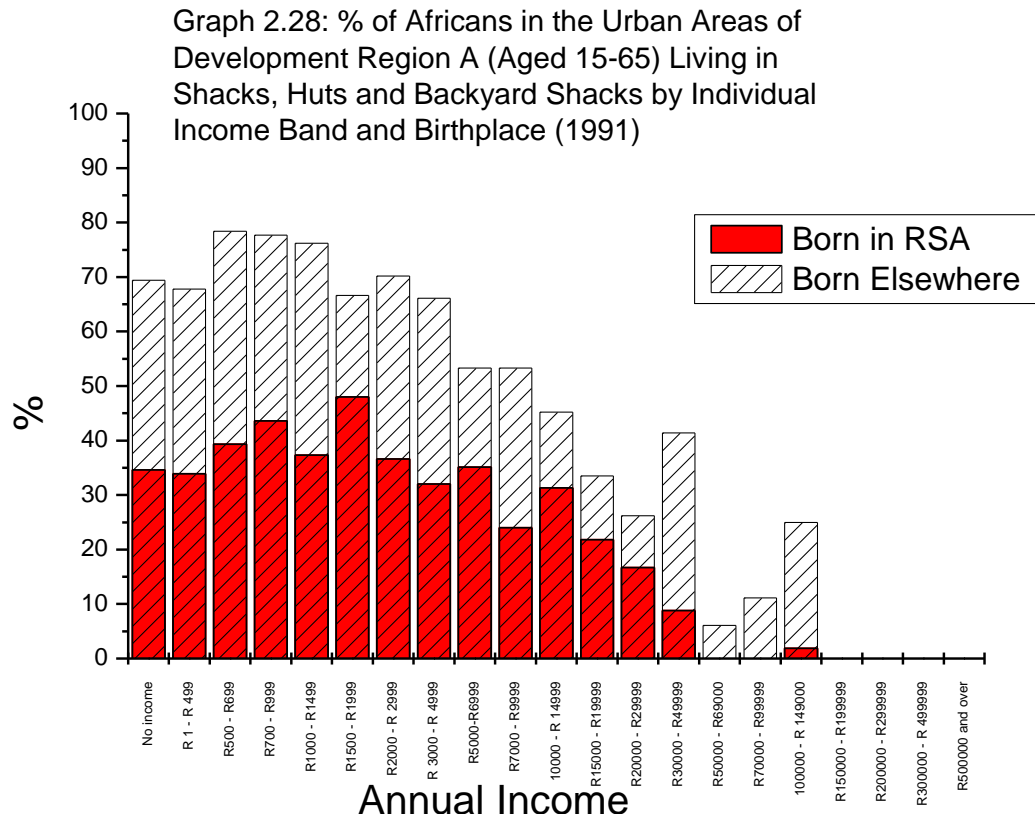
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<sup>103</sup> Oliver-Evans, C, Employment and Urbanisation..., p.15

<sup>104</sup> Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour..., pp.119-20

Evidence from Cape Town both supports and contradicts this interpretation.

Graph 2.28 shows the percentage of Africans living in informal housing in development region A in 1991 according to income and whether they were born within areas designated as white South Africa, or in the homelands.<sup>105</sup>



Three trends are apparent. Firstly, access to housing amongst people who historically qualified for section 10 rights has decreased considerably, with 36.9% of all Africans born in white South Africa living in shacks, compared to the 86.5 % living in flats and houses in 1980. Secondly, whilst former urban insiders have less access to housing than previously, they are still noticeably privileged in relation to

<sup>105</sup> Data taken from the 1991 Population census. Population bands are as reported in 1991. Only Africans reported as living in urban and semi-urban areas of Development region A, aged 15-65, were included in analysis.

immigrants in all income brackets. Finally, income plays only a limited role in defining access to housing for both categories of Africans except amongst the highest income bands, and its impact appears to be more significant for people born outside of white South Africa than within. A similar picture appears if housing access is analysed in terms of income deciles (table 2.9). There is a general correlation between income decile and presence in informal housing for immigrants into Cape Town. However, for people born within white South Africa this relationship is less clear and only becomes apparent for those in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> deciles. This shows how the access to housing granted under apartheid continued to play a central role in mediating the impact of market driven reforms upon those people who had been urban insiders.

<b>Table 2.9: Proportion of Africans aged 15-64, living in Urban areas of Development Region A in informal housing by African Income Decile and Birthplace (1991).<sup>106</sup></b>											
<b>Decile</b>	<b>No Income</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Born outside RSA</b>	69.9	73.9	71.6	70.2	-	66.1	-	53.3	53.3	-	41.5
<b>Born within RSA</b>	36.2	37.5	43.1	36.6	-	32.0	-	35.1	24.1	-	23.3

### **2.4.3. From Race towards Class and State Provision to Privatisation: Housing after Apartheid**

The ending of apartheid saw the removal of restrictions on the mobility and residence of all South Africans. It has also seen the government seek to expand housing access through a subsidy scheme in which all South Africans fulfilling certain income and family size criteria became eligible for a one off housing subsidy.

<sup>106</sup> The above table includes all Africans reporting an income and registered as living within development region A of South Africa in the 1991 census. The income deciles were derived from bands and therefore do not represent a neat 10% split of cases. The income deciles represented are deciles of African incomes, not the whole population.

This subsidy can be used either to contribute towards buying an existing property or to lay claim to newly built subsidy housing.<sup>107</sup>

Clearly, however, the housing shortage will take many years to clear and therefore whilst the subsidy system in theory provides equal access to housing for all, in practice decisions have to be made regarding where housing will be built and who will benefit. The City of Cape Town's Housing Allocation Policy, adopted in 2004, provides an example of the complexity behind how such decisions are made in practice. It outlines three criteria through which people may be selected for housing: as a member of a community targeted for housing upgrading; as a person on the housing waiting list; and as a person specifically identified by the municipality (usually as a result of being moved from elsewhere).<sup>108</sup> However, there is no prioritising of these different categories. Indeed, it is recognised that even though there are waiting lists these have been poorly maintained and are difficult to integrate as they were composed for different racial groups under apartheid.

The impact of the deracialisation of housing policy mirrors changes in both the labour market and welfare provision. Coloureds in general have seen a small decline in access, although this has not affected those wealthy enough to take advantage of the free market. Section 10 Africans have seen improving access, although this has also been accompanied by growing provision for people born outside Cape Town.

Between 1996 and 2001 there was an increase in the number of coloured households reported living in formal housing of some description, with 649,265 coloured households in flats and houses in 1996 and 793,565 in 2001. However, this does not represent an overall improvement if population growth is considered, as only 87.8% of households were in formal housing in 2001, compared with 88.9% in 1996. Statistics from the household and labour force surveys also suggest that the

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<sup>107</sup> Oldfield, S, 'The Centrality of Community Capacity in State Low-Income Housing Provision in Cape Town, South Africa', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24/4, December 2000, pp.859-60

<sup>108</sup> City of Cape Town, Policy: Housing Allocation, (Cape Town, 2004)

post-apartheid period has been one of a slight decline in formal housing occupancy for coloureds (see table 2.10).

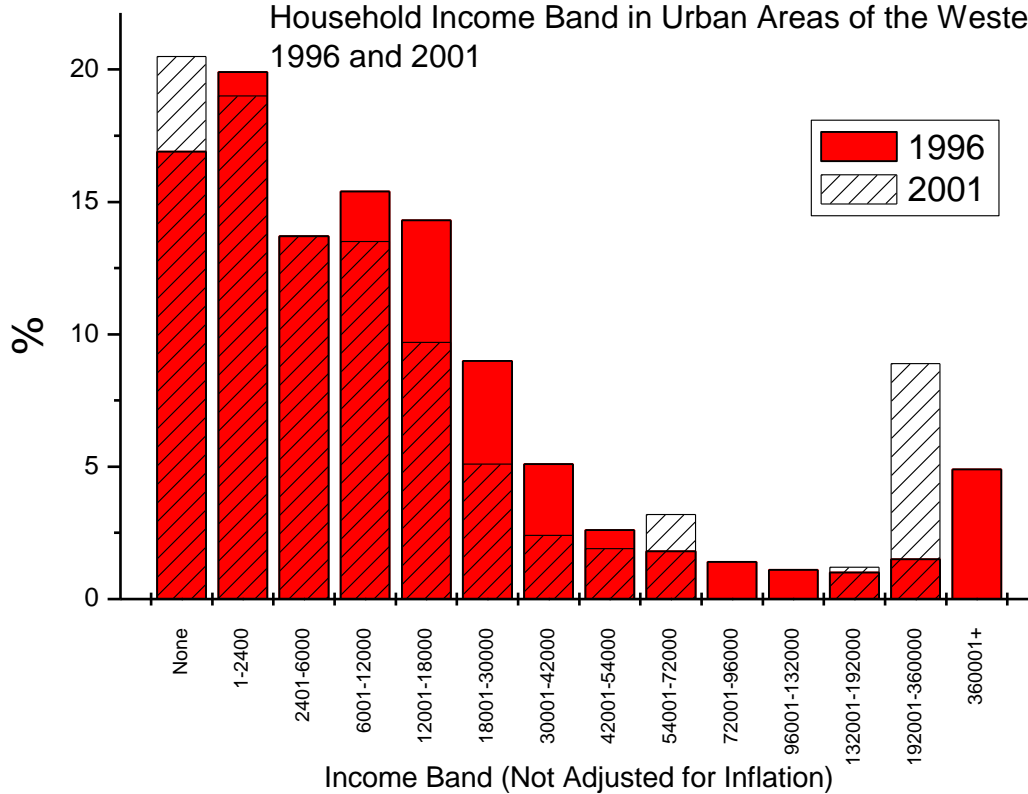
<b>Table 2.10: Proportion of Coloureds living in Shacks, Huts and Backyard Shacks, 1993-2005<sup>109</sup></b>							
<b>Year</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>%</b>	2.3	4.1	4.3	6.2	7.2	6	6.9

However, just as changes in the labour market were mediated by factors other than race, so too are changes in housing provision. Graph 2.29 compares the proportion of informal households by overall household income band in 1996 and 2001 for all coloureds living in the Western Cape.<sup>110</sup> What becomes clear is that income plays a key role in defining access to housing. Whilst not surprising, this relationship strengthened between 1996 and 2001. All coloured income bands, except the no income band, have seen a decreasing proportion of households in informal housing. However, this decrease is greater for those in the higher income bands than the lowest (excepting the unusual growth in informal housing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> highest bands which may be an anomaly caused by the small amounts of households falling in these categories). Interestingly, the number of households reporting no income has grown considerably between 1996 and 2001 from 5.4% of all coloured households to 9.4% and it is this group which has increasingly moved into informal housing.

<sup>109</sup> Data taken from: October Household Survey: 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999. Labour Force Survey: September 2001, September 2003, March 2005.

<sup>110</sup> Data taken from, 1996 and 2001 population censuses, all household with a coloured head of household were used in 1996 and all households where the majority population group was recorded as coloured in 2001 were used. Households where data on household income was missing were excluded.

Graph 2.29: Proportion Of Coloured Households Living in Shacks, Huts and Backyard Shacks by Household Income Band in Urban Areas of the Western Cape 1996 and 2001



It appears, therefore, that like changes in the labour market and with welfare provision, post-apartheid transformation has had the largest negative effect on those coloureds most reliant upon state support and subsidisation. Whilst housing provision for coloureds has only slightly worsened since 1994, it is the (increasing number) of people with low or no incomes that have suffered most from this change.

Whilst coloureds have experienced a slight decline in access to housing since the end of apartheid, housing provision for Africans has expanded. National comparisons between 1991 and the post-apartheid period are difficult to make, as the 1991 census excluded the homelands. The situation in the Western Cape, however, is easier to assess because no part of the province was ever a homeland. Table 2.10 shows how access to housing has improved for all Africans since 1996.

<b>Table 2.10: % Of African Households in Shacks and Backyard Shacks by Birthplace (Urban areas of the Western Cape)<sup>111</sup></b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>1991 (Development Region A)</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>
<b>All Africans</b>	59.4	65	50.4
<b>Household Head Born in RSA (1991) or Western Cape (2001)</b>	40.4	-	25.6
<b>Household Head Born Elsewhere</b>	68	-	58.6

However, within the context of an ongoing housing shortage apartheid insiders are still privileged in their housing access. People born outside the Western Cape are more likely to be housed in informal housing than those born within the area (graph 2.30).<sup>112</sup>

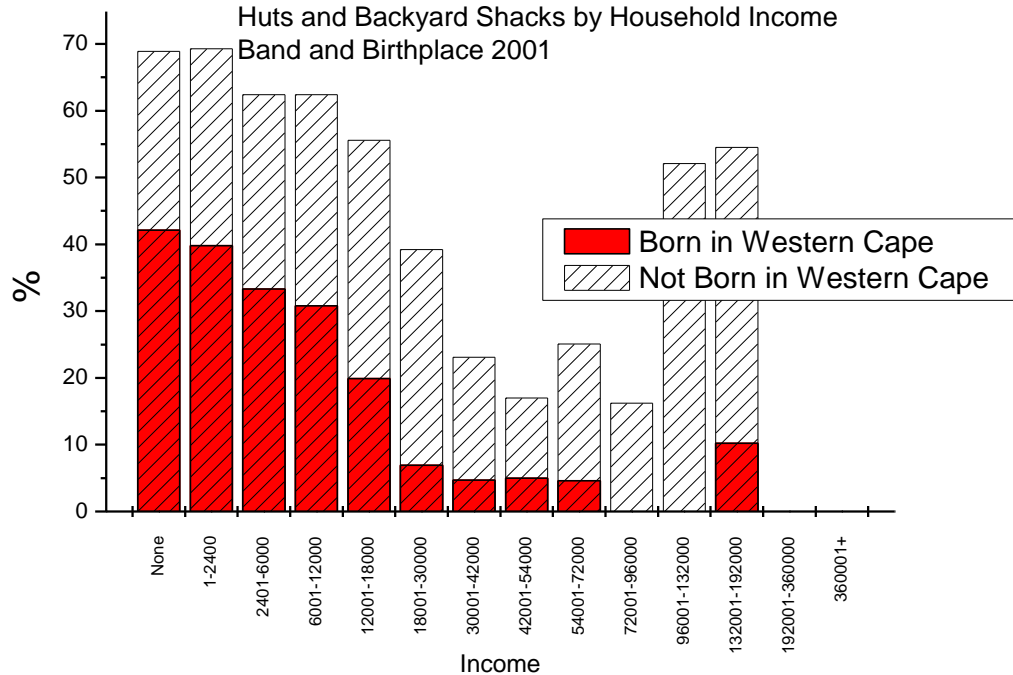
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<sup>111</sup> Data from the 1991, 1996 and 2001 population censuses.

<sup>112</sup> Data from the 2001 population census.

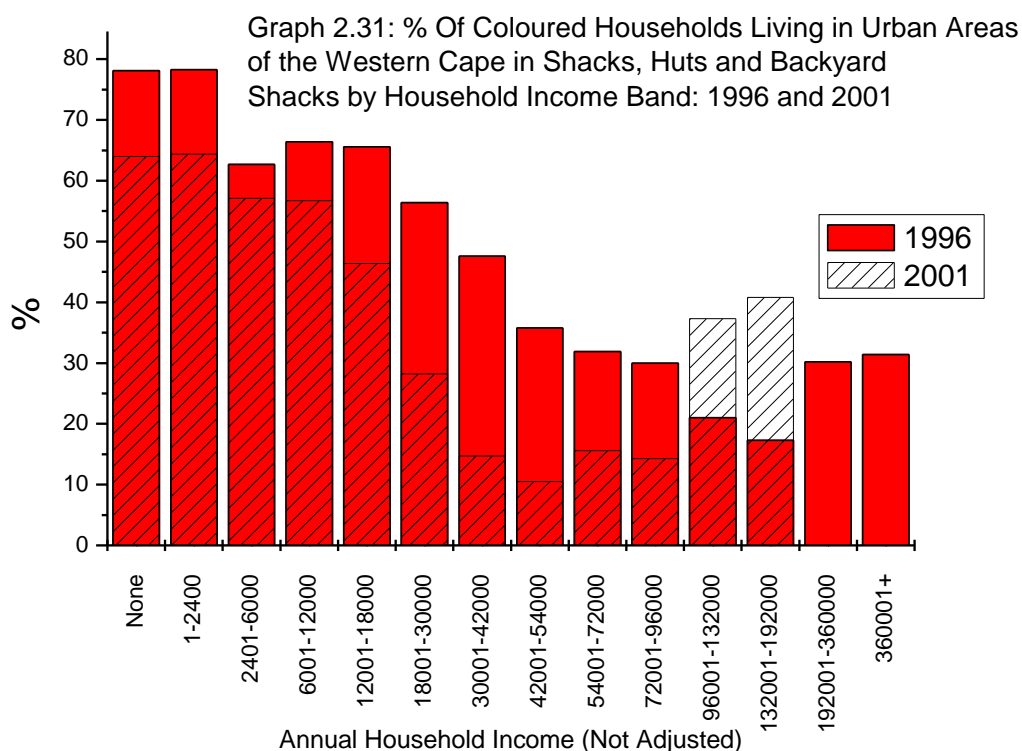


Graph 2.30: % Of African Households in the Urban Areas of the Western Cape Living in Shacks, Huts and Backyard Shacks by Household Income Band and Birthplace 2001



In all income bands people from outside the area are less likely to be formally housed than Africans born in the Western Cape. Indeed, Africans born in the Western Cape with no income are more likely to be in formal housing than people from outside with a household income of up to R18,000. However, whilst birthplace correlates with housing access, income is also important, with access improving for both groups as incomes increase. If this is compared to the data from 1991 (graph 2.28 and table 2.9), which revealed only a very limited correlation between income and formal housing access, particularly for Africans born within the Western Cape, it becomes clear that whilst housing access has improved it has done so in a way that has seen access expand most rapidly amongst more wealthy Africans. Graph 2.31 compares changes in housing access by income for all African households in urban areas of the Western Cape in 1996 and 2001 (unfortunately data was not collected on birthplace in the 1996 census). It clearly reveals that although the proportion of Africans living in informal housing has decreased across the board (unlike for coloureds) income has mediated the extent to which this improvement has been experienced. For those Africans in the higher income brackets (excluding

the R96,001 - R132,000 & R132,001 - R192,000) presence in informal housing has dropped markedly. However, for those in the lower brackets this drop has been less pronounced. It would appear, therefore, that those on lower income have been less able to benefit from the deracialisation of housing provision than those with higher incomes.



#### 2.4.4. Race, Class and the Continuing Legacy of Apartheid Discrimination in Housing Provision

Overall, the picture of housing provision since 1948 has been of an incomplete move away from race as the key determinant of access, towards income. Under early apartheid the state provided and regulated access to housing in line with apartheid principles. Coloureds were moved out of white areas and into new segregated housing estates, but overall provision for coloureds expanded. In contrast, Africans were treated as temporary urban residents and housing provision stagnated. As apartheid began to creak under its own contradictions in the 1970s policy slowly

changed and the state withdrew from housing provision. This saw the start of a trend that was to be continued post-apartheid – the growing importance of income in securing access to housing. However, whilst post-apartheid income is increasingly important for securing access to housing, apartheid has left a clear legacy. Summarising evidence from the Western Cape presented above, whilst nearly 70% of African households with no income and household heads born outside the Western Cape in 2001 were living in informal housing, this figure falls to around 40% of zero income households with an African head born within the region, and only about 22% of zero income coloured households.

## **2.5. Conclusion: Race, Class and Differential Discrimination**

Whilst apartheid is often stereotyped as dualistic system of exploitation based upon the division of white and black this study has revealed a complex system of privilege and discrimination in which South Africa's non-white population experienced considerable internal variation. Non-whites were split into racial groups and treated differentially on this basis, whilst Africans were further differentiated by influx control legislation. However this was not all that affected people life chances. Racial discrimination interacted with socio-economic cleavages, creating complex contours of privilege and discrimination. For all blacks apart from those living in the homelands apartheid provided access to state resources and economic opportunities which were conditional upon their presence in the apartheid hierarchy. Coloureds received better housing, welfare provision and labour market opportunities than Africans, whilst Africans with section 10 rights received more than migrants. Conversely, however, blacks were also discriminated against in relation to the population groups above them.

Within this context, the way in which blacks interacted with apartheid was heavily mediated by individual characteristics. For coloureds and section 10 Africans with low levels of education apartheid discrimination actually protected people from competition for resources and employment by people below them in the hierarchy. In contrast, people with greater education and potential life opportunities did not need this protection. Instead apartheid created ceilings artificially restricting their advancement.

With the gradual erosion of apartheid these artificial barriers have been removed and this has had a differential impact within and across the different race groups. For those of all races previously inhibited by apartheid's artificial ceilings the removal of discrimination has opened up new opportunities and seen growing wealth and access to services such as housing. For those with less education the picture has varied more by race. For Africans increased competition for employment has come from mass immigration from the Eastern Cape and unemployment has rocketed. However, housing provision and state welfare assistance have both improved, even if recent immigrants are able to share in this provision. In contrast working class coloureds seem to have suffered particularly notably from deracialisation, although on most indicators they still fare considerably better than Africans. Increased competition for skilled and unskilled manual work has seen job opportunities for coloureds without education decline. The value of state welfare grants for the poorest coloureds has fallen and, whilst housing provision has increased in absolute numbers, the proportion of coloured households living in informal accommodation has crept up slowly.

Overall, therefore, whilst race has played a central role in patterning life chances in South Africa, alone this is not sufficient to explain discrimination and inequality. Race interacted with a complex terrain of class, education and internal differentiation to produce very different experiences amongst different groups of black South Africans depending where they were positioned in relation to apartheid's artificial ceilings and floors. The rest of this thesis moves to examine the

nature of collective action in apartheid and how it relates to the changing patterns of this 'differential discrimination' in South Africa.

# **Chapter Three**

## **Race, Class and Revolt: The Student Uprising of 1976 in Cape Town**

### **3.1. Introduction**

In June 1976 school pupils in the township of Soweto marched to protest against the introduction of Afrikaans as the language of instruction for half of all secondary school subjects. Confronted by unarmed protesters members of the South African Police Force opened fire and, in the first act of what was to become nationwide unrest, the students rioted. This unrest spread rapidly, first through the Rand before, in August, Cape Town was engulfed.

Considerable focus has been placed upon the demographic, organisational and political developments preceding and influencing the development of unrest in Soweto. However, the Cape Town context was unique. In Soweto Black Consciousness (BC) organisations and ideologies intertwined with events, whilst in Cape Town they were marked by their absence. Furthermore, Capetonians were uniquely affected by the Coloured Labour Preference Policy. This chapter aims, therefore, to draw into focus the specific experience of the 1976 uprising in Cape Town whilst relating its findings to broader debates surrounding Soweto.

This chapter challenges three positions within the literature on 1976 – 1) that the events of 1976 were primarily political and universal in content, rather than immediate and student centred, 2) that the failure of the students to gain consistent adult and migrant worker support was a failure of student strategies, rather than representing an unwillingness on behalf of adults to challenge the state, and 3) that in Cape Town 1976 represented a turning point in relationships between Africans

and coloureds. It does this by showing that the events of 1976 in the city were at heart a highly fragmented and student driven response to the opening of political space brought about by the riots in Soweto and the state's failure to contain them, which not only failed to create inter-generational and cross race cooperation, but were operating in a context which made such co-operation highly unlikely.

Students became drawn into the unrest because Soweto and its aftermath expanded political space and provided an opportunity to challenge an education system that was both unjust and failing to deliver. This led to the unrest developing in a manner which was both dominated by students and which articulated demands that were firmly grounded in the student experience. However, more generally the social base for a more general revolt was lacking. Before 1976 adults in both Bonteheuwel and Guguletu had been drawn into ambiguous relationships with apartheid by the functioning of the apartheid political economy and the way in which access to resources locally were distributed. Consequently, when unrest broke the broader black population had little to gain and much to lose through engaging in protest. Furthermore, the differential impact of apartheid across and within the different racial groups prevented coherent narratives of change and plans of action from developing, even amongst the students. Pressures within apartheid education had built up in different communities but they were mediated by both race and class and the emergence of revolt did not reach across these boundaries.

This chapter starts by outlining the current debates that exist around the events of 1976. It then moves to a discussion of the forms of civil society that existed in Cape Town before 1976. It shows that there was little progressive activism in coloured and African communities at this time and, more importantly, that the forms of organisation that did exist demonstrate ambiguities in the relationships between older black Capetonians and the apartheid state rooted in the functioning of apartheid's discriminatory and distributional regime. Accepting that there was little organisational impetus behind the outbreak of unrest the chapter then proceeds to examine the social base of protest. It shows how it originated in the

intersection of clear schoolyard grievances with an opening of political space as events in Soweto made change appear possible and the reactions of the police pushed people into retaliation and boycott. Finally, it considers the progression of the unrest and demonstrates how its development was patterned by the differential experiences of apartheid within and across the city's black communities. Students remained at the heart of events because apartheid education gave them a clear and immediate focus for protest. In contrast adults, and particularly African migrants, remained alienated from activism as challenging apartheid at this time had little to offer to people beyond the schoolyard.

### **3.2. The Uprising of 1976 in Current Literature: Student Revolt or Universal Revolution?**

Academic literature on 1976 has focused on three interrelated features of the uprising. Firstly there has been a focus upon the relationship between organisations and the uprising: were the events of 1976 planned and what role did political movements and ideologies (both the banned liberation movements and Black Consciousness organisations) play in events? Secondly the activists themselves have been investigated: was 1976 simply a student phenomenon or did it draw support from throughout black society? Thirdly the role of structural conditions has been considered: was the uprising a response to a growing crisis of apartheid rule as represented by a deepening recession and the growth of an increasingly educated African youth, or was it simply a consequence of misguided education policy and a heavy-handed police response?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a range of interpretations on these questions see: Mafeje, A, 'Soweto and its aftermath', *Review of African Political Economy*, 5/11, 1978, pp.17-30; Glaser, C, "'We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis': School Politics and Youth Gangs in Soweto, 1968-76', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24/2, 1998, pp.301-323; First, R, 'After Soweto: a



Whilst divergent in their focus these debates contain at their core the underlying question of whether 1976 represented at one extreme a spontaneous, particularistic student revolt or at the other a universal political assault on state power. Opinions on this question are diverse, but coalesce around three broad positions. Firstly, it has been argued that the events of 1976 represented a politicised uprising which drew large numbers of Africans from across society into a sustained challenge to state power. Hopkins and Grange argue that amongst students schooling issues took a back seat to demands for political change, even before the revolt broke out, and that Soweto represented a clearly defined political challenge to the state.<sup>2</sup> In a more nuanced analysis Brooks and Brickhill acknowledge that students were at the centre of events but, pointing to the valorisation of liberation movement figures by the students and the formation of the Black Parents Association, have argued that whilst there was a shaking off of deference amongst the youth during 1976 this was not a rejection of the political heritage passed down from their elders. Instead, by fighting the state the students were the vanguard of a more universal struggle, gaining a widespread sympathy from the community at large which allowed them to 'assume sustained leadership of a struggle that developed through several phases and over much wider ground.'<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, the second position argues that underlying conditions were right for a broadening of struggle but a failure of student strategies prevented uprising becoming a universal and sustained challenge to state power. Specifically, it is argued that apartheid was so discriminatory it created a predisposition amongst the black working class towards oppositional political activity. Therefore, failures to broaden the social basis of the uprising had to be a result of deficient student

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Response', *Review of African Political Economy*, 5/11, 1978, pp.93-100; Hirson, B, Year of Fire, Year of Ash. The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Rebellion?, (London, 1979)

<sup>2</sup> Hopkins, P & Grange, H, The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show: The Inside Story of the 1976 Uprising, (Cape Town, 2001), p.66

<sup>3</sup> Brooks, A & Brickhill, J, Whirlwind Before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa from June to December 1976, (London, 1980), pp.104-5

organisation and the lack of a coherent political message. This approach is perhaps best illustrated in the work of Hirson, who argues that:

It was as if the recognition of the importance of the workers in any struggle remained a theoretical construct [for the students] that could not be made concrete. And if that is the case, it could *only* be because the young students were not able to make organisational contact with real flesh-and-blood workers in industry.<sup>4</sup>

The final position agrees that 1976/76 was a student uprising, but explains its limited social base on cleavages within the black population. Several authors have pointed to the fact that it was schooling policies – notably the rapid expansion of secondary education and the decision to implement Afrikaans as a language of instruction – that were the main causes of the uprising.<sup>5</sup> Building on this it has been argued that students had a unique experience of apartheid and consequently there was no clear basis upon which a student/parent/worker action could be formed. Ruth First argues that seeing the working class as a group simply waiting to be activated into revolt ignores the complexity of class in South Africa and the fact that different black groups, notably the migrant workers, had different interests.<sup>6</sup> Glaser makes a similar point in his study of relations between students and gangsters in Soweto during 1976, arguing that as an educated elite the students had little in common with most township youth. Therefore, whilst during the uprising these groups occasionally cooperated, this was fraught with tension and their different experiences, organisational forms and goals served to ultimately keep the two groups separate.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hirson, B, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash...*, p.253, Italics mine;

See also Mafeje, A, 'Soweto and its aftermath' ...

<sup>5</sup> Hyslop, J, 'School Student Movements and State Education Policy: 1972-87', in (eds.) Cobbett, W and Cohen R, *Popular Struggles in South Africa*, (Sheffield, 1988)

<sup>6</sup> First, R, 'After Soweto...', p.95

<sup>7</sup> Glaser, C, "'We Must Infiltrate...,'" p.322

### 3.3. Armchair Revolutionaries and Old Timers: The Dearth of Radical Politics in Cape Town before 1976

In Soweto the 1976 uprising was preceded by the development of new forms of organisation (particularly within the schools) and the growth of Black Consciousness (BC).<sup>8</sup> However, in Cape Town civil society before 1976 was quiescent and politicisation constrained.

Black Consciousness and linked organisations had virtually no presence in either the African or coloured schools in the Western Cape. There was only one branch of the BC South African Student Movement (SASM) in a coloured school in the Athlone area of the city, none in the African schools, and BC organisation was weak throughout the city.<sup>9</sup> There was also little BC involvement in community projects – a hallmark of their activities elsewhere. As Johnny Issel, one of the city's leading BC activists at this time remarked of attempts to build such organisations, 'people were not very interested in these things.'<sup>10</sup> Activists from other ideological tendencies had similar experiences. Neville Alexander, working from a revolutionary Trotskyite position, formed a socialist study group and became involved in setting up self-help groups, most notably the creation of a purchasing co-operative in the squatter camp of Vrygrond. However, whilst the study group continued, the co-op was abandoned due to the amount of organisers' time it consumed.<sup>11</sup>

The ANC was also inactive. ANC organising within the coloured communities had a limited history and there is no evidence of coloured ANC activism in the period immediately preceding 1976. Even in the African townships, where there were activists – mainly 'old timers' who had cut their political teeth in

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp.301-323

<sup>9</sup> Johnny Issel Interviewed by Jeremy Seekings, 12/3/1992, Cape Town; Interview with Oupa Lehulere (1986) reproduced in: Khanya History Programme, Students and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa 1976-2006, (Johannesburg, 2006), p.46

<sup>10</sup> Johnny Issel, interviewed by Jeremy Seekings, 12/3/1992, Cape Town

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Neville Alexander, 16/12/2005, University of Cape Town

the 1950s – these activists were mainly involved in underground work, maintaining links with the exiled liberation movements and identifying people to send abroad for military training: ANC involvement in civil society before 1976 was non-existent.<sup>12</sup>

Rather than being dominated by radical activists civil society in Cape Town at this time was dominated by organisations with a quiescent approach to the state and its policies. This did not mean that African and coloured civil society necessarily provided support to apartheid, however it did mean that before 1976 open challenges to state policy were limited.

In the coloured areas there was organised opposition to apartheid within both civil and political society, yet this opposition operated in a way that allowed rhetorical opposition to coexist alongside forms of activism that demanded little active support. This opposition was split between the Labour Party, which sought election to apartheid bodies in order to undermine them from within, and the Unity Movement, which opposed any collaboration and promoted boycotts of apartheid institutions.

The Labour Party drew its strength from electoral politics. Unlike Africans, coloureds had no homeland. Consequently mechanisms existed for political representation, which the Labour Party dominated. It was organised as an exclusively coloured political party and, despite a brief flirtation with BC in the early 1970s, remained focused upon organising and promoting the interests of coloureds, rather than all non-white groups.<sup>13</sup> However, whilst the Labour Party sought election to government bodies it used its involvement in these institutions to oppose them from within, rendering them unworkable.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Mildred Leseia, 4/9/2006, Parliament, Cape Town; Interview with Mountain Quembello, 25/7/2006, Guguletu; Interview with Wilson Sidina, 31/10/2005, Guguletu

<sup>13</sup> Goldin, I, Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa, (London & NY, 1987), pp.156-8

In contrast to the Labour Party the Unity Movement rejected all involvement in apartheid's 'dummy bodies' and boycotted apartheid elections. It espoused a position which came to be classed as 'ultra-left', rejecting co-operation with whites, arguing for working class dominance of the struggle and promoting a policy of non-collaboration in order to render apartheid unworkable.

The Unity Movement's strength was within the schools and the sports movement. Unity Movement teachers were involved in running after school discussion groups and study sessions and providing political education for pupils. Indeed, many people who were to become key figures in the anti-apartheid movement in the Western Cape had their first experience of political discussion and activism through the Unity Movement.<sup>14</sup> The Unity Movement also had considerable influence within the South African Council of Sport (SACOS). Set up in 1973 to facilitate sporting cooperation between communities in opposition to the government's organising of sport along racial lines SACOS practiced non-collaboration by organising non-racial sporting events, bringing together teams from across both the region and the country.

However, whilst both the Unity Movement and the Labour Party opposed apartheid and could exert influence they did not encouraged open or mass opposition to the state or its policies. Unity Movement teachers provided political education but, in the period before 1976, never encouraged their students to organise to oppose unpopular policies either within or beyond the schools. Indeed schools with strong Unity Movement traditions were often the least active in 1976.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the Labour Party confined its opposition to electoral politics.

In the African areas open political organisation was forbidden and civil society was dominated by township based organisations concerned with the immediate challenges of urban living. Very different forms of community organisation dominated in the areas of the townships which housed section 10 (a)

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<sup>14</sup> Trevor Manuel, Interviewed by Jeremy Seekings, 4/7/1992, Johannesburg

<sup>15</sup> Brooks, A & Brickhill, J, Whirlwind Before the Storm..., p.113

and (b) residents, those that housed migrants and those that housed squatters. Indeed, it was not until the mid-1990s that the residential organisations representing these different communities united. As the focus here is the formal township of Guguletu the organisations and networks which were operating in the squatter and hostel areas will not be discussed.<sup>16</sup>

Two forms of organisation are considered here because of the key role they played in ordering community responses to the local state and their continuing salience throughout the following three decades. These are the street committees and resident's associations. Whilst both street committees and residents association, or 'civics' as they were to become known, are most often associated with growing opposition to apartheid during the 1980s, similar structures existed in Cape Town in 1975.

The street committees were, and still are, locally based organisations composed of local residents organised together within a street. Elected by the street's residents these committees are normally made up of a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer, sitting in an executive committee of around ten. Whilst their precise roles have varied over time and in different areas of South Africa, in Cape Town at this time they were concerned primarily with regulating residents' behaviour and seeking to make the townships hospitable environments.

The street committees developed in Guguletu soon after its formation and were widespread. Nearly all people interviewed in Guguletu said that street committees existed in their streets and residents remember street committees existing when they first occupied their houses in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>17</sup> The role of the street committees during this period was primarily dispute resolution and tackling petty crime. Dispute resolution involved calling people, often fighting

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the nature of internal organisation of the hostel areas based on research performed in the township of Langa during the early 1960s see: Wilson, M & Mafeje, A, Langa: A Study of Social Groups in an African Township, (Cape Town, 1963)

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Guguletu street committee chair, 9/11/05, Guguletu; Street committee members (4 & 5) interviewed by Rebekah Lee, 2000/2001; Street committee member (1) interviewed by Rebekah Lee, 16/01/01

family members, to street meetings, asking them to explain their situation and adjudicating on disputes. As one respondent, recalled: '[T]hey would intervene if there was a family crisis, sorting that problem and bringing peace together.'<sup>18</sup> Central to the functioning of the committees was also crime prevention. Activities to regulate crime varied, with some committees simply calling offenders to meetings, whilst others sometimes dealt out physical punishment.<sup>19</sup>

The street committees also provided linkages between local residents and apartheid administrators. Street committee members would represent individuals in their dealings with the local authorities. In Guguletu a street chair addressed the administration board on behalf of a woman who had received an eviction notice due to complaints about her behaviour. In this role the street committee sought to both reconcile the resident with the members of the community who were unhappy with her behaviour, and simultaneously represent her to the local authorities.<sup>20</sup>

The second form of organisation were the residents' associations. A number of different organisations emerged during the 1960s and 1970s to represent the interests of residents of Guguletu. As early as 1962 there is evidence of a Nyanga West Civic Association (NWCA) operating in the area that was to later be renamed Guguletu, complaining to the Administration Board about flooding at the train station.<sup>21</sup> There was a Coordinating Civic Council, which it appears was formed in the early 1970s as a coordinating body for a range of organisations operating in the African townships.<sup>22</sup> An organisation called the Guguletu Residents' Association (GRA) also emerged in 1975 out of the pre-existing Guguletu Community Services Association.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Participant in backyard housing movement, 19/4/2006, Guguletu

<sup>19</sup> Street committee members (4 & 5) interviewed by Rebekah Lee, 2000/2001. The interviewee recalls the operation of the committees during the 1960s

<sup>20</sup> Letter from the Director of Labour and Community Services to Argus Action, 'Complaint by Miss Monica Ngesi of D-442, Nyanga', 1p., typed, ss, A4, 21/6/1974, CTAR, AWC 2/18, NY8/30/1

<sup>21</sup> Letter from A. Noapi of the Nyanga West Civic Association to 'Dear Sir', 1p., typed, ss, A4, n.d, CTAR, AWC, 2/2, G7

<sup>22</sup> Letter from the Acting Secretary of the Co-ordinating Civic Council of Langa, Guguletu and Nyanga East to the Chief Director of the BAAB, 3p., typed, ss, A4, 1/12/1975, CTAR, AWC 2/8, G27

Just like the street committees, the residents associations were concerned with making the lives of Guguletu's residents more bearable, primarily through regulating the local community and passing on community concerns to the authorities. The importance of these activities was made explicit as early as 1967 in the constitution of the Guguletu Community Services Association. This stated its aims as:

- a) To assist the authorities concerned with the administration of the Guguletu township by serving as a liaison between them and residents.
- b) To devise ways and means of (assisting the authorities in) combating juvenile delinquency and eliminating undesirable elements.
- c) To assist the authorities by encouraging residents in the promotion of social, cultural and recreational activities.<sup>23</sup>

Similar views were also put forward in the constitution of the GRA:

The purpose of the association shall be to:-

- (i) unite the residents of the 4 sections of Guguletu into one common body for the purpose of fostering closer relationships by the exchange of residential/citizenship experiences, views and knowledge among members.
- (ii) uphold and maintain the just claims of the residents by negotiating through recognized (sic) channels of communication with the Bantu Administration Board.
- (iii) enlighten the residents to the broader principles about the Urban Bantu Council policies.<sup>24</sup>

In liaising with the authorities the residents' associations also sought to perform a role as quasi local governments. The GRA was organised around the principle that 'every man or woman, boy or girl, who is resident of Guguletu shall be a member of the GRA'.<sup>25</sup> It also sought to provide for elections of officeholders and to draw feedback through mass meetings (although the extent to which these

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<sup>23</sup> 'Guguletu Community Services Association Constitution: Adopted September 1967', 2p., typed, ds (3), A4, CTAR, AWC, 2/8, G27, p.1

<sup>24</sup> Guguletu Resident's Association, 'Constitution', 9p., typed, ss, A4, 3/7/1/3, CTAR, PACG vol.1, p.1

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



operated openly is unclear). As such it strove to operate not simply as a voluntary organisation, but as a reflection of the collective will of the whole community.

It is difficult to assess the strength of the African residents' associations; however it would appear that their presence was relatively wide. Although not uniform across the township, at least some street committees in Guguletu were linked into the GRA. The GRA's constitution suggests it operated as an umbrella body for street committees as it gave its executive committee power to look into any complaint made with regards to 'any officer, member, street or section in its jurisdiction.'<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, an interviewee specifically recalled that when he first moved to Guguletu the street committees were known as 'Guguletu Residents.'<sup>27</sup>

Civil society in both the coloured and African communities of Cape Town before 1976 was quiescent. However, apartheid was characterised by the denial of political rights, poor quality services and in many coloured and all African communities, poverty and low wages. Questions arise, therefore, over why the regime was not more openly opposed. The traditional explanation for this has been that quiescence was a function of repression and a collective memory of the failure of the protests of the late 1950s and early 1960s. There can be little doubt that this played a role. After Sharpeville many activists were imprisoned and those who remained were hindered by government banning orders and the fear of being informed upon. Activists also experienced problems in learning new ways to organise once the mass action of the 1950s was no longer feasible.<sup>28</sup> Consequently political positions were rarely articulated in the open and radical political organising was eschewed.

However, this is not a sufficient explanation for quiescence. There was clear cooperation between widespread community structures and apartheid administrators in African communities which cannot be explained away as a result

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.3

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Guguletu street committee chair, 9/11/05, Guguletu

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Mildred Lesiea, 4/9/2006, Cape Town

of fear and disorganisation. Furthermore, coloured organisations – which had a far broader scope for action – were timid in their opposition. Any explanation of quiescence, therefore, needs to move beyond a simple assertion of the constraining effects of state power to consider the complexity of relationships between the apartheid state and its black populations.

In the African communities civil society quiescence was linked to the relationships which emerged from the nature of administrative control in the townships and community responses to the constraints and opportunities this presented. Specifically, a symbiotic relationship emerged between local government and civil society organisations based around the distribution of limited resources. This relationship encouraged Africans to cooperate with, rather than challenge, state power.

Whilst limited in quantity – particularly in the case of housing – local government in the townships (the Bantu Affairs Administration Board (BAAB)) controlled resources such as housing leases and trading permits.<sup>29</sup> However, despite having this control their knowledge of the African population was administering was highly circumscribed. There were no electoral mechanisms for the representation of Africans until the late 1970s and administrative information was often missing or incomplete. For example, the BAAB was at times unsure about who was resident in the properties they let and who was eligible for such housing when it became available, with the housing archives containing complaints from people being charged rent for housing they are not occupying and complaints of people illegally occupying housing units.<sup>30</sup>

Whilst the local administration was struggling with a lack of administrative data local residents were constructing organisations to negotiate the hardships of

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<sup>29</sup> The official housing shortage more than quadrupled between 1977 and 1981 from 1700 family units for Africans in the City to 7135. See chapter two p. 57

<sup>30</sup> Letter from National Mapipia, 2p., photocopied, handwritten, ss, A4, 25/5/1979, CTAR, PACG 1227, 17/7/1, vol.1; Statement By John Nombana, Guguletu, 2p., typed, ss, A4, 26/2/1979, CTAR, PACG 1227, 17/7/1, vol.1

urban life. Street committees initially emerged in response to the failure of the apartheid state to provide adequate services in the townships. For example the focus upon dispute resolution and informal policing filled a gap produced by an absence of effective state policing.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, residents' associations developed to fill the void left by the absence of formal mechanisms for representation and consultation with the local state, which regulated many elements of Africans' day-to-day lives. The constitutions of these organisations made specific reference to their roles as channels of 'liaison' between the authorities and township dwellers and one of the first community councillors noted explicitly that, 'these bodies filled the vacuum which had arisen as a result of the dissolution of the Urban Black Council.'<sup>32</sup>

However, gaps and failings in apartheid administration did not necessarily lead to a quiescent civil society. Seekings' study of the radical civic associations in the 1980s, which challenged not only unpopular policies but also apartheid, argues that these organisations were the result of similar dynamics to those described above: specifically the implementation of unpopular policies and the lack of legitimate channels of representation through which to oppose them.<sup>33</sup> Consequently the quiescent nature of African civil society in this period needs further explanation. The key to such an explanation lies in the symbiotic relationship that emerged between the African civil society organisations and apartheid administrators. The BAAB needed mechanisms to interact with and administer local communities; at the same time interaction with the BAAB provided concrete benefits for civil society organisations' members and activists. Civil society organisations were therefore granted quasi-representative and administrative functions in return for their cooperation.

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<sup>31</sup> Street committee members (4 & 5) interviewed by Rebekah Lee, 2000/2001, , see also 'Images of punishment in the People's Courts of Cape Town 1985-7 - from Prefigurative Justice to Populist Violence' in (eds.) Manganyi, C and Du Toit, A, Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa, (London, 1990), pp.342-3

<sup>32</sup> 'Minutes of the Third General Meeting of the Cape Town Community Council Held in the Fezeka Hall on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1979 at 15h00', 32p., typed, ss, A4, 08/11/1979, CTAR, PACG 204, 3/2/10/3, p.2

<sup>33</sup> Seekings, J, 'Civic Organisations in South African Townships', in (eds.) Moss, G & Obery, I, From 'Red Friday' to Codesa: South African review 6, (Johannesburg, 1992), p.218

The acting head of the BAAB in 1978 revealed the role that the residents associations played in providing a channel of communication between the board and the residents when he noted that:

It is impossible for him to go out and speak to every individual in the townships, therefore the board has to rely to a great extent on the co-operation of civic associations.<sup>34</sup>

However, in relying upon local civil society the BAAB devolved a series of *de facto* powers to these organisations. Residents associations and street committees assumed responsibilities for identifying and legitimating people to receive state resources. The Nyanga West Civic Association was responsible for providing letters of assistance to people registering for houses in Guguletu during its early occupation.<sup>35</sup> They were also allowed to directly nominate people to receive preferential treatment. For example, at a meeting held in 1963 with BAAB officials, the Civic Association requested priority for its membership for newly constructed housing and whilst not all were accommodated the board agreed to house 5 members and the Association provided a list of names to this effect.<sup>36</sup>

At the extreme such networks could also be used to generate profit. Members of the Nyanga West Civic Association appear to have sold 'assisting letters' to help people register for houses in the mid-1960s.<sup>37</sup> This process continued

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<sup>34</sup> Résumé of a Discussion Held Between the Acting Chief Director of the Administration Board Peninsula Area and Representatives of the Co-ordinating Civic Council of Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu in the Board's Head Office Goodwood on Thursday July 18, 1978 at 14h30, 6p., typed, ss, A4,18/07/1978, PACG, 3/2/10/1, vol.4, p.2

<sup>35</sup> Letter from J.S. Tulwana, Secretary of the Nyanga West Civic Association, to Mr Tenent, Bantu Administration, 1p., typed, ss, A4, 2/5/1964, CTAR, AWC 2/8, G27; Letter from J.S. Tulwana, Secretary of the Nyanga West Civic Association, to The Deputy Director, Bantu Administration, 1p., typed, ss, A4, 2/6/1964, CTAR, AWC 2/8, G27; Letter from J.S. Tulwana, Secretary of the Nyanga West Civic Association, to The Deputy Director, Bantu Administration, 1p., typed, ss, A4, 25/5/1964, CTAR, AWC 2/8, G27

<sup>36</sup> Letter from J.S. Tulwana, Secretary of the Nyanga West Civic Association, to the Superintendent, Bantu Administration, 2p., typed, ss, A4, 8/4/1963, CTAR, AWC 2/8, G27

<sup>37</sup> Letter from J.S. Tulwana, Secretary of the Nyanga West Civic Association, to Mr Tenent, Bantu Administration, 1p., typed, ss, A4, 2/5/1964, CTAR, AWC 2/8, G27; Letter from J.S. Tulwana, Secretary of the Nyanga West Civic Association, to The Deputy Director, Bantu Administration, 1p., typed, ss, A4, 2/6/1964, CTAR, AWC 2/8, G27; Letter from J.S. Tulwana, Secretary of the Nyanga West Civic Association, to The Deputy Director, Bantu Administration, 1p., typed, ss, A4, 25/5/1964, CTAR, AWC 2/8, G27

throughout the 1970s. For example, in 1979 a woman made a complaint to the housing board in which she stated that she had approached a member of the Guguletu Residents' Association because 'she is acquainted with officials and is known to help blacks obtaining houses.' She had given her R20 and a bottle of whisky; she also gave R60 to be passed on to an official of the BAAB. Interestingly the complaint was not focused on the solicitation of the bribe, but on the individual's failure to deliver.<sup>38</sup>

Within Guguletu, therefore, whilst repression played a role in generating quiescence it, quiescence was also generated through the function of the local political economy and distributive networks. There were clear incentives for cooperation with the state and these moulded a residential civil society and local political practice that was cooperative rather than conflictual.

Civil and political society in the coloured communities was less collaborative than in the African areas, but in spite of its rhetorical commitment to opposing apartheid rarely involved itself in active opposition to the state or its policies. Explaining coloured civil society during this period is complex. However, it appears that for most coloureds apartheid offered some benefits and that before the late 1970s many coloureds actually experienced improving standards of living, whilst simultaneously experiencing political disenfranchisement. Consequently, coloureds developed an ambiguous relationship with the state that reflected their intermediate position within the apartheid hierarchy.

Mohammed Adhikari makes the point that throughout the twentieth century coloured politics was dominated by an ambiguous relationship to racial discrimination. Whilst coloureds were generally opposed to the discrimination they experienced, their intermediate status in racial hierarchies also gave them privileges they were cautious about risking. Consequently, a major focus of coloured political activity revolved around ensuring they were not entirely excluded from the system:

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<sup>38</sup> Statement By Joyce Samuels of NY6 – 51, Guguletu, 2p., typed, ss, A4, 5/4/1979, PACG 1227, 17/7/1, vol.1

Because their assimilationist aspirations were thwarted and their intermediate position gave Coloured people significant privileges relative to Africans, the basic dynamic behind the assertion of Coloured identity and the main thrust of mobilizing (sic) politically as coloured people was to defend this position of relative privilege.<sup>39</sup>

This dynamic finds echoes within several studies of coloured politics during this period. For example, it has been argued that one of the reasons that (radical) Unity Movement politics appealed to middle class coloureds was that non-collaboration allowed opposition to apartheid without taking risks which could lead either to imprisonment, or in the case of the main bulwark of the Unity Movement – teachers employed by the state – unemployment.<sup>40</sup> Similar positions are present in studies of broader coloured attitudes. For example in the mid-1970s it was reported that coloureds were ambivalent about job discrimination, because whilst it prevented their advancement, it simultaneously protected them from African competition.<sup>41</sup>

It must also be recognised that although apartheid was restraining advancement for some, during the 1960s and early 1970s it was also delivering notable benefits for others. As shown in chapter two, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a marked expansion of employment opportunities and income for coloureds with, for example, coloured per capita disposable income rising in real terms by over 4% per year between 1965 and 1975. Access to state services such as housing was also increasing. Many activists interviewed in Bonteheuwel remarked that their parents had moved into the area from squatter camps and it had been a positive experience.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Adhikari, M, Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in The South African Coloured Community, (Ohio, Athens, 2005), p.11

<sup>40</sup> Alexander, N, 'Non-collaboration in the Western Cape, 1943-1963', in (ed.) Simons, M, The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape, (Cape Town & Johannesburg, 1989), pp.188-9

<sup>41</sup> Beinart, W, 'Recent Occupational Mobility of Coloured People in Cape Town', in (eds.) Van de Merwe, H W, & Groenwald, C J, Occupational and Social Change Among Coloured People in South Africa: Proceedings of a Workshop of the Centre for Intergroup Studies at the University of Cape Town, (Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, 1976), p.106

<sup>42</sup> Informal Chat, BISCO activist, Bonteheuwel; Civic and SANCO activist, Focus Group with Bonteheuwel Civic Activists, 10/11/2005, Bonteheuwel. This is also echoed in the work of Oldfield in

Within this context quiescence appears unsurprising. Political discrimination and poverty did exist and many people opposed this discrimination. However, people's immediate experiences also included day-to-day improvements in the quality of living and there appeared little to gain by openly challenging apartheid. Consequently many coloureds articulated their opposition to apartheid through political and civil society organisations that allowed them to express opposition without demanding radical action.

It is also worth noting that for those coloureds worst hit by apartheid social engineering – the victims of the group areas removals – the consequence of these policies probably also contributed to a lack of radical challenge. Dense social networks are often vital for the formation of organisations as they provide the contacts through which people come together to share problems and organise.<sup>43</sup> However, strong social networks were absent amongst people recently moved. Western's study of the group area removals reveals how there was little community cohesion in the new townships as peoples' networks were torn asunder when they moved into environments where they knew no-one.<sup>44</sup> Without such bonds it would have been difficult for people to come together to discuss problems and mobilise.

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the township of Elsies River: Oldfield, S. E, 'State Restructuring and Urban Transformation in South Africa: A Negotiation of Race, Place and Poverty', PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, Minnesota, July 2000

<sup>43</sup> Della Porta, D. & Diani, M. Social Movements: an Introduction, (Oxford, 1998), pp.113-4

<sup>44</sup> Western, J, Outcast Cape Town, (London, 1981), pp,223, 228, 239 & 253

### 3.4. Students before 1976: Discontent without Action

While apartheid administration and discrimination tied many Africans and coloureds into ambiguous relations with the state there was one section of the population which was insulated from many of the benefits of apartheid, whilst being affected disproportionately by the discriminatory aspects of apartheid legislation. These were the young, and increasingly educated, school pupils.

Both coloured and African secondary schooling had undergone considerable expansion immediately before the outbreak of unrest in Soweto.<sup>45</sup> However, whilst South African blacks were becoming better educated they were not always able to translate this into improved employment, earning opportunities and life experiences. As shown in chapter two, apartheid strictly limited opportunities for both Africans and coloureds, especially by placing ceilings on possible achievement for those with the best education. The impact of this was well recognised at the time. In its evidence to the Cillié commission the Cape Western Region of the Institute of Race Relations reported that because of the CLPP:

On the whole they [youth] have attained higher educational standards than their parents, yet are precluded of making use thereof. The Cape Western Region of the Institute [of Race Relations] has records of a very large number of [African] matriculants who found no employment but as labourers; of qualified women primary school teacher who were unable to obtain teaching positions and were either unemployed, or working as domestic servants, chars or "tea girls."<sup>46</sup>

Similar restrictions were also felt within the coloured communities. A series of essays were written by pupils at Alexander Sinton High School on the uprising and its causes and were made available to the commission into the riot. One of the themes within these pieces, written by young, generally middle class coloureds, was the limitations that apartheid placed upon their personal achievement:

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<sup>45</sup> Hyslop, J, 'School Student Movements...'

<sup>46</sup> SAIRR, South Africa in Travail: The Disturbances of 1976/7, (Johannesburg, 1978), pp.93-4



Even when having a standard ten certificate a so-called [coloured] is not able to obtain a proper job... it is unfair that the poor white should be placed above the upper class coloured.<sup>47</sup>

Alongside the restrictions placed on achievement by apartheid there was also dissatisfaction at the quality and form of schooling that was provided. In the African schools the Afrikaans language policy was universally despised from the moment it was introduced. Few teachers, let alone pupils, were proficient in Afrikaans and its introduction had a huge impact on the schooling experience. In Soweto it was protests against this policy that were the catalyst for the riots and whilst in Cape Town it did not create such an immediate reaction, it was still experienced as a clear barrier to educational attainment. One pupil recounts how their teacher used to teach from two books: reading out the Afrikaans text, but using the English text to teach herself.<sup>48</sup> Suddenly many subjects became inaccessible and the potential for academic success appeared to evaporate. The words of one pupil echo the general hatred for the new policy and its impact on attainment:

[T]his Afrikaans. I hated it... Even at school, the math, we were doing it in Afrikaans, the geography we were doing it in Afrikaans. Lets say for a child that didn't grow up in an Afrikaans place, it's killing her or him, so we didn't want that Afrikaans language, we just wanted our own, our own language and English to be the second language.<sup>49</sup>

The picture in the coloured schools was more variable. The quality of coloured schooling was higher than for Africans. There was also considerable variation in the quality of education and facilities between coloured schools. However, in general there still existed considerable discontent about both the quality of facilities and the curriculum. For example, in the wake of the uprising the schools in Bonteheuwel issued a list of ten grievances, the first four of which were:

1. The system of coloured education and the policy of apartheid.

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<sup>47</sup> Essays Written by Children (7A) in a Coloured High School (Alexander Sinton), handwritten, ss, A4, October 1976,UCTMA, BC651, Oral Evidence

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Women's activist, 29/8/2006, Cape Town

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Participant in backyard housing movement, 19/4/2006, Guguletu

2. The lack of compulsory education for coloured people.
3. The lack of facilities at the coloured schools.
4. The lack of good sportsgrounds and playgrounds at the schools and in the residential areas.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, as one Alexander Sinton pupil said:

I myself, speaking for the majority is dissatisfied with the education. We haven't the proper facilities but it is expected of us the (sic) produce results, without it being proved to us that what we are learning is of very much importance to us.<sup>51</sup>

On the verge of 1976, therefore, education and its outcomes were far from perfect in both coloured and African schools. Furthermore, there was an awareness of this amongst school pupils. However, radical organising was absent amongst school pupils, just as it was amongst adults. Grievances alone cannot, therefore, be seen as the sole driver of action. Before discontent could become action it was necessary for the way the students conceived of their situation to change. This occurred in 1976 when events in Soweto began a process of expanding people's horizons for action that was to lead to protest, violence and unrest.

### **3.5. Students in Revolt: The Unrest of 1976/7 in the Western Cape**

In June 1976 civil society in Cape Town was heterogeneous and quiescent. In the African areas the spread of BC ideas had been limited, the schools were quiet and residential civil society was dominated by organisations which on occasions cooperated with apartheid governance structures. Furthermore, whilst veterans of the 1950s struggles remained their presence was faint. In the coloured areas the two

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<sup>50</sup> 'Bonteheuvel Pupils Issue Statement on Grievances', *Cape Times*, 31/8/1976, p.2

<sup>51</sup> Essays Written by Children (7A) in a Coloured High School (Alexander Sinton), handwritten, ss, A4, October 1976, UCTMA, BC651, Oral Evidence

main coloured political forces, the Labour Party and Unity Movement, did express opposition to apartheid. However, their forms of activism, with the notable exception of the sports movement, did not involve the use of civil society as a sphere in which to mobilise people to oppose the state.

It is not surprising, therefore, that as Soweto burnt in June and July 1976 the townships of Cape Town stood quiet. In the initial aftermath of June the 16<sup>th</sup> there was sporadic but limited action. A demonstration took place at the University of Cape Town (UCT), the staff association at the coloured University of the Western Cape (UWC) declared their support for the people of Soweto and there were isolated incidents of stoning and arson in the African townships. However, this was followed by what the government sponsored inquiry called 'an ominous lull',<sup>52</sup> and no unrest related violence was reported in the Cape Peninsula during July 1976.<sup>53</sup> This lull ended in August. On the 29<sup>th</sup> July students at UWC resolved to boycott classes for a week in sympathy with Soweto. Following from this on the 4<sup>th</sup> August a demonstration of about 1000 students took place during which stones were thrown and the next day the law faculty building was heavily damaged by fire. Then, on the 11<sup>th</sup> August, school children from Cape Town's three African high schools staged demonstrations against Bantu education and the use of Afrikaans in teaching. Just as in Soweto these demonstrations were forcibly dispersed and protest turned to widespread rioting, with 16 people shot dead.<sup>54</sup> The rioting continued the following day. Government buildings such as the BAAB offices and the beer halls were singled out for destruction. African pupils also commenced a boycott of their schools. Arson attacks at coloured schools throughout the city also occurred, including in Bonteheuwel, and the first protest by coloured pupils took place at Belgravia High.<sup>55</sup> The following week saw simmering unrest in the African communities as the school boycott continued and sporadic protests at coloured

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<sup>52</sup> RSA, Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1976 to the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1977, vol.1, (Pretoria, 1980), p.260

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.2, p.1

<sup>54</sup> Brooks, A & Brickhill, J, Whirlwind Before the Storm .... p.316

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

schools throughout the city. Then, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August pupils at the three high schools in Bonteheuwel staged a protest which was dispersed by police using batons and tear gas. Over the next two days clashes between police, pupils and residents within Bonteheuwel escalated and on the 25<sup>th</sup> August police opened fire into a crowd of protesting pupils from Arcadia Senior Secondary school, killing Christopher Truter, the first coloured casualty of the riots. These riots marked the start of widespread coloured involvement in violence and during early September clashes between pupils and the police affected many of the coloured areas of Cape Town.

From these beginnings more concerted action coalesced. In the coloured areas the unrest, though short lived, was intense and by October, after which little rioting or protest was reported, 57 coloureds had been killed throughout the Peninsula.<sup>56</sup> Coloured workers, alongside Africans, also took part in a two day stayaway on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of September and on several occasions coloured pupils travelled to the centre of Cape Town to stage demonstrations. African pupils also staged marches and protests in the city centre, although on different days.

In the African areas the school boycotts continued into the New Year. Initial opposition to the beer halls expanded to a widespread campaign against the sale and consumption of alcohol. Shebeens were visited by students and told to close or be burnt down. Cars were stopped and searched for liquor and people were ordered not to drink. Around 100 shebeens were destroyed in Cape Town during this period.<sup>57</sup> Then in December, with the campaign against liquor being continued and augmented by calls for a period of mourning over Christmas, clashes took place between migrant workers housed in hostel accommodation in Nyanga, and apparently assisted by the police, and school pupils and residents of the formal townships. Squaring off against each other across the main road separating the hostel compounds from the township a series of attacks took place with houses

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<sup>56</sup> RSA, Inquiry into the Riots..., vol.2.

<sup>57</sup> Hirson, B, Year of Fire, Year of Ash ..., p.265

burnt down and people assaulted.<sup>58</sup> This violence reached its crescendo over Christmas when 26 Africans were killed in fighting.<sup>59</sup> Following this African students instituted a boycott of examinations in the New Year. However, by the time postponed exams were held in March 1977 schooling in the African areas had returned to normal.

### **3.5.1. Following Soweto: The Outbreak of Revolt in Cape Town**

The uprising in the Western Cape was intimately linked to the events on the Rand, but differed considerably in both its emergence and development. Unlike Soweto politicisation and organisation were limited in Cape Town before the riots.

However, similar grievances did exist. Socio-economic transformation was creating a small but rapidly expanding African secondary school population which was just as inconvenienced by the government's Afrikaans language policy as the students in Soweto. Coloured school pupils also had experience of poor quality schooling and limitations on their future prospects. As a result the events in Soweto resonated in Cape Town. Existing grievances became amplified at the same time as the possibility of collective action became more real – Soweto made people believe they could and should act. Finally, when people did act the state response escalated, rather than controlled, protest as the violent suppression of protests transformed relatively amorphous demonstrations loosely directed against aspects of apartheid into violent confrontations which put state transformation firmly on the agenda.

However, whilst the state quickly assumed a central focus in the minds of rioting students a lack of broader politicisation and leadership, combined with considerable social distance between the students and other residents, meant that as the unrest proceeded it did so as an almost exclusively student affair. The discourse of change articulated was intimately linked to student experience and adult support

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<sup>58</sup> RSA, *Inquiry into the Riots...*, vol.1, p.312

<sup>59</sup> Brooks, A & Brickhill, J, *Whirlwind Before the Storm...*, p.342

for the students was inconsistent and rather than representing common cause with their demands was instead generated by the excessive actions of the state and its law enforcement agents.

In 1976 education and its outcomes were far from perfect in both coloured and African schools. However the move to open protest and revolt did not simply reflect these grievances. Indeed, without both the action of the students in Soweto, alongside the highly confrontational actions of the riot police, Cape Town's students would most likely have finished 1976 as they had begun it.

Literature on collective action points to the importance of the 'political opportunity structure' in defining its extent and nature; in order to act people need to believe that action is both possible and worthwhile.<sup>60</sup> In this regard the events in Soweto fundamentally transformed South Africa's political landscape and played a major role in the unrest in Cape Town. In the period before Soweto pupils opposed to the introduction of Afrikaans, but acquiesced. However, in the space of a few days the situation transformed from one in which the apartheid state and education system appeared unassailable to one in which its ability to control its population was called into question. Every day events in Soweto and other townships made the front pages of the city's newspapers and the realisation that the state was struggling to contain the protests led to a growing belief that action both could and should be undertaken. New forms of action were put on the menu and educational issues were given considerable exposure. The impact in the African areas was dramatic:

Ever since that occasion of June Sixteenth on our way to school... we will buy newspapers... You could see the pictures of kids who are beaten and all that brutality, so all of us in the [train] carriage will analyse what's happening. And many sentiments would be expressed that you are sell-outs in Cape Town. What is happening in other provinces is not happening [here], and yet you are affected. We all don't want this Afrikaans. But nothing is happening in Cape Town. That would be happening, daily discussion, day after day.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Tarrow, S, 'National Politics and Collective Action: Recent Theory and Research in Western Europe and the United States', *Annual review of Sociology*, 14, 1988, p.429

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Zoliswa Kota, 6/6/2006, Parliament, Cape Town

In the coloured communities Soweto also made an impact, particularly at UWC. Faced with the escalation of unrest UWC students began to discuss events and assess how they could contribute. On the 30<sup>th</sup> July a week long boycott of classes was started in solidarity with Soweto. Regular symposiums and small-group discussions were held where topics such as 'the community and solidarity', 'the individual and the group' and Black Consciousness were discussed.<sup>62</sup> The strong focus of Black Consciousness on community involvement led students to make contact with communities beyond the university and 'to move towards the black man on the street.'<sup>63</sup> As a result a pamphlet entitled 'UWC-Soweto' was published and distributed throughout the country.<sup>64</sup> A decision was also taken for students to visit communities to expand the basis of activism and a mass meeting of students resolved:

That we... make an ardent attempt to mobilise the community so that we can broaden our front and thereby be more effective as a pressure group.<sup>65</sup>

Students from UWC visited schools throughout the Cape Peninsula and helped to organise and coordinate student protests. In Bonteheuwel itself three girls from UWC visited Modderdam Senior Secondary on the day before the protests began.<sup>66</sup> Students also visited Bonteheuwel High.<sup>67</sup>

In the coloured high schools there is little evidence of mobilisation or discussion before the arrival of the UWC students, at least in Bonteheuwel. However, when the UWC students brought their message they were able to tap into pre-existing educational grievances within the schools. A student at Bonteheuwel High described the protests as beginning, 'education wise, [as] we were not happy with

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<sup>62</sup> Interview With Cecil Esau, 9/5/06, Rhondebosch; Untitled notes of group discussions and symposia held at UWC, 'General Report...', 8p., typed, ss, A4, August 1976, SAHA, A2675 III (945)

<sup>63</sup> Untitled notes Ibid., p.2

<sup>64</sup> 'UWC-Soweto', pamphlet, 1p., typed, ds (2), A5, 1976, CACE Collection

<sup>65</sup> RSA, Inquiry into the Riots...., vol.2, p.274; See also, Interview with Cecyl Esau, 9/5/2006, Rhondebosch

<sup>66</sup> Brooks, A & Brickhill, J, Whirlwind Before the Storm ...., p.114

<sup>67</sup> Personal Communication, Mohammed Adhikari, UCT

things that happened at school.’<sup>68</sup> He then goes on to say how the organisers of the first action linked the situation in Soweto, where students were made to learn in Afrikaans, to the fact that the content of coloured schooling was heavily prescribed by the government:

[W]e had a few students that said look it here, our brothers and our sisters in Soweto is busy with the uprising. Why, why don't we support them? That the government can't describe to us what subject we must take and what is good for us in education. We must be able to, to tell them look here. This is the kind of education we want.<sup>69</sup>

Another student talked of the resonance Soweto had for coloured children who experienced poor educational standards at school every day:

[T]he notion of being black was perceived to be people from Soweto and up there. Yet very many of the issues that they were engaging with, we were confronted with lack of text books, lack of labs in school.<sup>70</sup>

Within the context of educational discontent and the ongoing events in Soweto protest seemed justified, possible and worthwhile.

However, open revolt in Cape Town was not simply a consequence of educational grievances, but the transformation of peaceful protest in light of state repression. Pupils in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel both organised public protests inspired by Soweto which were violently disrupted by police. It is a moot question whether the pupils would simply have returned to school after their protests had they not been confronted by riot police. Similarly, the extent to which responses other than repression were possible within the apartheid state apparatus as it existed is also doubtful: although as will be seen the events of 1980 suggest that lessons had been learnt. However, this aside, it is clear that a violent police response to pupil demonstrations played a major role in transforming protests into riots.

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Youth activist during late 70s-early 80s, 7/12/2005, Bonteheuwel

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Anonymous participant in Committee of 81 Focus Group run by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, 29/10/2005



Repressive action by the authorities operated to fan rather than restrict action within Cape Town. Authors have pointed to the importance of repression in stifling the emergence of collective action and revolt by increasing the individual cost of protest.<sup>71</sup> However, it has also been recognised that considerable dangers exist in resorting to repressive action, as repression can provoke outrage and thereby further heighten opposition.<sup>72</sup> Also, by denying mechanisms through which people can express demands and have them addressed repression makes oppositional activity more necessary if such demands are to be considered.<sup>73</sup> Both these trends are apparent in the events which unfolded in Cape Town in 1976.

The role of police action in driving people into violent action and transforming vague notions of discontent into clarified opposition to white rule is a near universal theme of participant's recollections of the riots. Before the riots strong beliefs about apartheid were not central to student consciousness and it was Afrikaans, educational discontent and sympathy with Soweto, not political change, which caused people to act. However, once the police intervened everything changed. Over-reaction by the police in provoking rioting was a central theme in much testimony to the Cillié commission.<sup>74</sup> This is supported by student testimony. The following, from a student at Fezeka in Guguletu, reveals how once the police had intervened trepidation dissolved and students embraced violent action:

I remember quite reluctantly following the march... We were going to Langa High School but we got stopped by the police in drizzling weather and there was, of course, the normal thing – teargas, raids beating shooting... The afternoon after the march was dispersed, the whole thing burst into flames here in Cape Town. One was swept into that whole trend of running around the location, stone throwing, burning etc. A whole night of this intense activity which I just got swept into. It just seemed natural to go along with the tide – no profound questioning of the issues at

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<sup>71</sup> Tilly C, *From Mobilization to Revolution...*, (London, 1978), p.100

<sup>72</sup> Tarrow, S, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, (Cambridge, 1998), pp.81-5

<sup>73</sup> Della Porta, D. & Diani, M. *Social Movements...*, p.205

<sup>74</sup> Notes of Evidence given by van der Ross to the Cillié Commission, n.d., UCTMA, BC651, Cillié Commission Cape Town Evidence, p.32

stake, and whether one should participate or not. That question was never a question at all. After one followed the march, it ceased to be a question at all.<sup>75</sup>

Similar experiences were also evident in Bonteheuwel:

[T]here was a demonstration and we refused to go to class and then ... we just saw the whole [school] was surrounded by this burley policeman with this caspirs and all that. And we stood then, we thought to ourselves, hey what's gonna happen now? I mean we are students, we are 15, 16 years old. And they gave us a time of three minutes to disperse. And we just refused. We just stood there. And the next moment they charged into the school with teargas and batons and they start hitting us and the students just scampered. The whole place full. And some was taken to police stations, some was shot and... some of us was badly beaten. And from that day we. Everyday we decided there's no education now. We gonna fight the injustice.<sup>76</sup>

Or in the words of another participant, 'The main reason I got involved was they killed somebody right in front of my face.'<sup>77</sup>

Repression also transformed collective identities within the City.

Klandermans argues that one of the key elements precipitating collective action is the creation of politically relevant collective identities which define a social group with common interests and an outside agent which needs to be affected in order to realise those interests:

What then *does* make collective identity politically relevant? The answer to this given in the literature on social movement participation is the following: collectively defined grievances that produce a 'we' feeling *and* causal attributions that denote a 'they' which is held responsible for the collective grievances are needed for transferring routine ingroup-outgroup dynamics into political conflict.<sup>78</sup>

Repression, by bringing the full weight of the state down on protesting students, helped create these 'we' and 'they' dynamics. There is little evidence of violence preceding police action. However, the response of the security forces to protest was

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Oupa Lehulere (1986) reproduced in: Khanya History Programme, Students and the Struggle ..., p.50

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Youth activist during late 70s-early 80s 7/12/2005, Bonteheuwel

<sup>77</sup> Focus Group with Bonteheuwel Activists, 7/12/2005, Bonteheuwel

<sup>78</sup> Klandermans, B., The Social Psychology of Protest, (Oxford, 1997), p.41

of such ferocity that it closed off the possibility of peaceful protest and caused widespread resentment. In turn this resentment focused attention not simply on the educational system, or even the situation in Soweto, but the illegitimacy of the regime.

### **3.5.2. Unrest in Progress: A Student Protest**

The initial outbreak of violence in 1976 was centred at the schools and was a consequence of the interaction of student grievances, the examples set by Soweto and heavy-handed police action. However, in itself this does not rule out the fact that once the riots began they could have become transformed into a broad assault on state power. Yet, an analysis of the development of the riots in both case studies reveals that not only did they start as student protests, but they remained student protests. This student-centricity operated at several levels. Firstly the organisation, actions and grievances articulated during the unrest were all heavily conditioned by the experience of the school yard. Secondly, the students not only failed to consistently mobilise adults, but also explicitly defined themselves in opposition to their parents. Finally, after initial support based on revulsion at the action of the police, adults themselves began to distance themselves from the students and their activities.

By the beginning of September both the African and coloured communities had become involved in violent conflict with the police and many schools were on boycott. This move, from protest to revolt, transformed student and community action. Soweto had made action appear possible; this action created a new political context. Protest had spread, authority had broken down and the government had become a central target for angry students. It became necessary, therefore, to organise, formulate demands and coordinate action. However, the revolt had started in the schools and was precipitated by a mixture of educational discontent and police violence. It therefore lacked both a clear leadership and a coherent ideological theorisation of apartheid or even the purpose of the revolt. This meant

that as the students sought to come to terms with their rapidly transforming circumstances they did so on an *ad hoc* basis and primarily through an articulation of an identity and demands that were grounded in a particularistic school student life experience. The actions of the apartheid state had brought into stark reality the need for political transformation whilst its failure to effectively repress had made this transformation appear possible. However, there was no blueprint for this future society. Students therefore looked to their own experiences for how to make a better future and in doing so they articulated a vision which, in many ways, represented a negation of the hardships of student life.

The demands articulated during 1976/7 in both communities reveal the student centrism of the uprising as well as the diversity of the student experience in Cape Town. During riots the overwhelming political iconography was from the Black Consciousness movement, with black power salutes and slogans dominating protests. However, a closer examination of student demands reveals not a theoretical approach to political change but an iteration of day-to-day grievances reflecting the immediate experiences of Cape Town's school children.

Students from the Bonteheuwel schools issued a statement to the press which revealed the parochial nature of many of the demands being put forward. In this they listed their main grievances:

1. The system of coloured education and the policy of apartheid.
2. The lack of compulsory education for coloured people.
3. The lack of facilities at the coloured schools.
4. The lack of good sportsgrounds and playgrounds at the schools and in the residential areas.
5. The general behaviour of the police during the unrest in the Black areas.
6. The interference by police in demonstrations on school grounds which were not forbidden.
7. The taking into custody of fellow students.
8. The attitude of White teachers on the staff.
9. The inconvenience allowance given to white teachers at Coloured schools is seen as an insult.
10. The silence of the Cape Teachers' Professional Association during the unrest.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> 'Bonteheuwel Pupils Issue Statement on Grievances', *Cape Times*, 31/8/1976, p.2

Apart from a broadly defined opposition to the policy of apartheid all these grievances were related to schooling issues or the immediate experience of the students during the rioting. Furthermore, they were strong on what was being opposed, but they lacked any articulation of what a better society would look like. Of particular interest is the focus on the inconvenience allowance, which was paid to white teachers working in coloured schools. This suggests involvement by UWC students as unequal pay for teachers was a major issue in coloured universities where one of the few occupations for educated coloureds was in teaching.

The location of student demands within day-to-day experience is highlighted by the variation in demands between schools. In the essays produced at Alexander Sinton opposition to job reservation was a common theme, but was not mentioned in Bonteheuwel. Alexander Sinton was a school in a middle class area of the city and these demands represented an opposition to apartheid rooted in the experiences of middle class children who, despite their academic success, were being held back by apartheid discrimination. In contrast, in Bonteheuwel it was the immediate quality of schooling which was articulated in their protests.

In the African schools demands were similarly located within local conditions and the student experience and consequently differed from those in the coloured schools. During the unrest students at Langa High issued a statement in which they spelt out their main grievances. These were Bantu education, having to pay for school books, the poor state of African schools, the actions of the riot police and the fact that blacks were unable to share the wealth of whites. The statement concluded with immediate demands; these were the freeing of detainees, free education and 'equal job, equal pay.'<sup>80</sup> No link was made between immediate student hardships and broader political transformation and apartheid was not even mentioned.

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<sup>80</sup> 'Statement by Langa Scholars', UCTMA, BC651, Oral Evidence, 4p., handwritten, ss, A4, undated. There are several other statements of demands drawn up by students from the African schools. See, SAIRR, South Africa in Travail ..., Appendix A & B. Again these are almost entirely concerned with educational issues.

However, whilst student demands predominated in interactions with the authorities students themselves were becoming increasingly militant. The temporary weakening of coercive state power at the local level created a context in which students began to seek more profound change. Students began to articulate wider demands such as the release of political prisoners.<sup>81</sup> They also increasingly demanded political transformation. However there was no clear plan for how to achieve this and whilst rhetoric and action escalated it did so in a way that continued to be heavily conditioned by student experiences and which did not draw together a coherent, universal, narrative of change:

[I]n 1976, democracy was posed at the level of abstraction... the attitude was that we didn't want Afrikaans, we didn't want Bantu education, we wanted equal education and then we wanted to be free – one man one vote – and it just went on and on.<sup>82</sup>

You know when you are student who didn't have any ideology, you know for us it was just we don't want Afrikaans, 'we want to be free'... I remember my own perception, it really meant, you know, we threw stones, we burn everything, and the whites are going to get scared and I'm going to have a house in Constantia.<sup>83</sup>

With no theorised means through which to approach change and limited links beyond the schools militancy predominantly focused upon symbols of apartheid power and barriers to change at the local level. The Cillié commission noted that whilst there were occasional demands for the release of political prisoners, most focused on people detained during the unrest and did not link to ANC and PAC prisoners.<sup>84</sup>

Unrest in the African areas lasted far longer than in the coloured communities and consequently developed more sustained activities. The most sustained of these actions was the campaign against drink. Amongst the first targets of the riots were the schools and buildings owned by the BAAB, most notably the

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<sup>81</sup> 'Wanted: Respite for Calming Down', *Cape Times*, 18/9/1976, p.7

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Oupa Lehulere (1986) reproduced in: Khanya History Programme, Students and the Struggle ..., p.40

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Mampe Ramotsamai, 29/8/2006, Cape Town

<sup>84</sup> RSA, Inquiry into the Riots ..., vol.2, p.299

beer halls. However, this quickly shifted to a focus upon drink generally within the community. Attacks were launched on shebeens and individuals who consumed liquor. Peoples' breath was smelt and if drunk their mouths were washed out with soap.<sup>85</sup> This was significant because whilst the beer halls represented a state presence within the community, the shebeens were not and the broader campaign against drink targeted neither the state nor the education system. Yet, it consumed perhaps the most energy during the unrest. Self-interest was undoubtedly a factor for some people and there are stories of people stealing and selling, rather than destroying, alcohol.<sup>86</sup> There is also evidence that rival shebeen owners used the unrest to put their competitors out of business. However, the focus upon alcohol was far more than this. It was an attack by young, well-educated students, on a potent and immediate symbol and cause of much of their hardships. Alcohol was regularly identified as a cause of their parents' quiescence. However, it was also seen as a cause of hardship in itself:

Look at what liquor has caused to our people: Red eyes, lazyness (sic), their families have broken down, rotten smell out of their mouths, jelly paunches and muscles, colour of their skins has changed, death, became hoboos, they show their private parts to children, fight and kill one another for the reason, divorce, dirty words out of their mouths, so-called babalas [hangovers] and their (sic) is no law in their families. Live like animals. Now do you see the works of liquor.<sup>87</sup>

The campaign against alcohol was, therefore, not only an attack on state power, but also an expression of student discontent with the behaviour of their parents, friends and neighbours. In this way it would appear that for many students from 1976 the remaking of their own communities was seen as the first and most accessible stage on the road to freedom.

Just as the grievances articulated during the uprising developed from student experience, so too did the organisations which coordinated protest and

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.328

<sup>86</sup> Statement on the events of 1976 handed to a pupil at Alexander Sinton High School, Oral Evidence, 5p., typed, ss, A4, undated, UCTMA, BC651, pp.2-3

<sup>87</sup> 'The Voice of the ANC (Spear of the Nation): The War is On', 1p., pamphlet, typed, ss, A4, n.d. 1976 or 7, UCTMA, BC651

made decisions. There is no evidence of formal organisation driving protest. Nor is there any evidence of shared ideological understandings amongst the students in either case study. Instead students built organisation on local experience in an attempt to understand and organise their situation. This is of particular interest because of the focus on BC organisation and linkages within the studies of the riots in Soweto. It is also significant because it suggests that collective action can emerge in the right conditions even when organisation and networks are absent.

The nature of organisation during the uprising was linked to the fact that revolt was in large part a reaction to events beyond the communities. Pupils had not been mobilised around a single line or with a single goal in mind, but had instead been thrown headfirst into opposition by developments on the ground. Consequently there were no structures through which events could be coordinated and ordered, and a lack of people with authority to speak on behalf of the students. There was also no prevailing ideology or iconography. At the organisational level this meant that students looked around and used what was available.

In the coloured areas organisation revolved around the existing Student Representative Councils, successful school students, people from UWC and the churches. In the African areas the riots persisted longer and the situation was more complex. There were no existing structures and little interaction with other groups and therefore students looked inward for inspiration. However, the absence of both organisation and ideology meant that there were no structures or beliefs that people could link themselves to in order to claim leadership status. Every student's opinion was therefore valid and consequently the students met collectively in mass meetings.

In the coloured schools students looked to existing organisations and networks to provide representation once unrest had started. Many schools already had SRCs and these became significant in the unrest. The Cillie commission cites evidence from Salt River High School on how the riots changed the role of the SRC:



Although the aim of the council of the Salt River High School was to bring about better co-operation between teachers and pupils, it soon exceeded the scope of its normal activities. The council held meetings without the principle's consent; it conducted a poll among pupils on whether examinations were to be written or not; and its members incited pupils to boycott classes.<sup>88</sup>

Similar events also occurred in Bonteheuwel. At Modderdam an SRC existed prior to the uprising. This dealt with school issues but in 1976 transformed into a more political body.<sup>89</sup> In Bonteheuwel the riots also saw a rise to prominence of individuals who already had status within the schools as a result of their academic or extracurricular activities. At Arcadia High, for example, one of the main leadership figures was a well-known 800 and 1500 meter runner.<sup>90</sup>

This is not to say that there were no linkages made beyond the schoolyard. However, these were rare and whilst they introduced broad concepts such as black power into the protests they left little clear ideological content in their wake. There is little evidence of formalised contact between school children and working adults apart from ad hoc church meetings. There is evidence of linkages with UWC and in Bonteheuwel pupils formed a body with university students which helped provide structure to the protest by arranging meeting and drawing up demands.<sup>91</sup> However, as was seen in the grievances expressed by students, this did not lead to the adoption of a broader vision to guide action, though it may have brought certain demands from the universities into the classroom. It is also important not to overestimate the level of organisation. No new coloured student organisations emerged during 1976 and experiences within the schools reveal only limited coordination of activities:

[W]e were not activists at the time, we didn't even totally, fully understand what was happening. It was more knee-jerk kind of responses of these, so still in a semi unorganised way people were called to meetings, because people wanted to understand what the hell is happening. But even then there was no... organised

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<sup>88</sup> RSA, *Inquiry into the Riots...*, vol.2, p.278

<sup>89</sup> Interview with former youth activist, 8/3/2006, Bonteheuwel

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Bennet Bailey, 18/7/2006, Cape Town

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Youth activist during late 70s-early 80s, 7/12/2005, Bonteheuwel

structures within the area itself, it was going up, staying there for a few months and then it was the end of the year and this fizzled out.<sup>92</sup>

A lack of organisation predating the unrest was even more marked in the African schools and the almost complete absence of school level organisations saw pupils in the African townships develop a different approach to those in Bonteheuwel. Whereas Bonteheuwel pupils were able to draw on existing, albeit not political, networks African students had almost no organisational resource at all. There was no open political organisation in any of the African schools before the first protests were called, and there were not even apolitical representative structures, such as SRCs. The initial action appears to have been coordinated by a small group of pupils, possibly acting with encouragement from underground members of the banned liberation movements.<sup>93</sup> However this organising was clandestine and most pupils report that the first they were aware of the demonstrations on the 11<sup>th</sup> August was when they were told to keep their books at home the day before.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, there is to this day a lack of awareness amongst many participants about who called the demonstrations. As Zoliswa Kota, a current ANC MP who was to become a leading figure in progressive politics in the city before leaving the country in the mid-1980s said:

I can say even today I still didn't know where it came from... But we heard that... there was a meeting that was held in the forest at some point and that that meeting, that meeting that took place previously in that particular forest came up with these particular leaders. And I still [am] very much now in the dark in terms of who are the face in the forest [laughs]. But it was clear there was some kind of leadership.<sup>95</sup>

This lack of an 'organisational pre-history', as one student put it, meant there were no existing means to coordinate action. In Soweto organisation built on the links which had preceded, and indeed played a role in precipitating, protest. In

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Quentin Michels, 27/03/2006, Goodwood

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Mountain Quembello, 25/7/2006, Guguletu

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Zoliswa Kota, 6/6/2006, Cape Town; Interview with Oupa Lehulere (1986) reproduced in: Khanya History Programme *Students and the Struggle ...*, p50; Interview with Women's activist, 28/7/2006, Charlesville

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Zoliswa Kota, 6/6/2006, Parliament, Cape Town

Bonteheuwel students turned to existing organisations and networks. In Guguletu African students faced with a need to respond to their circumstances simply came together as a mass.

Throughout the uprising African pupil organised predominantly through daily mass meetings of all students, usually on the school field outside I.D. Mkhize high school. There were no permanent office holders and a new chair was elected at every meeting.<sup>96</sup> Individuals did assume central roles in guiding discussion and suggesting campaigns and like in Bonteheuwel these were often students who had existing profiles within the schools.<sup>97</sup> However, this did not negate the mass based process of decision-making. This was highlighted in a meeting between students and representatives from the Bantu Education Department when it was demanded that officials met not with representatives, but with all 3,000 scholars.<sup>98</sup> The Chief Director of the BAAB also confirmed this lack of leadership when he explained to the Cillié commission that, 'So-called leaders have no control [and simply] try to please the audience.'<sup>99</sup> Such a reflection is significant because government officials and politicians were torn with paranoia about the influence of subversive elements guiding opposition; the recognition that such incitement was absent strongly supports an interpretation of highly amorphous organisation.

In certain circumstances smaller, more organised, groups formed, usually linked to specific forms of action. One group which gained considerable exposure was the 'Comrades Movement.' The Comrades Movement was held responsible for several arson attacks on schools in the Langa area and several people were arrested

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Dinga Sikwebu, 15/11/06, Johannesburg; Interview with Zoliswa Kota, 6/6/2006, Parliament, Cape Town; Interview with Oupa Lehulere (1986) reproduced in: Khanya History Programme Students and the Struggle ..., p.56

<sup>97</sup> Interviewees recall how the prominent figures during the uprising included several prefects and at one school the person who had been responsible for delivering the register and ringing the school bell: Interview with Women's activist, 29/8/2006, Cape Town; Interview with Dinga Sikwebu, 15/11/06, Johannesburg

<sup>98</sup> Evidence of Fr. Mathew James Gormley, St. Anthony's Church, Langa in Notes of evidence given to Cillié Commission, typed, ss, A4, n.d., UCTMA, BC651, p.7

<sup>99</sup> Notes of Evidence given by A MacLaughlin, Chief Director, Peninsula BAAB, to the Cillié Commission', n.d. , UCTMA, BC651

and tried.<sup>100</sup> However it is difficult to gauge its boundaries and whether it had an actual organisational form. Groups of youth and students were responsible for attacking policemen and burning down schools during this period and the police certainly believed that there was a student structure organising much of the violence during this period. However, the label may simply have come from the fact that students and youth involved in riotous activities referred to each other as 'comrades'. Indeed when interviewed in the Cape Times African pupils issued an explicit denial that such an organisation existed on exactly this basis.<sup>101</sup>

The reasons why African students adopted a mass approach to organising are fourfold. Firstly a fear of repression appears to have stopped individuals from assuming leadership roles. Secondly, the absence of previous organising traditions was important. The lack of practical organisational experience meant there was little knowledge of how to create structured and delineated organisations and there were few pre-existing networks that could be developed. Furthermore, the lack of exiting leadership meant that unlike in Soweto, where students could claim leadership on the basis of political activities, relationships and knowledge predating the unrest, in Cape Town there was no ready-made leadership. Consequently, in a highly politicised situation all students had similar claims to leadership:

The whole attitude was that we were all a leadership; therefore we could not expose any particular individual... This was unlike in Soweto where precisely because the leaders were the most advanced – chairmen, secretaries, and executive members of SASM... – they naturally assumed that leadership.<sup>102</sup>

Thirdly, the existing networks that could have provided greater organisational structure to the pupils' activities - including both the banned political

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<sup>100</sup> Brooks, A & Brickhill, J, Whirlwind Before the Storm: ..., pp.122-3

<sup>101</sup> 'Schools Boycott', *Cape Times*, 18/01/1977, pp.1-2

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Oupa Lehulere (1986) reproduced in: Khanya History Programme Students and the Struggle.... pp.56-7. Lehulere's interpretation of leadership during this period is of particular interest because he argues that whilst everybody was encouraged to think of themselves as leaders, this was in fact being spread by the people who were most prominent at the time. This he links to the fact that they were not embedded in strong organisational traditions and were therefore not instantly singled out to lead. Instead they almost fell into leadership positions and therefore sought to play down their profile in order to avoid repression.

movements and other adult dominated organisations – were not heavily involved with the students. The lack of underground involvement in the unrest was in part a result of the nature of underground organising at this point. Some students did work with underground figures. At least one pamphlet was issued under the name of the ANC during the shebeen campaigns. Political discussions took place at the houses of ANC members after the riots had started where banned literature was handed out. ANC activists also recall contacting leading pupils within the townships and asking them to take certain lines and spread certain positions within meetings.<sup>103</sup> However, the main focus of the underground was not to perpetuate the unrest and influence the direction of the protest, but to recruit people to leave the country for military training, with two ANC members, Mountain Quembello and Lumko Huna, tried and convicted on these grounds.<sup>104</sup>

The final reason why students continued organising as a student mass was because they explicitly rejected the assistance of adults and offers of assistance in organising. The students refused to be represented by adults in dealings with the authorities, so whilst parents' organisations were formed and negotiated with the education authorities, students insisted that they could represent themselves *en masse* and refused to let their parents speak on their behalf:<sup>105</sup> This rejection of adult leadership extended to an unwillingness to take advice from adults, who were often seen as guilty in acquiescing to apartheid:

[Y]ou know the revolt was a revolt against the state, but it was also a revolt against the older generations. How could they have tolerated this? So there was a strong anti-parents [feeling] and having sold out, and everything that went with them, whether it's the ANC, whatever it is. It's part of that sell out and tolerating apartheid and how can they.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> 'The Voice of the ANC (Spear of the Nation): The War is On', 1p., pamphlet, typed, ss, A4, n.d., 1976 or 7, UCTMA, BC651; 'ANC Offered Free Education – Evidence', *Cape Times*, 17/11/1977, 'Terror Trial Witness Tells of Recruitment', *Cape Times*, 16/11/1997; Interview with Mountain Quembello, 25/7/2006, Guguletu; Interview with Wilson Sidina, 31/10/2005, Guguletu

<sup>104</sup> 'ANC Offered Free Education – Evidence', *Cape Times*, 17/11/1977

<sup>105</sup> RSA, *Inquiry into the Riots ...*, vol.2, p.284

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Dinga Sikwebu, 15/11/06, Johannesburg

Evidence presented by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) to the Cillie commission confirms this interpretation:

Parents, teachers, clergymen, social workers and others of the older generation are unanimous and categorical in declaring that the children refuse to listen or to be influenced by them.<sup>107</sup>

Furthermore, just as the students rejected the advice, assistance and authority of their parents, many of them also rejected the leadership of the exiled liberation movement, seeing them as part of a broader failure by the old generation to affect political transformation:

I remember people like Oscar Mpetha, the old man, coming on board when we were students... and wanting to advise. And I remember we were saying no, no, no, no, you old people get out of the way. You didn't do anything, it's our turn now, we going to [be] free.<sup>108</sup>

This is of particular interest because it shows just how divorced the students were from other residents in the township and broader ideological currents within South Africa. As well as constructing a narrative of transformation reflecting a distinctly schoolyard experience they also sought to exclude adults from the revolt they were constructing. The forms of organisation they adopted flowed directly from their schooling experiences and were conditioned not by broader ideas and ideologies.

The final evidence of the fact that 1976 was overwhelmingly a student revolt was the fact that adults were only drawn into protest intermittently and migrant workers physically opposed the actions of the students.

Adults in all communities had sympathy with the school children, but their support was limited and quickly ebbed away. A stayaway called by the students on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September was widely supported. Evidence submitted to the Cillie

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<sup>107</sup> SAIRR, *South Africa in Travail: ...*, p.70

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Women's activist (1), 29/8/2006, Cape Town

Commission by the National Development and Management Foundation of South Africa and based upon talks with around 18,000 coloured employees found absenteeism within industry reached between 40 and 80%.<sup>109</sup> Not only was general support for the strike high, but it appears to have been particularly supported by coloured women in the Cape's clothing industry, where between 85 and 90% of workers stayed away.<sup>110</sup> In the African townships there was also considerable support for the call for a period of mourning over Christmas.<sup>111</sup>

At first glance this suggests that the social base of the uprising spread and that it assumed characteristics of a more general uprising. However, an investigation of the circumstances in which adults became involved reveals that their responses were conditioned less by sympathy with the students' demands than by their revulsion at the actions of the police and that after the initial unrest their ongoing support was limited. In evidence presented to the Cillié commission the pastor of Bonteheuwel's Dutch Reformed Church reported how, after the first protests in the area began on the 24<sup>th</sup> August, a large number of young people turned up at a youth meeting at his church. Because of the tension and the fact many of the people were not church members the elders of the church called the police. However, the next day Christopher Truter was shot dead and adults, many of whom had just the night before sought to keep the youth under control, 'joined younger ones in throwing stones and jeering.'<sup>112</sup> A similar story emerged in the evidence of Friar Mathew James of St. Anthony's RC church in Langa. At a meeting held in his church on the 5<sup>th</sup> October there was general agreement that 'there was no violence before the police came.' It was also agreed that 'Parents were not in sympathy at first, especially coloured, but were after [the] shooting and beating.'<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> RSA, *Inquiry into the Riots...*, vol.2, pp.297-8

<sup>110</sup> 'The Cape Scene', *The Financial Mail*, 17/9/1976

<sup>111</sup> 'Township Clashes. 24 die, 106 Hurt', *Cape Times*, 27/12/1976

<sup>112</sup> Notes of Evidence given by J.M. Hartney to the Cillié Commission, Cillié Commission Cape Town Evidence, n.d., UCTMA, BC651, p.32

<sup>113</sup> Notes of Evidence given by Fr. M. James to the Cillié Commission, *Ibid.*, p.7

However, adult support never moved beyond sympathy in the face of police brutality. As the unrest dragged on parents came to oppose, rather than support, the students' actions and involvement in sympathy actions declined. After the well supported stayaway in September later calls for industrial action gained little support and in the African areas (coloured pupils had already returned to school) adults started to take active steps to encourage a return to normality. By January 1977 both LAGUNYA (an organisation established by adults to negotiate with the education authorities at the height of the unrest) and the Cape Peninsula African's Teacher's Association were trying to persuade the pupils to return.<sup>114</sup>

Adults, therefore, had little involvement in protest during 1976 and when they did so it was as a result of exposure to repression, rather than as agents seeking to articulate their own programme of change. Indeed, it appears that adults in Cape Town were drawn into the protests primarily in their role as parents. The strong support by coloured clothing workers for the September stayaway is particularly significant in this respect. In the more politicised period of the mid-1980s working class coloured women had low levels of union militancy and participation rates in political strikes. It therefore appears that the heavy handed police response to unrest drew coloured women, as mothers, into action which they both previously and subsequently eschewed. Such an interpretation is supported by the Cillie Commission. The Commission noted that even when it was young men, rather than school students, who were shot by the riot police the overarching narrative within the townships was of police violence being perpetrated against innocent children who were seen as helpless victims of the violence.<sup>115</sup>

Finally, it is also important to note that there were groups of Africans who had little sympathy for the students, even in the face of repression. These were the African migrant workers. December 1976 saw a series of fights between school pupils, youths, township residents and migrant workers, with 29 people killed

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<sup>114</sup> 'Pupils threaten New Schools Boycott', *Cape Times*, 31/1/1977; 'Call to End Pupil Boycott', *Cape Times*, 8/01/1977

<sup>115</sup> Brooks, A & Brickhill, J, Whirlwind Before the Storm..., pp.357-8



between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> December. This conflict emerged after pupils declared a Christmas of mourning and migrant workers refused to participate. The students forbade celebration and the buying of presents and clothes.<sup>116</sup> In a continuation of the shebeen campaign drink was also forbidden. However, migrant workers ignored these demands and fighting ensued; both sides agreeing that conflict erupted when students attempted to remove liquor from a car owned by migrants.<sup>117</sup>

This incident rapidly expanded into open conflict between the two communities. Township residents of all generations became drawn into this fighting and highly adversarial group identities solidified around residential status:

The comrades stated in a pamphlet that the migrants were not to come into the residential area of the permanent inhabitants; if they would not keep out of this area, they should go back to their homelands. In another pamphlet, they were ordered to leave the peninsula before a specified time.<sup>118</sup>

Whilst peace was eventually negotiated African migrants in Cape Town never came to support the actions of the students.

### **3.6. Conclusion: Race, Class and Revolt: Differential Discrimination and the Student Uprising of 1976/7**

It has long been argued that the students struggled to consistently expand their campaign beyond the schoolyard, even in Soweto where links with adults were more established.<sup>119</sup> This has been confirmed in the preceding discussion, as it is apparent that in its demands, organisation and social base the uprising of 1976/7 in

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<sup>116</sup> Pamphlet issued during 1976 riots cited in: RSA, *Inquiry into the Riots ...*, vol.2, p.314

<sup>117</sup> RSA, *Inquiry into the Riots....*, vol.2, p.320

<sup>118</sup> Ibid p.411

<sup>119</sup> Glaser, C, “We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis...” p.319; see also, Mafeje, A, ‘Soweto and its aftermath...’ p.22

Cape Town represented particularistic student experience, not a universal political challenge.

However current explanations of this student centrism are not always convincing. It is clear that the revolt itself emerged from the intersection of student demands, inspiration from elsewhere in South Africa, and the violent response of the police. It is also true that a lack of organisational contact and parochial demands contributed to keeping students and adults apart. In Soweto there is clear evidence that migrants who had physically opposed to the students came on board in a later stayaway after the students had visited them and explained their situation. However, the view that black disunity is explained predominantly in this fashion is less convincing. Adult support of students was always intermittent and selective and eventually dropped away. Furthermore, whilst students from a range of backgrounds were united by the fact that they all acted during the uprising, there was much variation in when how and why they acted. In the African schools the calls were for free education and the scraping of Afrikaans; in working class coloured schools facilities and educational quality were demanded; whilst in the middle class schools many students focused on job reservation. Furthermore, there was no joint action between students from the different communities. African and coloured students organised marches to Cape Town's city centre, but never on the same day, a fact which brings into question the idea that 1976 represented a transformation in the relationship between Africans and coloureds.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, apart from during the September stayaway, high mortality rates in coloured and African communities never coincided.<sup>121</sup>

In explaining the variable responses to the events of 1976 the differential impact of apartheid discrimination provides an effective starting point. Within the context of generally rising educational standards and attainment the implementation of discriminatory policies was impacting all black secondary

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<sup>120</sup> Mafeje, A, 'Soweto and its aftermath...', p.18

<sup>121</sup> RSA, Inquiry into the Riots..., vol.2, p.302

students in a negative way. Consequently, despite very different experiences of discrimination the focus upon educational issues brought about by the events in Soweto, alongside common exposure to police repression, unleashed broad, albeit highly diffuse, opposition to the state and its apartheid policies within Cape Town's school going youth. When the events of 1976 made change appear possible, it met a ready audience:

[W]e thought the battle was over and we just have to succumb to be domestic servants forever. You see. But we were clear that moment that this has to change.<sup>122</sup>

Yet beyond a common opposition to apartheid the differential impact of apartheid implanted cleavages within and between the black population groups. Many pupils became drawn into protest, but stratification within the school going youth played a central role in defining the nature of the uprising. The differing demands presented by different schools reflected the fact that racial and class divisions led blacks to experience the education system very differently. Middle class coloureds generally received a good education and their concerns were therefore less on the quality of education and more on their chances beyond the schools. Working class coloured schools were less well equipped and attainment was lower, hence facilities and educational quality predominated. In the African schools Afrikaans was the major issue and this was the consequence of a policy targeted only at Africans. Socio-economic differentiation was reinforced by the physical segregation of apartheid. Students had no social contact across the apartheid enforced colour line and rarely met. Even in 1977 few contacts had been made and as one coloured activist said, 'Guguletu was a foreign place to us.'<sup>123</sup>

In contrast apartheid discrimination created less urgency and greater risks for challenging apartheid amongst older Africans and coloureds than it did for their children. The heavy reliance of all African and many coloured adults on the state for

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with Zoliswa Kota, 6/6/2006, Parliament, Cape Town

<sup>123</sup> Anonymous participant in Committee of 81 Focus Group run by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, 29/10/2005

services such as housing combined with the precarious position that many of them held within the apartheid labour market to discourage them from involving themselves in the uprising. That this played a role in adult quiescence was supported by evidence supplied by the South African Institute of Race Relations to the official inquiry into the unrest. Analysing the social basis of the uprising they concluded that, 'men who live with their families in family accommodation, who are gainfully employed, usually do not get involved in township unrest – they have too much to lose.'<sup>124</sup>

This dynamic was even more pronounced amongst the city's migrant African population – so much so that it led them to actively oppose the actions of the students. Most existing interpretations of the conflict between migrants and urban Africans have focused upon the role of the police in encouraging the migrants to attack the residents and a large amount of evidence appears to confirm cooperation between police and migrants.<sup>125</sup> However, distrust between the two groups was an intermittent feature of township life well before 1976: a fact which suggests that the conflict of Christmas 1976 had roots deeper than simple manipulation by the police. As early as 1966, at a meeting between the Guguletu Civic and Welfare Association and members of the BAAB, complaints were being made by township dwellers regarding the impact of the hostels on the community:

It was raised by Mr. Myeki and supported by Miss Mgudlandlu that the Zones are a threat to the "Family Units" community. Young girls (some being scholars) and married women were enticed from school and homes by attractions found at the zones.<sup>126</sup>

This complaint shows a clear hostility toward the migrant labourers amongst Africans with Section 10 rights. It also reveals the existence, well in advance of the

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<sup>124</sup> SAIRR, *South Africa in Travail...*, p.99

<sup>125</sup> Despite finding there was no collusion the Cillie commission heard large amounts of evidence stating that this had take place: RSA, *Inquiry into the Riots...*, vols. 1&2

<sup>126</sup> 'Guguletu Civic and Welfare Association: Special Meeting of the Central Committee held at the Guguletu Community Centre, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1966, at 8.00 pm', 4p., typed, ss, A4, 02/11/1966, CTAR, AWC 2/8, G27, p.1

rioting of 1976, of clearly defined insider/outsider identities within with the minds of urban Africans.

Rather than reflecting police incitement, therefore, the conflicts between the migrants and the formal housing areas can be seen to reflect longstanding differences between the two communities as a result of the very different experiences the two communities had of apartheid. While supposedly pawns of the police the migrants gave clear and convincing explanations of why they opposed the students. These reveal the irrelevance of the student struggle for the migrant workers and should not be ignored:

At first the migrants did not take part in the rioting. They also refused to go on strike and did not attend the memorial service held on Christmas Day but, contrary to the Comrades' order, celebrated instead. The reason they themselves gave for not participating was that they had come to the peninsula to work, to earn money and to return home with their money after their period of employment.<sup>127</sup>

Apartheid laws meant that for most migrant workers their futures lay in the homelands. Also, if they were to be dismissed from work for striking they would automatically lose their rights to remain in the city. Migrants thus had little to gain and much to lose from supporting a programme of action which failed to address itself to their concerns. Furthermore, physical segregation reinforced social segregation. Migrants were kept in separate compounds and had few direct links with residents. They therefore had little firsthand experience of the repression and little personal contact with its victims:

One of their [migrant] leaders said that they had not attended the [Christmas] memorial service because they were not going to mourn for people whom they had not even known.<sup>128</sup>

The calls by the students were not, therefore, experienced as legitimate responses to state repression but as attempts to restrict and even endanger the precarious

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<sup>127</sup> RSA, Inquiry into the Riots..., vol.2, p.312

<sup>128</sup> RSA, Inquiry into the Riots..., vol.2, p.312

livelihoods of migrant workers. That the use of coercion to enforce these calls led to violence cannot, therefore, be simply explained by police action. Instead the migrants were integrated into the apartheid political economy in a way which created very contrasting interests for them to those of the residents and students.

Overall, therefore, the uprising of 1976 in Cape Town needs to be seen as a response to opening political opportunities by a group of black South Africans uniquely disadvantaged by apartheid discrimination. This revolt was sustained by shared experiences of discrimination, and as the unrest unfolded violence, within the schoolyard. However, whilst strengthened by a shared student experience it was unable to transcend these bounds. Beyond the schools apartheid was not in crisis and people continued their daily lives, albeit in occasional protest at the brutality of repression. 1976 in Cape Town was neither a universal revolt against state power, nor was it a revolution thwarted by bad decisions.



## **Chapter Four**

# **From Bread and Butter to Banners and Rallies: The Changing Contours and Limits of Progressive Organisation, 1977 - 1985**

### **4.1. Introduction**

As noted in chapter one, theories of collective action and organisation often point to the importance of resources and political opportunities for precipitating action. A central argument of this thesis, however, is that without deeper, coherent, concerns rooted in the social structure organisation and opportunity cannot alone create action. In Cape Town the period 1977-1985 provides strong evidence for this interpretation. In 1979/80, a series of boycotts broke out across the city drawing in people from across the black communities. This led to a period of organisation building which provided many of the resources seen as central to the development of effective activism. These organisations expanded political space by making action appear possible; they built links between activists campaigning on similar issues; they increased the intellectual and physical resources available to poor communities; they provided explanations that linked hardship to apartheid and sought to present the view that only through its removal could people achieve their goals. Furthermore, they did so in a context of considerable material hardship. However, these organisations failed. In the coloured communities, despite a successful election boycott in 1984, active involvement by adults in progressive organisation and activism was never sustained. A similar picture emerges in the African communities where popular participation, particularly amongst adults, remained weak.



In explaining this general failure of organisation, and the moments when activism did emerge, this chapter moves beyond the resources and organisations used by activists to look at how the apartheid political economy patterned protest and quiescence. It shows how effective mobilisation relied on moments of shared grievance to provide a social base for action. This happened throughout this period amongst an educated activist elite. A shared experience of poor education and thwarted life chances created a group of people who consistently sought ways to challenge apartheid. It also happened for a moment in 1979/80, when busfare increases and poor quality schooling became felt across race and class lines, creating a community of interest that could be mobilised by this emerging network of more politicised activists. However, more generally, the political economy constrained rather than supported activism. Whilst the activist elite had common experiences of oppression apartheid's differential discrimination fragmented the black population on race and class lines making it difficult to construct a unified programme of action. Furthermore, the integration of blacks within Cape Town's political economy encouraged quiescence more than protest. These two factors ensured that, a moment in 1979/80 aside, progressive organisation and activism remained the preserve of an activist elite.

Studies of activism (all focused in coloured and squatter communities) categorise activism between 1977 and 1985 in Cape Town into two periods: firstly, a period of intense grassroots mobilisation and organisation around bread-and-butter issues in the early 1980s; secondly, with the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF), a time of more explicitly political mobilisation that successfully organised an election boycott of the tricameral parliament and gained considerable exposure, but was more distanced from the day-to-day concerns of residents.

However, whilst agreeing on periodisation, explanations for these changes are varied. There have been few studies of Cape Town in this period, but those that

exist can be divided broadly into three. The first interpretation, represented by Maseko, sees the emergence of organisation in the early 1980s as an organic response to a political system that did not provide mechanisms for meeting people's demands. Because they were rooted in grassroots pressure from below these organisations were initially successful. However, over time the leadership came to believe that their bread-and-butter goals could only be met through political change. This caused a shift in focus to national political issues which alienated mass support and caused decline.<sup>1</sup>

The second interpretation is provided by van Kessel in her study of the community newspaper *Grassroots*. She argues that activists became involved in community organisation not to address specific grievances, but as way to pursue political aims. 'Grassroots' organisation was dominated by young and highly politicised activists instilled with 'vanguardism.' This 'vanguardism' involved making people aware of the injustices of the apartheid system and using this to mobilise them into the struggle. Community issues were important only insofar as they were a tool for broader political mobilisation:

[A]ddressing community issues was not an end in itself. Housing, transportation, and jobs were more likely to awaken an interest in the average township resident than the Freedom Charter or Marxist classics. But these bread-and-butter issues were a means to an end, stepping stones in a mobilization [sic] process against racial and class oppression.<sup>2</sup>

Within this schema the move from grassroots to national organising was simply a result of changed circumstance, as the state's reform strategy forced political considerations to the fore. Furthermore, whilst this led to an appearance of decline

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<sup>1</sup>Maseko, S, "Civic Movement and Non-Violent Action: The Case of the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee", *African Affairs*, 96, 1997, p.355

<sup>2</sup> Van Kessel, I, "Beyond our Wildest Dreams": The United Democratic Front and The Transformation of South Africa, (Charlottesville & London, 2000), p.246

in the level of popular mobilisation, at heart it represented little change.

Organisation had always been dominated by an activist elite.<sup>3</sup>

The final interpretation sits between these two views and is represented by Gunnarsen. He argues that the key dynamic of this period was a move from politically minded activists acting as leaders directing popular struggles to an assumption of a role as organisers, organising people around their day-to-day hardships and taking the lead from the community. Activists were not simply seeking bread-and-butter improvements, but nor were they merely using such issues as one tactic amongst others – the very nature of activism was such that political leadership necessarily emerged from involvement in grassroots struggles:

The space created by the boycotts [of 1980] and the frequent mass meetings was filled out by experiences with democracy. These experiments revised the landscape of leaders... In the new environment leadership was derived from followers, thus messing up the meaning of the concepts and invoking a new meaning. Increasingly, leaders followed followers and followers led leaders.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, although recognising a shift in organising with the formation of the UDF and its need to rapidly respond to state initiatives, this is not seen to have fundamentally undermined the heritage of this period – the ability to undertake mass action around single issues – and he does not recognise a decline in organisation at this time.<sup>5</sup>

At the heart of all these interpretations is the broader issue of the complex relationship between organisation and action. Maseko sees organisation as central to mobilisation and locates decline within organisational choices. Gunnarsen sees organisation as a consequence of mass mobilisation, with leaders deriving their legitimacy from their followers. In contrast, van Kessel queries the extent to which

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<sup>3</sup> Van Kessel, I, "Beyond our Wildest Dreams"..., pp.256-7. See also: Staniland, L, Struggling for Community: Civic Activism in Greater Cape Town 1980 - 1986, Edinburgh University Centre for African Studies Occasional Paper 100, (Edinburgh, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> Gunnarsen, G, Leaders of Organizers against Apartheid: Cape Town 1976-1984, PhD Thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2001, p.145

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

organisation ever created mass mobilisation beyond an educated elite, seeing organisation as a tool not a widespread community response.

This thesis broadly supports van Kessel's interpretation – that organisation did not create mass mobilisation. In 1979 and 1980 organisation was limited, yet there was considerable protest. In contrast, the next 5 years saw little protest despite the deliberate building of organisation and campaigns. The high point of anti-apartheid organising after 1980 was not mass action, but an election boycott. This boycott, whilst successful, involved abstention rather than participation, was dominated by van Kessel's vanguard and did not see mass mobilisation. However, this thesis moves beyond van Kessel's work to show why organisation could not build activism. In doing this it shows the importance of the apartheid political economy. The fragmented nature of Cape Town's black population made it difficult to develop programmes of action that could enlist widespread support. Furthermore, the functioning of apartheid in the city did not generally create widespread grievances in either the African or coloured communities. For much of this period, there was little pushing people to protest, and therefore little protest.

However, accepting that organisation struggled to create mobilisation does not mean in the right circumstances it did not shape its development. Organisation provided a conduit through which contradictions could move from sporadic protest and discontent into a more explicitly political or widespread challenge to the state. This happened in 1980 as diffuse protests were brought together into a city-wide movement through links and ideologies that had developed since 1976; indeed a key difference between the events of 1976 and 1980 was the role organisation played in sustaining and channelling protest. Organisation also provided the vehicle through which the activist elite was able to organise, plan and sustain the tricameral boycott. However, what it could not do was bridge the gap between this elite and the population it claimed to be speaking for. Networks, ideologies and resources did

matter, but how far they mattered depended upon the broader structural context within which they were operating.

To demonstrate the relationship between organisation and action at this time this chapter starts by outlining organisational development in the city before 1979/80. It shows how, despite the emergence of tentative linkages, citywide progressive organisation remained limited. It then examines the events of 1979/80. Here it demonstrates how, despite organisational limitations, a momentary convergence of interests across the city's black population caused popular support for boycotts to expand. A wave of protest then built as increasing numbers of people became drawn into protest.

The chapter then sketches a broad narrative of events between 1980 and 1985. The boycotts persuaded a group of activists that challenge was possible. These activists then set about building organisation around bread-and-butter issues to draw people into progressive politics and spread this challenge. However, these organisations ultimately failed and with the announcement in late 1982 of plans to reform the apartheid electoral system the focus of activists shifted from local communities to national political change. Finally this chapter considers why the attempts by activists to build organisation and mobilisation failed to widen the social base of activism. It shows how organisation was undermined by the fragmented nature of the city's black population and by the fact that coloured and African adults, despite suffering considerable discrimination, were integrated into apartheid's political economy in ways that encouraged quiescence and inhibited the construction of a unified anti-apartheid politics.

## 4.2. Calm after and before the Storms: The Limited Impact of the Soweto Uprising on Progressive Politics 1977-9

The events of 1976/7 are often assigned a central role in the re-emergence of opposition to apartheid.<sup>6</sup> However, in Cape Town the development of activism and organisation before 1980 was limited. Formal progressive organisation, therefore, played a limited role in the outbreak of the 1979/80 boycotts, although networks and ideas influenced by Soweto were significant.

Interviews in both cases reveal a 'lull' in activism after 1977 as individuals central to the uprising either left school and were absorbed into the economy (which had not yet moved into the doldrums of the 1980s)<sup>7</sup> or in the absence of internal progressive organisation (due to the ongoing commitment to armed revolution by the banned political movements) went into exile.<sup>8</sup> This lull meant civil society remained dominated by organisations maintaining relationships of cautious cooperation with the state.

A clear example of the limited impact of 1976/7 in radicalising African civil society was the response to plans for limited local government for urban Africans. The 1977 Community Council Act established local councils for the African townships, but left the Bantu Affairs Administration Board (BAAB) (comprised of white officials) with ultimate authority, and was clearly located in a framework of separate development. However, African civil society responded to these proposals with initial engagement. This engagement included the Nyanga Residents Association, led by ANC stalwart Oscar Mpetha. Surviving letters reveal Mpetha's

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<sup>6</sup> Brewer, J D, *After Soweto: An Unfinished Journey*, (Oxford, 1986)

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Oupa Lehulere (1986) reproduced in: *Students and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*, (Johannesburg, 2006), p.60; Interview with Bennet Bailey, 18/7/2006, Cape Town

<sup>8</sup> '1976 Changed My Life', *Grassroots*, 7/4, June 1986.; 'Back to Schools Africans Urged', *Cape Times*, 4/01/1977

initial support for the councils,<sup>9</sup> whilst another activist recounted that underground ANC activists received instruction from exile to involve themselves in the community council election, before later this position was reversed.<sup>10</sup> The involvement of not only civil society, but also underground ANC figures, in plans to reform apartheid brings into serious question the view of 1976/7 as a turning point in the nature of political struggle in the African areas.

In Bonteheuwel transformations are equally difficult to locate. There was no underground presence in the community and interaction with the local authorities continued to be characterised by limited cooperation and organised without political content or strategy. For example, in 1977 the council introduced an 'infill scheme' to build new housing on land including the backyards of existing houses. This was widely opposed as people were losing their backyards and the population of the township was increased without any expansion in local service provision. However, whilst in the 1980s such issues were to be taken up by organisations operating within an explicitly progressive political framework, at this time community discontent was channelled through the church, with the campaign was led by the Ministers Fraternal.

However, whilst Soweto had a limited affect within broader communities, it left a mark on the minds of a younger generation, particularly students and ex-students from the University of Western Cape. This consciousness interacted with other organisational developments, including the emergence of the independent trade union movement and the development of the non-racial sports movement, to create links across the city between like minded individuals. These linkages resulted in small scale organisational experiments, rather than mass action, but they were the foundations on which later organisations were built.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Discussion Between Members of the Nyanga Resident's Association and the Chief Director at Nyanga on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1978 at 2.30pm', 2p., handwritten notes, ss, A4, 1978, CTAR, PACG 3/7/1/1 where it is reported 'Mr. Mpetha states that [whilst] amongst the people of Nyanga there is a divided feeling about community councils, the majority seems to approve', p.2

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Wilson Sidina, 31/10/2005, Guguletu

The late 1970s saw small scale initiatives within communities as people with common experiences of apartheid sought avenues to challenge inequality. One activist, who became involved in the United Women's Organisation (UWO) and Cape Area Housing Action Committee (CAHAC) in the early 1980s, remembers being involved in several projects, mostly linked into white liberal and church organisations. This included attending the Young Christian Workers and helping with a Black Sash literacy project for domestic workers.<sup>11</sup> In the case studies organisational experiments were also taking place. Students from UWC established a homework group for children in Bonteheuwel and a study group at the local library.<sup>12</sup> Drama groups were set up in the African areas<sup>13</sup> and at Fezeka High School a history society was established where students discussed politics and banned literature, including the Communist Manifesto.<sup>14</sup> The South African Council of Churches ran winter schools teaching liberation theology and there was some discussion of Marxism.<sup>15</sup> By 1978 a branch of the black consciousness inspired Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) had been launched in Guguletu and in 1979 a branch of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) was launched in Cape Town.<sup>16</sup> A 'Peninsula Youth Association' was also formed in Guguletu, to 'unite young people from the LAGUNYA<sup>17</sup> townships.'<sup>18</sup> The final organisational development of this period was the formation of UWO which started as an Ad hoc women's committee in 1978 involving women who had been involved in the ANC before its banning.<sup>19</sup>

However, despite these developments the political landscape of 1979 was not radically different to 1976. None of these organisations attracted significant numbers of supporter and activism did not expand beyond a few individuals. There

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Daphne King, 23/11/2005, Cape Town

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Quentin Michels, 27/3/2006, Goodwood

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Zoliswa Kota, 6/6/2006, Cape Town

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Shepherd Mati, 23/4/2007, Cape Town

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Whitey Jacobs, 12/9/2006, Cape Town,

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> LAGUNYA is a commonly used term in Cape Town to refer to the apartheid era formal African townships of Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Dinga Sikwebu, 15/11/2006, Johannesburg

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Mildred Leseia, 4/9/2006, Cape Town; Interview with Zoliswa Kota...



were no campaigns led by progressive organisations and many of these fledgling organisations sought cooperation with the authorities. The Peninsula Youth Association, for example, specifically stated in correspondence with the BAAB that 'it is not a political body' and that it aimed 'to promote the interests of youth and to afford recognised means of communication between the youth and the peninsula authorities.'<sup>20</sup> This period is therefore better understood as a time when individuals – mainly university students in the coloured areas and ANC old-timers and a few matric students in the African communities – began to seek new ways of understanding and challenging apartheid. In doing this they built linkages across the city, but they did so without any clearly theorised plan of action, and in many cases no clear ideology

### **4.3. 'We shall not ride', 'We shall not write', 'We shall not buy': The Great Boycott Season of 1979-1980**

The period of protest in Cape Town between 1979 and 1980 is often referred to as 'the great boycott season' as people in both coloured and African communities boycotted buses, schooling and consumer goods. More generally, it has been seen as a time when coloureds and Africans came together in a united cause against apartheid<sup>21</sup> and, particularly amongst school children, a moment of cognitive transformation as it became clear that material hardships could only be overcome through political change.<sup>22</sup>

However, the evidence presented here suggests that rather than being a turning point in mass consciousness across the city, 1979/80 was located in a

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<sup>20</sup> Letter from W.M. Guma to The Director, BAAB, Cape Peninsula, 1p., handwritten, ss, A4, 6/9/1977, CTAR, PACG 3/7/2/1, vol.1

<sup>21</sup> Goldin, I, Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa, (London & NY, 1987), p.208

<sup>22</sup> Molteno, F, 1980: Students Struggle for their Schools, (Cape Town, 1987)

particular historical moment. This moment saw grievances emerge which were universally experienced across the city's black populations, regardless of race and class. For a time, the city became united in action as these grievances provided a basis upon which an emerging group of politicised activists, seeking ways to challenge apartheid, were able to organise and mobilise people. However, even as the boycotts spread, they began to unravel. Differences between the African and coloured communities undermined unity in action, especially as the costs of involvement rose. These divisions impacted first on the consumer and bus boycotts, where the causes of protest were of less significance to people's daily lives. They then spread to the school boycott where the existence of separate education systems saw different state responses and consequently different reactions within the African and coloured schools.

#### **4.3.1 Pasta, Textbooks and Clipcards: The Boycotts of 1979-80**

The start of the great boycott season can be traced to the Fattis and Monis pasta processing factory in Cape Town. After a group of workers were sacked in April 1979 for trying to organise a branch of the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU) the whole factory came out on strike. Whilst strikes were rare this strike was particularly unusual. On the 10<sup>th</sup> May a meeting attended by students from educational institutions across the city, including UWC and the coloured teacher training colleges, called for a boycott of Fattis and Monis products. This call was taken up by organisations at UCT and a Community Action Committee was formed involving organisations from throughout Cape Town's black communities.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Organisations involved in the Consumer Action Committee included the Western Cape Teachers Association, Western Province Council of Churches, the Labour Party, Western Province General Workers Union, the recently formed United Women's Organisation, Muslim News and the Nyanga and the Guguletu Residents Associations: Pillay, D, Trade Unions and Alliance Politics in Cape Town, 1979-85, PhD Thesis, University of Essex, 1989, p.111

The boycott was highly successful, spreading nationwide. In Cape Town it was university and school students that undertook the majority of the community support work. Most boycott pamphlets were printed at UWC and it was UWC and high school students, supported by left wing students from UCT, who were key in most actions, such as the protest held on the 24<sup>th</sup> May when pupils from across the city invaded supermarkets and pulled Fattis and Monis products off the shelves.<sup>24</sup> In Bonteheuwel students distributed pamphlets and parents who worked for Fattis and Monis and the unions addressed meetings in the area.<sup>25</sup> In Guguletu the picture is less clear. There were no formal student organisations in the township. However, members of UWO supported the boycott and the Guguletu Residents Association was involved in the Consumer Action Committee. The boycott itself was widely supported. In November, 1979 the sacked workers were reinstated.

The next boycott to break out was the school boycott. This is widely believed to have begun in the coloured township of Hanover Park in April 1980, in protest at poor schooling conditions and the dismissal of teachers due to earlier protests. However there were intermittent protests and boycotts during February at both the Hanover Park schools. There was also a class boycott at Fezeka High in Guguletu on the 15<sup>th</sup> February over compulsory school uniforms, school fees and a lack of textbooks, leading some people to argue the boycott had its genesis in the African areas.<sup>26</sup> Regardless of where the boycott started it was from April that it began to gather momentum, spreading through coloured and African schools.

Whereas 1976 had seen students acting in isolation, without formal organisation and little political content, the 1980 boycott was more organised, brought together coloured and African schools, linked with non-student groups and involved a much clearer theorisation of the links between conditions in the schools and the broader apartheid context. In the words of one student involved in the boycott:

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.119

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Youth activist and underground MK operative, 29/7/2006, Claremont

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Whitey Jacobs, 12/9/2006, Cape Town

1980 is a student movement that understands the place of politics and understands the primacy of other social forces in... change.<sup>27</sup>

Widespread support was received from parents and teachers. Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs) were formed in the coloured areas, including Bonteheuwel, and a Parents Action Committee was formed in the African townships.<sup>28</sup> Over 1000 teachers attended a meeting that expressed support for the boycott and the demand for a 'single non-discriminatory, non-racial society in which no racially stratified education system can function.'<sup>29</sup> Support was also expressed from black staff at UWC.<sup>30</sup> At Bonteheuwel Senior Secondary School the situation became so serious the principle invited parents to a meeting to discuss, 'present pupil presence/absence from school and the critical position which has developed.'<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in the African Townships 2000 residents attended a meeting held on the 25<sup>th</sup> May which elected 16 people to represent the students' grievances.

Whilst in 1979 there had been little progressive student organisation, during the boycott effective organisation coalesced. A city-wide 'Committee of 81'<sup>32</sup> was established to represent and make decisions for all boycotting schools. Representatives from every school voted on decisions, with motions passed by a majority being implemented by all. Locally, each school elected a student representative council (SRC) which decided on the positions to take to the Committee of 81. In this way decision making flowed from discussions within individual classrooms, through the SRCs and into the citywide structure.<sup>33</sup> In coloured communities SRCs were represented directly on the committee. However,

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Oupa Lehulere, 8/2/2008, Johannesburg

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Whitey Jacobs, 12/9/2006, Cape Town

<sup>29</sup> '1 000 teachers support boycott', *Cape Times*, 30/4/1980

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Principal and Staff, Bonteheuwel Senior Secondary School, 1p., typed, ss, A4, 29/5/1980, NLSA, AP.1982-632

<sup>32</sup> The committee of 81 got its name from the 81 schools that were represented at its meetings.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Bennet Bailey, 18/7/2006, Cape Town

in the African townships an intermediate body was formed, known as the Regional Committee, which represented African schools en masse on the Committee of 81.<sup>34</sup>

As well as transforming organisation, the boycott also saw a rapid spread of new ideas and ideologies. As the boycott progressed the iniquities of the education system began to be linked into apartheid as an economic system that was built on structurally entrenched cheap labour and inequality. In turn, these ideas led to a growing recognition of the need for alliances beyond the schools. This was clearly reflected in a key Committee of 81 publication:

The wider and deeper the present boycott action has developed, the more we have become aware of one of the main lessons of 1976. This lesson was simply that *we should not allow any serious action by black students to become isolated in the schools...* If we allow the struggle to be isolated in the schools, we shall find ourselves complaining to and petitioning the anti-capitalist rulers for no more than repairs to apartheid buildings in apartheid ghettos and group areas... The condition of the ghetto schools and the gutter education are the outcome of the whole system of racist oppression and capitalist exploitation.<sup>35</sup>

In line with this greater focus on political change the students did not call an outright school boycott. Instead classes were replaced with awareness sessions where students watched videos about international political struggles and discussed politics and the events of 1976:

We had the awareness campaigns from the morning until about 12, 1 in the afternoon... We had football, sport tournaments in the afternoon. To keep guys busy... But to participate in those games you must have been part of the awareness programmes.<sup>36</sup>

Because of this greater focus on education, and restraint by the state, the 1980 boycott was relatively blood free.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Whitey Jacobs, 12/9/2006, Cape Town

<sup>35</sup> Committee of 81, 'From the Schools to the People', 6p., typed, ss, A4, April or May 1980, MA, Bundy Collection, p.1. Emphasis in original.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Bennet Bailey, 18/7/2006, Cape Town

Overall, however, whilst the schools boycott was widespread it was not, ultimately, successful. Furthermore, when it did end it did so in division and discord. Coloured schools suspended the boycott on the 30<sup>th</sup> July after just over three months amongst leadership divisions and a breakdown in discipline in the schools.<sup>37</sup> In the African areas the decision by the Committee of 81 to return to school was ignored and the boycott continued into 1981, before it finally fizzled out.

The final two events of 1979/80 were the bus and red meat boycotts. The bus boycott was a response to plans to raise bus fares in the city. It started on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June, some 6 weeks after the students had begun their boycott. In its early weeks it was well supported in both African and coloured communities. Pickup points for commuters were arranged along with reduced taxi rates so that people could still travel to work. However, like the schools boycott, the bus boycott failed. It was in the coloured communities that the boycott first broke down, after six weeks, whilst African commuters stayed away far longer. The red meat strike also failed. Like Fattis and Monis the boycott was in support of dismissed workers, on this occasion from a meat processing plant. However, from the start this strike was not fully supported. Only 20 of 200 coloured workers came out on strike, compared to overall support of nearly 80%.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the boycott of red meat did not inflict large scale loses on the company and was ultimately called off.

### **4.3.2. Issues without Race and Class Boundaries: Explaining the Emergence of the Great Boycott Season**

Formal progressive organisation played no real role in the emergence of the great boycott season. As shown in section 4.2 progressive organisation before 1979 was limited in both communities, where responses to material hardships were

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Youth activist and BYM founding member, 10/5/2006, Cape Town; Untitled notebook containing records of meetings around the school boycott, 44p, handwritten, ss, A5, 1980, photocopy in author's possession

<sup>38</sup> Pillay, D, Trade Unions and Alliance Politics..., p.163

coordinated on an ad hoc basis. Instead organisation emerged as a result of the demands of action. The Committee of 81 was formed after schools were on boycott to coordinate protest, not create it.<sup>39</sup> The Consumer Action Committee was formed to organise a boycott after Fattis and Monis staff were on strike. PTSAs and the Parents Action Committee did not predate the boycott.<sup>40</sup> Instead, all of the campaigns of this period emerged in response to immediate grievances which, whilst often supported and spread by activist networks, drew their strength from the fact they were experienced across race and class boundaries in a way that made widespread collective action possible.

The school boycott provides the clearest example of limited organisational involvement, an initial lack of political content and the importance of collective grievances which allowed action to spread city-wide. As already noted there were no city-wide student structures before the boycott and its outbreak was firmly rooted in the poor conditions that prevailed within both African and coloured schools. The first set of demands drawn up by the boycotting students in April reveal how immediate grievances lay behind the boycott's outbreak:

- Schools to be allowed to have SRCs
- No student be forced to wear uniforms or pay school fees
- School buildings be repaired
- Sufficient text books be delivered immediately<sup>41</sup>

In the African High Schools conditions were particularly dire. In February 1980 the South African Institute for Race Relations produced a confidential paper examining schooling in the African schools. This noted that there were around 50 pupils in every class and so few text books that as many as 20 students had to share a single book.<sup>42</sup> That it was the poor quality of schooling that caused protest, not a

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.119

<sup>40</sup> 'Conflict in the Western Cape', *Work in Progress*, 13, 1980, pp.1-15

<sup>41</sup> 'Schools Boycotts – Cape Town 1980', 4p., typed, ds, A4, n.d., MA, MCH24-11, p.1

<sup>42</sup> 'Memorandum on Chairman's Visit to the Principals of Three African High Schools on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1980', SAIRR, 4p, typed, ss, A4, 22/2/1980, UCTMA, BC998, E2.5.3

clear desire to challenge apartheid, was confirmed by activists involved in the boycotts:

[T]he 1980 boycott started with the problem of the school fees at Fezeka high school... we were... told to pay school fees before the end of February, for registration. Then out of a discussion of the students we felt that this is not correct now. Because some of our parents will not be able to pay, then if they have not paid then children were chased out of school... And it went further... in terms of the corporal punishment. So..., we were able now to influence within other schools around the common issues that were affecting students.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst in the coloured areas schooling provision was better, conditions were still poor and again it was this which drove the boycotts. As one of the key figures in Bonteheuwel recalled:

What started this thing was mostly that... We were fed up with the conditions at school itself. One, we were fed up with the teachers .We not getting quality teachers... No books ... then the buildings has been vandalised... Cold during winter period. So there was this whole bundle of problems. But it was not restricted only to certain schools. It was a generic problem throughout the whole Western Cape... So then people started discussing these disparities, you see. <sup>44</sup>

These quotes are significant because not only do they reveal the importance of the poor conditions within the schools, but more importantly they highlight the fact these grievances were experienced collectively across the city. In Guguletu students worked with other schools around corporal punishment. In Bonteheuwel these grievances led to the participant discussing issues with people across the whole Western Cape. It was this commonality of interest, caused by the fact black schooling was poor everywhere, that allowed the boycott to spread rapidly from school to school.

Similar dynamics are also apparent in the bus boycott. Again ad hoc organisation was established to co-ordinate protest, which focused on an issue of general concern and significant impact. As early as 1975 the City Council was

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with CAYCO activist, 11/9/2006, Guguletu

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Bennett Bailey, 18/7/2006, Cape Town



expressing concern over the impact that higher busfares would have on low income coloureds and was pushing for increased subsidies.<sup>45</sup> With far lower wages Africans were even more adversely affected. The issue of busfares was particularly sensitive because it was apartheid segregation that meant blacks had to live in townships with long commutes to their places of work. Increasing busfares, therefore, were experienced as a rising cost that was not only difficult financially, but was also a result of discriminatory policies that restricted people's transport and living options.<sup>46</sup> Like the schools boycott, therefore, moves to increase busfares impacted city-wide. It was this widespread discontent, and its location within broader experiences of discrimination, that made boycott possible.

Whilst the schools and bus boycotts were located in significant material hardship, the consumer boycotts that started the boycott season were not. It is insufficient, therefore, to argue that material hardship alone caused protest. The following section discusses in more detail the role of organisation and political space in providing a context that supported action. However given its success, and the fact it appears to run counter to the general analysis offered in this thesis, it is worth considering the Fattis and Monis boycott in more detail here.

The Fattis and Monis boycott appears to have drawn its strength from a combination of general opposition to the treatment of the striking workers, strong support amongst university and school students, and the fact that the existence of other brands of pasta made the boycott low risk. Whilst the absence of material grievances in the boycott appears to undermine the argument proposed here – that structural push factors were crucial to action – the failure of the red meat boycott suggests such a reading is only partly correct. At its heart the Fattis and Monis boycott was run by student activists and trade unionists. Trade unionists were

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<sup>45</sup> Department of Coloured, Rehoboth and Nama Relations, 'Verhoging van Busgelde: City Tramways en Golden Arrow Busmaatskapye: Hersieing van subsidie U13/2/2/1 Verwys, 30/1/1975, SAKUS 3/185, 20/7/4/2

<sup>46</sup> 'Statistics on the Transport Situation in the Townships of Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu, Cape Town', SAIRR, 10p., typed, SS, A4, 1980, UCTMA, BC998, Bus Boycotts 1980, p.4; 'Success of Bus Boycott', Pamphlet Issued by the Bus Action Committee 1p., typed, A4, 1980, photocopy in author's possession,

drawn in as a result of their organisational role, whilst many students came to the boycott whilst searching for broader ways to challenge inequality. The success of the boycott, therefore, lay less in the personal impact of the boycott across African and coloured communities, and more in the fact that a successful and widespread campaign was organised around a clear injustice which people could participate in for little personal cost. The fact that the red meat boycott failed, as people refused to sacrifice the eating of red meat for similar ends, shows how important the low cost of the Fattis and Monis boycott was and how, in the absence of deep felt grievance, many people would not make sustained sacrifices for the greater good.

### **4.3.3. Shaping Protest: Political Space, Activist Networks and Repertoires of Action in the Boycotts**

Although the boycotts of 1979/80 were heavily conditioned by apartheid's underlying structural contradictions, these contradictions alone did not determine the nature or success of protest. Two other dynamics played a crucial role in turning structural contradiction into sustained action. Firstly, there was the growing activist network which facilitated organisation, coordinated protest and framed injustice in a way that sustained involvement. Secondly, this period also saw an expansion of political space as a lack of repression provided space for activism to emerge, which was then pushed open as successive protests emerged, each of which further demonstrated the possibility of action.

Whilst the boycotts emerged around material grievances their development into sustained challenge (and often their early unfolding) owed much to the networks of activists that had emerged over the preceding five years. Indeed, the emerging grievances and protests of this period provided many people who had been looking for a way to challenge apartheid a context for action that had previously been missing. In contrast to 1976 the boycotts of 1980 tapped into a nascent network of politically minded activist. In turn this provided a broad

ideological coherence which supported action and cooperation across the city. They also developed organisational networks that allowed for sustained decision making and the practical implementation of programmes of action. Whilst alone these do not account for the wider spread of the boycott (grievances were still important) without these linkages it is unlikely that the boycotts would have achieved the success they did.

The Fattis and Monis strike emerged as a result of labour relations within the company. However, the boycott it spawned was the result of growing activist linkages across the city. The boycott was not organised by workers, but through student organisations and the non-racial sports movement.<sup>47</sup> It also relied heavily on links within the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU). A list of some of the officials working in the FCWU, who helped implement the boycott locally, reveals the importance of politically minded activists in spreading the boycott. These included Virginia Engel, an activist in the Moravian Church and a former Black Consciousness activist at UWC; Athalie Crawford a white radical involved in student politics; Liz Abrahams, an ANC veteran, former Western Cape secretary of SACTU and member of the Federation of South African Women; Oscar Mpetha, another ANC veteran and a central figure in township politics who helped bring the boycott to the African areas; Norma Gabriel a civic activist who was at this stage linked into Neville Alexander's group; and Johnny Issel a former Black Consciousness activist who became a key figure in Congress politics in the province and was responsible for establishing the community newspaper *Grassroots*.

Likewise, the bus and school boycotts and the formation of the Committee of 81 relied on informal networks of progressive individuals. Initial meetings around the bus boycott were organised by Johnny Issel.<sup>48</sup> In Bonteheuwel the leadership of the school boycott was drawn into city-wide structures through links in the non-

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<sup>47</sup> 'Stalemate at factory over workers' strike'. *Cape Times*, 15/5/1979; 'More calls for Fattis boycott', *Cape Times*, 19/5/1979

<sup>48</sup> Trevor Manuel, interviewed by J. Seekings, 4/7/1992, Johannesburg

racial sports movement.<sup>49</sup> Leaders of the boycott from other schools, including in Guguletu, recall how the links that later brought them into the Committee of 81 were made at summer schools and through involvement in the Young Christian Workers and Young Christian Students.<sup>50</sup> The growth of protest and opposition also brought veterans of pre-1960s politics into the open. As individuals were drawn into campaigns, organisation and networks coalesced. The Fattis and Monis strike was the first time many activists who became central in the Western Cape Congress movement worked together; however many of the links formed in this campaign were used to organise the bus boycott and later the UDF<sup>51</sup>

These growing networks were crucial because they helped turn disparate grievances into sustained and theorised protests which had both aims and explanations for injustice. The Committee of 81 not only provided a vehicle for decision making but also published demands and spread views on why apartheid education was inferior. In turn these demands and discussion provided the rallying point for students, turning their general experiences of hardship into a defined set of aims and identifying ways of achieving those aims. By creating a narrative of protest organisation was able to rally people together.

The growth of organisation also had more a more practical impact on organising, by providing the resources required to sustain and spread action. Many of the ad hoc organisations of this time linked African and working class coloured activists with white and middle class coloureds with ready access to the skills and material resources required in the building of organisation and spreading of protest. Many of the pamphlets published in 1979/80 were printed at UCT or UWC. Similarly, the organising of boycott meetings and pamphleteering at transport hubs depended upon activists with ready access to transport, money and communication

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Suleiman Isaacs, 7/8/2006, Goodwood

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.; Interview with Bennett Bailey, 18/7/2006, Cape Town; Logan Wort and Trevor Oosterwyk, interviewed by Jeremy Seekings, Cape Town, 24/6/1992; Focus Group with Former Members of the Committee of 81

<sup>51</sup> Trevor Manuel, interviewed by J. Seekings, 4/7/1992, Johannesburg

equipment. Whilst formal organisation, therefore, played little role in the great boycott season, informal networks were crucial to its unfolding.

The second dynamic that transformed grievance into sustained action was an opening of political space. This opening of space was a result of three transformations. Firstly, unlike in 1976, repression was limited. Secondly, and related to the lack of repression, the repertoire of action employed, using boycotts and mass meetings, provided a low risk route into protest. As already discussed with regards to the Fattis and Monis boycott, people could protest by abstaining rather than acting. Finally, as the boycott season itself unfolded it forced open growing space for action. 1979/80 was not a single protest but a wave of interrelated protests, constantly building on what had preceded.<sup>52</sup> In the minds of many people the Fattis and Monis boycott showed that collective action was possible and could succeed and it was this that encouraged further protests. As each protest expanded so too did the bounds of possibility and this encouraged people to undertake and organise new protests.<sup>53</sup> A student in Guguletu, for example, recounted how the school students were holding meetings which, when the red meat boycott broke out were then used to support the workers and how out of this a more explicitly politicised understanding of the student struggle developed.<sup>54</sup> Equally, the tactics of the red meat boycott itself drew heavily on the experience of the Fattis and Monis boycott.

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<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of how action can build on action to force open political space see: McAdam, D, Tarrow, S & Tilly, C. *Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge, 2001), p.243

<sup>53</sup> Trevor Manuel, interviewed by J. Seekings, 4/7/1992, Johannesburg

<sup>54</sup> Interview with CAYCO activist, 11/9/2006, Guguletu

#### **4.3.4. The Limits of Shared Grievances: Race, Class and the Mixed Success of the Great Boycott Season**

Although the Great Boycott Season saw some successes, particularly in drawing large numbers of black Capetonians into protest, most of the boycotts failed. This failure is significant because it reveals clear limits to black collective action in the city, even at a time when organisation and opportunity were supportive of such action. The boycotts relied on the articulation of universally experienced grievances. They collapsed when this universality could no longer be sustained.

The clearest example of this was the schools boycott. Whilst for a time students united behind a programme of action, as the boycott progressed this unity could not be maintained. Divisions opened up along both race and class cleavages. Notes from the meeting in May 1980 at which the boycott was suspended reveal how in the coloured schools divisions emerged between those schools that wanted the boycott to end and those (including Bonteheuwel) who wished to escalate the action in an attempt to precipitate revolution.<sup>55</sup> Within this debate class played a key role. In working class schools like those in Bonteheuwel, the students came to see the boycotts as part of a broader move for liberation, whereas in the more affluent schools the satisfying of specific educational demands was seen as sufficient to allow a return to school.<sup>56</sup> In turn this reflected the different life chances of middle and working class coloureds. In the more affluent areas schooling and education was a vehicle for personal advancement. However, in areas where pass rates were lower and jobs depended less on high levels of education the demand for better schooling was subsumed under broader demands for transformation.<sup>57</sup> Students in the working class schools also had less to lose as they relied less on education and delayed exam results were therefore less likely to impact on their life chances.

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<sup>55</sup> Untitled notebook containing records of meetings around the school boycott, 44p, handwritten, ss, A5, 1980, photocopy in author's possession. This is of particular interest because it runs contrary to the commonly held view of the school boycott as a carefully theorised boycott with limited aims that did not see itself as occupying a revolutionary moment.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Bennett Bailey, 18/7/2006, Cape Town

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Divisions also emerged between Africans and coloureds. Key here were the very different conditions in the schools in the two communities, the existence of different education authorities and the social and physical distance between African and coloured students. The decision by African pupils to ignore the Committee of 81's decision to return to school reflects all three of these dynamics. Africans felt unable to return to school because they had received no redress to their demands (which whilst framed within the broader context of student protest included demands that related only to Africans). Furthermore, they were due to meet the Bantu education department to discuss their grievances the day after the Committee of 81, which was dominated by coloured schools, voted to suspend the boycott.<sup>58</sup>

Similar divisions also emerged around the bus and red meat boycotts, where coloured support trailed off far quicker than it did in African areas. Again this was seen at the time as being a consequence of distance between racial groups and their different relationships with the state. For example, in accounting for the decline in coloured support for the red meat boycott the head of SACOS noted that: 'the divide and rule policy of the government makes it difficult for the coloured people to identify with the Africans'.<sup>59</sup>

The great boycott season was a high point in the history of progressive organising in Cape Town. It was the first time that large numbers of black Capetonians had come together in protests that, whilst primarily linked to immediate grievances in the schools, factories and townships, also contained a significant strand of political challenge.

In accounting for the success of the boycotts, as well as their limits, a combination of material grievances, organisation and political opportunities were all of relevance. A lack of repression, activist networks and expanding belief in the possibility and efficacy of action all helped the boycotts emerge and develop from

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Whitey Jacobs, 12/9/2006, Cape Town

<sup>59</sup> Support for bus boycott declining, *Cape Times*, 6/8/1980

disparate grievances into widespread protest. However, whilst these political opportunities and organisational resources played a key role in protest, their success was limited by the resonance of the campaigns they looked to support. Conditions within schools citywide were atrocious and inadequate schooling was linked to broader labour market discrimination, consequently support for the schools boycott was widespread. Busfare rises caused considerable hardship across communities and were seen as unfair, but were not as central to the lives of commuters as the daily schooling experience was to students. Protest was therefore widespread and sustained, but had limits. The consumer boycotts were ultimately abstracted from most people's lives and therefore, whilst there was considerable support for the Fattis and Monis boycott, once the costs of participation increased, as it did with the red meat boycott, support dropped away.

Finally, returning to the picture of differential discrimination presented in chapter two, it is worth noting that whilst many of these campaigns appeared on the surface to be rooted in bread-and-butter issues, the most consistent supporters of these campaigns were university graduates and matric students, not those people most directly affected. The boycotts of 1980 showed that when grievances coalesced the actions of an activist elite could create action. However without such grievances action was hard to sustain.

#### **4.4. From Bread and Butter to Banners and Rallies: The Rise and Fall of the Organising Tradition in Cape Town 1980-1985**

In the wake of the great boycott season activist consciousness within the coloured communities of Cape Town was transformed. The development of protest across racial groups, the successful organisation of the boycotts, and a growing political



consciousness all worked to create a new layer of activists that both felt apartheid could be challenged and sought ways to achieve this. This activist elite sought ways to expand political consciousness and grow political struggle and, in the early 1980s, began to look to mass organisation within civil society as a mechanism for expanding popular support for progressive politics.

Working within a framework for action that aimed to create politicisation by organising people around their daily hardships this activist elite, still dominated by university students, set about building 'grassroots' civil society organisations across Cape Town. Considerable effort and energy was ploughed into drawing people into progressive organisation, where it was believed they would learn about the injustices of apartheid and through this realisation become progressive activists themselves. However, this approach to organising failed and organisation remained dominated by a young activist elite. Similarly, in the African communities there was little growth in activism during the early 1980s

Then, in 1982, the government announced plans to reform the apartheid constitution and draw coloureds into the national political system. This led to the creation of national organisation to oppose these changes and a shift in progressive organisation and activism at the local level, as it shifted focus from bread-and-butter issues to national political concerns. However, although the focus of activism shifted, the fundamental dynamics driving and shaping participation did not and mass participation remained limited to passive support. The same activist elite dominated organisation, although coloureds became increasingly joined by an African activist elite that was forming along similar lines. This section considers why this expansion of activism did not achieve its goal of widening the social base of protest. It does this by first outlining how civil society changed between 1980 and 1985, before discussing the reasons why people did, and did not, involve themselves in activism.

#### 4.4.1. Bread and Butter: Civil Society in Cape Town 1980-1982

The approach to progressive organisation and activism that dominated the early 1980s can be broadly described as 'the organising tradition.'<sup>60</sup> In the coloured communities university students, graduates and veterans of the boycotts began to seek ways to extend the challenge to apartheid. In doing so they met with African veterans of the struggles of the 1950s, absorbed ideas on collective organising from Latin America and Lenin and developed an approach to mass action focused on the building of local community organisation as a mechanism for drawing the broader community towards progressive politics. This approach was widely adopted throughout the coloured communities. In the African areas, despite more limited growth in progressive organisation, UWO adopted a similar approach.<sup>61</sup>

At the heart of the organising tradition was a plan to link mass organisation and activity within civil society, based around bread-and-butter issues and day-to-day concerns, into a broader campaign highlighting and ultimately challenging apartheid. The way this was to be achieved was to run campaigns on commonly held grievances, such as the cost of rent, but to simultaneously demonstrate that apartheid was the root cause of all these grievances. Once people realised they were not only poor, but poor because of apartheid, it was hoped they would become absorbed into a broader anti-apartheid opposition:

[The goal of organising was to] take that opportunity [presented by the bread-and-butter issues] to mobilise people around political issues, bigger political issues in the country. Using the bread-and-butter issues as the issue around which you can rally people. So yeah, from the leadership point of view it was a political move, but for the ordinary members it was about addressing the bread and butter issues in the community.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *BBSK News*, September 1980, MA, MCH50; 'Manifesto to the People of Azania', issued by the committee of 81, 10p., typed, DS, A4, 14/5/1980 MA, Bundy Collection, pp.3-6

<sup>61</sup> Seekings, J, 'Strategic Thought in South Africa's Civic Movements, 1977-1990', in (eds.) Adler, G & Steinberg, J, From Comrades to Citizens: The South African Civics Movement and the Transition to Democracy, (Basingstoke, 2000); Van Kessel, I, Beyond our Wildest Dreams..., pp.235-241

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Civic and SANCO activist, 10/11/2005, Bonteheuwel

Three forms of organisation emerged in progressive civil society during the early 1980s, all of which were heavily influenced by the organising tradition. These were civic associations, youth organisations and the women's movements.<sup>63</sup>

Civic associations were geographically based organisations campaigning on issues affecting the local community, such as rent rises and the condition of the built environment. Whilst they had office holders, such as a treasurer and chair, involvement was primarily via participatory democracy practiced through mass meetings at which all residents were invited to attend and vote on decisions. Civics tended to be opposed to apartheid, though no clear ideology dominated, and engaged in non-confrontational protests and civil disobedience such as placard demonstrations, marches and petitions alongside organising local community events like plays and soup kitchens.

Initially civic organisations only operated in the coloured areas, including the Bonteheuwel Civic Association (BCA) which was launched in 1980. However, in May 1982 the Western Cape Civic Association (WCCA) was launched to cover the African areas (although it remained relatively weak). Such was the growth of the civic movement that by 1982 it was estimated that 32 civic associations existed in and around Cape Town.<sup>64</sup> At the same time as local civic associations were formed city-wide coordinating structures were also developed. The WCCA had several branches covering each of the LAGUNYA townships and eventually Crossroads. In the coloured areas umbrella structures, including the congress aligned CAHAC and the Unity Movement Federation of Cape Civic Associations, were formed to take up city-wide concerns.

The second major area of organising in this period was within youth movements. Again these movements were predominantly focused in coloured

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<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, despite the scale of the 1980 school boycott student organisation did not grow notably during this period. At the time of the 1982 COSAS national conference student organisation in both the coloured and the African schools was still very weak.

<sup>64</sup> Lodge, T & Nasson, B, All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s, (London, 1991), p.40

communities. Coloured youth movements tended to emerge alongside civic associations to involve young people in activism, as civic issues were seen to be the concern of adults. The Bonteheuwel Youth Movement (BYM) was a typical youth movement of this time. It was formed after the 1980 school boycott by students from UWC, including involvement from Trevor Manuel, and during the early 1980s between 6 and 30 members regularly attended its meetings. It had a drama group, a history group and organised games for the youth and discos.<sup>65</sup> It met every Wednesday and discussed explicitly political themes.<sup>66</sup> It also arranged community events. For example, in June 1982 the BYM held a cultural afternoon, attended by more than 100 people. This involved a panel discussion on the role of youth and a series of plays.<sup>67</sup>

Moves to form a youth structure also took place in African areas. ANC veterans called several meetings to which key youth figures in the community were invited. These included people such as Themba Mpetha, Oscar Mpetha's son, Whitey Jacobs, who was to become a key figure in the Cape Youth Congress and South African Youth Congress in the mid 1980s, and Oupa Lehulere, who became a central figure in 'ultra left' student university politics. However, despite these early moves, youth organising in the African townships remained weak, with activity confined to an interim committee which did not organise within the community.<sup>68</sup>

The final major organisational development of this time was the formation of women's organisations. The United Women's Organisation (UWO) - a non-racial organisation made up of women from all group areas - was formally established in 1981 and became involved in campaigns such as starting a crèche in the townships, protesting against increases in the bread price, and protesting at rental rises. A Women's Front Organisation (WFO) was also launched, campaigning on a similar platform but based around activists in the Nyanga area.

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with BYM/CAYCO Youth activist, 23/6/2006, Mitchell's Plain

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Youth activist and BYM founding member, 10/5/2006, Cape Town

<sup>67</sup> 'BYM Organises', *Grassroots*, June 1982

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Dinga Sikwebu, 15/11/2006, Johannesburg

Before 1983 the success of grassroots organisation varied by location and over time. In the African communities activism remained limited. The WCCA and the UWO ran a campaign against evictions in 1982 that did succeed in garnering community support for a boycott of the community councillors' businesses. However, beyond this there was little African activism. The WCCA ran no other notable campaigns and youth organisation did not develop beyond an interim committee. Similarly, whilst UWO was able to expand its membership during this time from 125 in 1981/2 to 183 in 1983/4, its most high profile campaign of this time – a campaign and attempted boycott around bread price rises – ended in failure.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast activism in the coloured areas saw initial success. Coloured youth organisation remained relatively constant throughout the early 1980s. However civic organisation saw considerable expansion in 1981. In Bonteheuwel the BCA during this period fought the council to get street lighting, opposed rent issues and set up a soup kitchen.<sup>70</sup> A campaign to get a day hospital opened in the township was also run. Indeed, the BCA was one of the most active civics in the coloured communities. In 1981 it was meeting every Monday at 7.30pm.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, whereas most civics were organised solely through mass meetings, in Bonteheuwel the civic also used house and street meetings where neighbours met in small groups to discuss issues.<sup>72</sup>

City-wide CAHAC and its affiliates were also strong. CAHAC launched a maintenance campaign in 1981 to protest against the failure of local government to undertake repairs despite a service charge being levied on tenants specifically for this purpose. At this campaign's inaugural meeting in Bonteheuwel, which was the focal point for much of the campaign's organising, CAHAC was able to attract over 1500 people.<sup>73</sup> Overall this campaign saw over 7000 houses visited by activists and

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<sup>69</sup> UWO Membership Records, UCTMA, UWO, B67

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Trevor Baron, 29/6/2006, Bonteheuwel

<sup>71</sup> 'Reopen Our Day Hospital', 4p., typed, 1981, BCN, p.4

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Colin Lawrence, 14/6/2006, Cape Town

<sup>73</sup> 'Council Tenants Want Free Repairs', *Cape Argus*, 6/9/1981

started with a survey of 200 families.<sup>74</sup> 130 people also went to Cape Town to protest outside the Cape Town Civic Centre.<sup>75</sup>

CAHAC also organised around rentals. In response to rent increases in December 1981 a Rents Action Committee was formed. This brought together CAHAC and its affiliates with organisations such as UWO and WFO, trade unions, and churches. A petition of over 41,000 signatures was gathered and mass meetings were held which at their height attracted an attendance of 2,000 people. CAHAC was able to put together a delegation to meet the minister of community development, Pen Koetzé, and put their demands to him in person.

However, whilst there were high profile campaigns at this time by the end of 1982 much grassroots organisation in the coloured communities had gone into decline. The rents we can afford campaign ended in failure when Koetzé refused to cede to the delegation's demands and CAHAC could not agree a strategy for taking the campaign forward in the wake of limited community support for a rental boycott.<sup>76</sup> This was the last large scale campaign run by the coloured civics. In June 1983 CAHAC noted that whilst there had been considerable activity from 1980 to the end of the rents we can afford campaign after this 'organisation nosedived.'<sup>77</sup> CAHAC also noted that whilst its aim had been to draw broad support from coloured society, as an organisation it remained dominated by a young activist elite.<sup>78</sup>

The picture amongst local civic organisations is less clear. There is evidence of a general decline in the number of coloured civics and their activities. In 1983 CAHAC had noted that many of its affiliates were weak or inactive.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, CAHAC's 2<sup>nd</sup> AGM, also held in 1983, stated with regard to its affiliates that: "lately

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<sup>74</sup> 'Mend Our Homes Plea to Council', *Cape Argus*, 3/7/1981

<sup>75</sup> '130 Protest at Councils "Bad Repairs"', *Cape Argus*, 29/10/1981

<sup>76</sup> 'We Still Demand... Rents We Can Afford', *Grassroots*, May 1982

<sup>77</sup> 'An Assessment of CAHAC and Organisation', CAHAC, 3p., typed, June 1983, MA, CACE, , p.1

See also an assessment of CAHAC that predated the formation of the UDF: Untitled notes, 'The Meeting Opened with a Plea for Unity...', 13p., handwritten, 12/5/1983, UCTMA, UWO, B87, p10

<sup>78</sup> 'An Assessment of CAHAC and Organisation...'

<sup>79</sup> 'Report on the CAHAC Assessment Workshop Held on 19 June 1983', MA, MCH50

attendance has been very bad, with delegates arriving late and struggling for a quorum.”<sup>80</sup> Notes from CAHAC suggest that the civic in Bonteheuwel underwent a similar decline to the regional structures and other civics. Focusing on the campaign that was launched by the BCA to try to secure the building of a day hospital CAHAC noted that:

In about June/July they embarked on a campaign to have the D[ay] hosp[ital] reopened, but to date the campaign has not climaxed. Instead of a weak affiliate/branch [i.e. Bonteheuwel] initiating a campaign of such magnitude, it could have been taken up by CAHAC.<sup>81</sup>

However, in contrast to many areas not all civic organisation collapsed in Bonteheuwel. The campaign for a day hospital is testimony to the continued activity of civic activists. Similarly, activists from this time recount how they remained involved in a soup kitchen and helping with the running of an advice office.<sup>82</sup> It does appear, however, that like CAHAC the BCA remained predominantly an organisation of young activists. The maintenance campaign in 1981 was the most high profile campaign in the community, however even this did not widen support for the organisation beyond a relatively small activist core.<sup>83</sup>

#### **4.4.2. Banners and Rallies: Civil Society in Cape Town 1983-5**

The high point of grassroots organisation in the coloured communities was in 1981 and from late 1982 the strength of the sectoral organisations that had previously emerged declined. Campaigns around grassroots issues ceased to be run and organisations were neglected. This decline coincided with the announcement by the government to reform apartheid to give limited political representation to coloureds

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<sup>80</sup> ‘CAHAC: 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting’, 17 July 1983, MA, MCH50

<sup>81</sup> ‘CAHAC – Federal or Unitary Structure’, 10.p., handwritten notes, June 1983, MA, Manuel, Box 2, p.9

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Joseph Aranus, 12/5/2006, Cape Town

<sup>83</sup> Gunnarsen, G ‘Organise and/or Mobilise – the Organizational process on the Cape Flats 1979-1982’, paper delivered to the Department of History, University of Western Cape, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1999, p.14

and Indians and the formation of the national UDF to coordinate protest against these proposals. As grassroots civil society declined, more political organisation expanded.

The start of the decline in grassroots politics in the coloured communities began around the same time that the government announced plans to reform the apartheid political system. These plans were announced in May 1982 and included the further restriction of Africans without section 10 rights, alongside a de facto recognition of the permanence of Africans with section 10 rights in the white areas. However, most significantly, the government announced its intention to give Indian and coloured South Africans national political representation in an ethnically segregated tricameral parliament.

The impact of these changes on civil society was profound as the focus of both activists and their organisations shifted from the local to national level and from immediate hardships to the political system. The first organisation to respond to the Koornhof proposals, named after the cabinet minister who announced them, was the Federation of Cape Civic Association which began to hold meetings on the issue around Cape Town.<sup>84</sup> Then, in September 1982 the Women's Front called a meeting to discuss the Koornhof bills and it was at this that the Disorderly Bills Action Committee (DBAC) was formed.

The DBAC brought together organisations from across sectors, communities and ideologies in Cape Town. These included the Federation of Cape Civic Associations, the left aligned Western Cape Youth League, progressive trade unions and the Congress aligned grassroots movements such as CAHAC, UWO, WFO, COSAS and the newly formed Cape Youth Congress (CAYCO). However, the DBAC did not last and in August 1983 the Congress aligned organisations, citing inactivity and ideological infighting, helped launch the nationwide UDF. Those organisations remaining within the DBAC, primarily leftist and Black

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<sup>84</sup> Pillay, D, 'Trade Unions and Alliance Politics...', p.211



Consciousness groupings, formed the Cape Action League and became involved in their own national movement, the National Forum. When the DBAC and then UDF were formed they were intended to operate as fronts, bringing together organisations with an interest in opposing the constitutional reforms. Because the DBAC did not develop beyond a regional forum of organisations, and because the Cape Action League did not have a clear presence in either of the case study communities, their structures will not be outlined here. Instead focus will be on the UDF.

The UDF was a front with structures designed to provide representation for affiliates rather than individual members. The theoretical grounding for the relationship between affiliates and the UDF was based on a two tier division of labour. Local affiliates were to keep organising locally on bread-and-butter issues, whilst the UDF drew together these organisations in a national opposition to the political system.<sup>85</sup> The structures of the UDF in Cape Town were designed to reflect this division. In individual communities area committees were to be formed to coordinate the activities of all local affiliated organisations. Above the area committees were regions which included the Northern Suburbs, Southern Suburbs, City of Cape Town, Townships (representing the African areas) and the Rest of Townships (of which Bonteheuwel was a member). The regions reported to a Western Cape Regional Executive Committee. At each level representation was by affiliate, and activists could not have direct membership of the UDF. In practice these formalised structures did not always operate as planned. Bonteheuwel was one of the first communities to establish an area committee, which remained active throughout the mid-1980s. However, in Guguletu no area committee was

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<sup>85</sup> Seekings, J, *The UDF: A History of the UDF in South Africa 1983-1991*, (Oxford, 2000), p.43. A point of interest worth noting here is that much of the theorising that lay behind the positions adopted by the UDF seems to have emerged from the United Women's Organisation in the Western Cape. For example, well before the UDF was formally launched UWO was outlining the need for a two tier organisational structure which closely resembled the final form that the UDF took on its launch. See: 'UWO Preparation for GC Discussion on Programme of Action and Management Committees', UWO, 2p., typed, March 1983, UCTMA, UWO, B87, p.1

established and instead a UDF Township area committee was set up which coordinated activities across the LAGUNYA area.

This growing opposition to the constitutional reforms coincided with considerable change in progressive civil society. Firstly, the nature, style and focus of activism changed. Secondly, it coincided with a slow growth in the strength of student/youth politics. Thirdly, it coincided with a continuing decline in strength and support for the coloured civics and ongoing indifference amongst African adults to progressive organising.

Political plans to transform apartheid at the national level were mirrored in shifting priorities amongst progressive organisations and activists as campaigning moved away from bread-and-butter issues to the explicitly national and political issue of apartheid and the new constitution. The main campaigns of this period were not around rent, food prices or bus fares. Instead they focused on a boycott of elections to the new parliament and, in the African areas, of the local authorities. The most successful campaigns of this period were: the Million Signatures Campaign, launched in early 1984 by the UDF, which attempted to collect a million signatures in opposition to the Government's reform; boycotts of the Black Local Authority Elections in the African areas; boycotts of the tricameral parliament.

Because these campaigns relied upon widespread support but did not require consistent commitment – people could sign a petition and never involve themselves in progressive politics again – organisation and the nature of activism was transformed. Progressive politics, particularly in the coloured areas, shifted towards pamphleteering and publicity. In Cape Town the Million Signature Campaign was organised primarily through blitzes. These involved activists from across the City (both African and coloured) targeting individual communities and randomly knocking on doors. This was by far the most successful way of collecting signatures, but was done at the expense of the more careful conscientising and organising that had characterised earlier organising. Reporting in April 1984 the UDF Western Cape noted that 70% of their signatures had been collected door-to-

door, with activists spending an average of just six minutes per house.<sup>86</sup> Talking during his trial for ANC activities an activist from Bonteheuwel recounted a picture of activism at this time which shows how the key UDF activities were to raise the profile of issues, rather than organise people around them:

[T]he activities that we were mainly engaged in at that time was things like pamphleteering, posterising (sic)... You find that, I for example, in our youth group, we would sit down and make UDF T-shirts, we would make pamphlets and so forth.<sup>87</sup>

Large rallies and public events became the other main method for campaigning. For example, in October 1983 a people's weekend was held. To support this in the Western Cape around 1,000 T-shirts were produced and 3,000 badges. 85,000 copies of UDF news were distributed along with 3,000 posters. As part of this 2,000 people attended a rock against the constitution event at UCT, whilst a church rally in Bonteheuwel 'Christians against the constitution' was attended by over 1,500 'primarily church people who would not have attended other meetings'.<sup>88</sup> Again, whilst able to mobilise large numbers of people, the focus on bread and butter issues of 1981/2 had become a thing of the past.

The tricameral election boycott and boycott of African local authority elections supported by the UDF, Cape Action League and a range of other progressive organisations across South Africa was highly successful. Not only did it succeed in its aims, it also strengthened progressive organisation and activism. Only one in five eligible voters took in the tricameral elections.<sup>89</sup> In the Western Cape and the case studies themselves the campaigns were equally effective. In the Bonteheuwel ward for the tricameral elections only around 8% voted, one of the lowest turnouts in the country. Support from coloured school students was particularly marked on Election Day when around 634,000 boycotted school,

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<sup>86</sup> 'Western Cape Region: Report to National Secretariat 28 & 29 April 1984', 3p., handwritten, 1984, MA, UDF box 2, p.1

<sup>87</sup> Ashley Forbes Trial Evidence, UCTMA, p.1347

<sup>88</sup> 'Report of UDF Western Cape Region', UDF, 5p., typed, November 1983, MA, UDF, box 2

<sup>89</sup> Seekings J, The UDF..., p.110

although there was no labour stoppage in support of the boycott.<sup>90</sup> This clearly represented a failure of the government's reforms to mobilise Indian, coloured and African communities behind the new apartheid dispensation. The UDF itself saw these outcomes as major successes for both the campaign and progressive organisation. An assessment of the Million Signature Campaign noted some weaknesses but concluded it had brought together and trained hundreds of activists and laid the groundwork for the anti-election campaign. The same assessment concluded that overall the UDF had developed activists, generated new activists and heightened the political climate.<sup>91</sup>

The UDF in Bonteheuwel was particularly strong during this time. Bonteheuwel was one of the few areas to successfully establish an area committee. This area committee coordinated the activities of all progressive organisations in the township and brought together the BCA, the advice office, many local church organisations and the youth and student movements. Pamphleteering took place, activists were involved in the million signature campaign and the three Bonteheuwel high schools participated in the Election Day boycott.

Alongside UDF activities student and youth organisation was consolidated in Bonteheuwel. The BCA continued to be led by the UWC activists who had established it, but their work was bolstered by young recruits from within the community. The Bonteheuwel Youth Movement was never a large organisation during this time, however its membership was sustained throughout the UDF period, and youth activists were heavily involved in UDF campaigns.<sup>92</sup> Bonteheuwel also saw a group of activists emerge within the schools. Whilst there was no Bonteheuwel branch of COSAS several students became involved with COSAS at a regional level. Furthermore, SRCs had existed in all the Bonteheuwel secondary schools since at least 1980. Consequently, the politicised students who

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<sup>90</sup> Goldin, I, Making Race..., p.221

<sup>91</sup> 'Cape Town Region Assessment Workshop 16/09/84: Summary of Discussion', UDF, 4p., typed, 1984, MA, CACE

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Nazeem Dramat, 13/11/2006, Johannesburg

were linked into citywide student and UDF networks were able to organise around explicitly political activities in the schools. One activist, for example, remembers how in Bonteheuwel High during 1984 the SRC members would facilitate political awareness programmes on school:

So we will corner an assembly and then in that assembly we will explain [political issues]... what the tricameral parliament is all about, what apartheid is all about, why we are in Bonteheuwel, what gutter education is all about.<sup>93</sup>

This politicisation in the schools was also facilitated by the development of a formal structure to link the three schools together. In 1984 the Bonteheuwel Inter School Congress (BISCO) was established by SRC members who were also involved in CAYCO and the BCA. BISCO was not to fully realise its potential as a coordinating structure until the unrest of late 1985, and remained the preserve of a relatively small group activist group at this time. However as an organisation BISCO did allow the schools to act together in protest around a range of progressive issues, such as supporting strikers from the nearby Epping industrial estate.<sup>94</sup>

In Guguletu the UDF was less significant as an organisation, possibly because its key focus was in the coloured areas and the tricameral parliament. However UDF structures were developed and Guguletu was part of the Township UDF area committee.<sup>95</sup> Youth organisation remained relatively underdeveloped before 1984, although the launching of CAYCO at a regional level was accompanied by the formal launching of two youth structures in Guguletu, a branch of CAYCO and LAGUNYACRO.<sup>96</sup> However, after 1984 youth organisation began to expand, with links being made to underground activists and an explicitly political and

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Henrietta Abrahams, 8/5/2006, Kenilworth

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> 'UDF Western Cape: Report of the Regional Commission', UDF, 8p., typed, n.d. (early 1984), SAHA, AL2431, A4.6.2,

<sup>96</sup> LAGUNYACRO existed before CAYCO and the people who formed CAYCO in the Africans areas were mainly veterans of LAGUNYACRO who left the organisation. However, LAGUNYACRO came to be known for its support of the one stage theory of revolution, in opposition to CAYCO's acceptance of the SCAP/ANC two stage approach.

congress aligned position being spread in meetings. Like in Bonteheuwel formal membership of these organisations hovered around 20 people.<sup>97</sup>

The final area where organisation expanded during this period was within the African schools. In December 1983 the Guguletu/Nyanga branch of COSAS was reporting only 30 members and the Langa branch 14 members. Beyond the African townships there was only one other Cape Town branch, in Ravensmead.<sup>98</sup> However, from 1984 the situation in the schools started to change. In August 1984 COSAS made a national call to students to build SRCs and this gave a major boost to organising. In Guguletu COSAS activists organised activities to support this campaign.<sup>99</sup> In some schools this led to conflict, most notably in the recently opened Crossroads 3 School. However, this conflict often acted as a rallying point and, between 1984 and 1985, SRCs were formed in most African schools.<sup>100</sup> This surge in activism was partially reflected in political school organisation. As momentum built behind the campaign student politics began to expand. COSAS in Guguletu grew slightly in membership during this period, claiming around 40-60 members by early 1985.<sup>101</sup> 1984 also saw closer links being built between the schools and more explicitly political youth organisations with members of LAGUNYACRO, CAYCO, the Young Christian Students (YCS) and COSAS all being involved with meeting with students and helping them to mobilise.<sup>102</sup>

However, whilst the UDF and its campaigns were expanding citywide networks and drawing in increasing numbers of young people, they were not changing the social base of activism, rather they were consolidating and expanding activism amongst already responsive groups. Local, grassroots organisation

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<sup>97</sup> CAYCO and LAGUNYACRO were formed in 1983 after the formation of CAYCO regionally led to a need for township youth to be represented on the regional structures. Interview with CAYCO LAGUNYACRO youth activist, 15/11/2006, Johannesburg

<sup>98</sup> Untitled notes of December 1983 COSAS Congress, 10p., handwritten, SAHA, AK2117, J3.22, p.9

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 4/8/2006, Goodwood

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Marc Jansen, 14/8/2006, Goodwood

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 4/8/2006, Goodwood

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 14/8/2006, Goodwood

representing black adults was either continuing to decline (in the coloured communities) or was still struggling to establish itself (in the African areas).

The decline in civic organising noted earlier was not checked by the launch of the UDF and both the strength of CAHAC and its involvement in active campaigns remained subdued.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the extent to which coloured residents had become alienated from grassroots progressive organisation, and the fact that the UDF did little to create mass support for progressive action, is well represented in the fate of the 1984 campaign against busfare increases. In November 1984 CAHAC planned a campaign against rises in busfares. In keeping with the UDF's ability to produce mass publicity over 100,000 campaign specific pamphlets and 85,000 other pamphlets and papers were distributed in just two days by around 2000 activists. Blitzes were held in those areas most likely to be affected by the boycott.<sup>104</sup> However, mass participation was not achieved. To keep conservative residents on board the bus boycott was designed to last only two days. However, an assessment of the boycott by the UDF noted that whilst some people did stay away, 'there were many who did catch buses' and in general the campaign was seen as far from successful.<sup>105</sup>

In Guguletu the lack of civic activism continued and there was a lack of enthusiasm for UDF activities amongst both the civic association and the population in general, a fact which is particularly interesting because it undermines the view of African communities as necessarily more radical and politicised than coloured communities. The WCCA remained resistant to political messages and campaigns in spite of the involvement of underground activists in its structures and its affiliation with the UDF. The chair of the civic in Guguletu during this time argues that it remained focused on social problems in the community and avoided taking an openly political stand until the unrest of the mid-1980s:

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Peter Gabriel, July 2004, Cape Town

<sup>104</sup> Letter from UDF secretary to all affiliated organisations, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1984, 5p., typed, 1984, UCTMA, UWO, B87, , p.2

<sup>105</sup> 'UDF News', Undated (November 1984), Newsletter, A3 Folded, DS, Typed, (4), MA, CACE

You see when the UDF was formed, the UDF wanted us to change into a political organisation. Yeah. And I resisted that. Yeah. Because I felt that it was not time yet for the civic to become an overt political organisation. Although there was a word from the Lusaka, from the ANC that civic associations be formed. Yeah. I still felt that we should continue as a non-political organisation.<sup>106</sup>

Indeed, the archival record suggests that at times the WCCA was in direct conflict with the UDF. In January 1984 a report back to the UDF revealed that the chairman of the WCCA in Guguletu had been encouraging people to go to Khayelitsha – a new township about 30 miles outside of Cape Town – in direct contravention of the UDF’s campaign against such a move. Similar tensions also revealed themselves in March 1985 when the chair sent a letter to the UDF complaining they had printed pamphlets in the name of the WCCA without consulting them. As a result they temporarily suspended their membership of the UDF. They also declared that the delegate that was currently representing WCCA in the UDF was not mandated to do so by the organisation.<sup>107</sup>

This discomfort with political campaigning was also reflected in township residents’ responses to the UDF. Whilst there was little support for apartheid in Guguletu, this was not reflected in open support for the UDF. The Million Signatures Campaign was particularly difficult to implement in the townships where activists reported ‘grave fears’ amongst residents that ‘slowed down collection substantially.’<sup>108</sup> Whilst such fears were caused in large part by the oppressive nature of apartheid, they stand contrary to the idea of a highly politicised African township population. The experience of the women’s movement also backs up this interpretation. Like CAHAC UWO struggled to run a successful campaign around bread price increases in 1982, despite careful attention to the organising tradition. Furthermore, although activists report that their organisation remained strong even after the UDF had been formed and the focus moved to

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Basil Stuurman, 31/7/2006, Guguletu

<sup>107</sup> ‘UDF AGM Report Back’, 12p., handwritten notes, 16 & 17/3/1985, photocopy in author’s possession

<sup>108</sup> ‘Western Cape Region: Report to National Secretariat 10/11 March 1984’, 1p., typed, 1984, MA, UDF box 2



political issues, archive evidence contradicts this view.<sup>109</sup> Table 4.1 shows how UWO's recorded membership in Guguletu fell after the UDF had been formed. Similarly, in June 1984 UWO in Guguletu was reporting 'very few active members', whilst in KTC it had 15 active members and New Crossroads 6 or 7.<sup>110</sup>

	<b>1981-2</b>	<b>1983-4</b>	<b>1984-5</b>	<b>1985-6</b>	<b>1986-7</b>
<b>Guguletu</b>	125	183	72	55	91
<b>Athlone</b>	23	16	0	0	0
<b>Woodstock</b>	21	16	14	7	8
<b>Mitchells Plain</b>	17	0	0	0	0

Overall, therefore, it appears that the UDF struggled to engage people beyond an activist core, even as it achieved high profile success in the election boycott. Adult involvement in progressive politics was limited and although student and youth activism saw some growth, this was not widespread. The extent to which the UDF had failed to engage people beyond an educated elite in both African and coloured communities is perhaps best reflected in an assessment of the organisation by a UDF activist. A 1984 handwritten assessment of the UDF in the Western Cape from within the organisation noted that the UDF was 'weak', that 'people largely see the UDF as the educated youth' and that a large silent majority remained untouched. Furthermore, it also noted that 'where we have reached people [there has been] very little content.'<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Women's activist, 29/8/2006, Cape Town; Interview with Nomaindia Mfeketo, 3/8/2006, Parow

<sup>110</sup> 'Minutes of the Fourth Conference of the United Women's Organisation', UWO, 12p., typed, UCTMA, UWO, A3, 9 & 10 June 1984, p.3

<sup>111</sup> UWO Membership Records, UCTMA, UWO, B67

<sup>112</sup> Untitled assessment of the Western Cape region of the UDF, 'our state...', handwritten notes in notebook, mid-1984, SAHA, AL2431, A4.7/2, notebook 4. There is an interesting trend in the Western Cape UDF archives which appear to show, right up until the boycotts, deep concerns about

## 4.5. The Limits of Organisation: Race, Class and the Constrained Social Base of Activism 1980-85

It has been argued that it was the shift from grassroots campaigns to national political organising that alienated the UDF from the black masses. However the chronology presented above shows this to be false. There was little organisation in the African communities even when the focus of progressive organisation was on local concerns; indeed, student and youth organisation actually expanded after the UDF had been formed. Similarly, whilst in the coloured areas there was a decline in adult mobilisation, this predated the shift to national political issues.

It was not the shift from grassroots to political issues that weakened progressive politics in Cape Town what did prevent mass support for progressive politics at this time? This question is of particular interest because of the contrast between this period and the success of the great boycott season. Between 1980 and 1985 progressive activists explicitly sought to mobilise people into action, first through campaigning and organising round grassroots issues and later through mass publicity campaigns around explicitly political aims. However, neither of these methods achieved the level of support that was attained in 1979/80 when organisation and theories of mass mobilisation were in their infancy. Why, therefore, did a period of intense organisational and ideological development have such limited results and what differentiated those people who became involved in activism from those who did not?

In answering this question it becomes necessary to distinguish between South Africans who felt apartheid discrimination most notably – van Kessel's

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the extent to which people were being drawn behind the organisation. This quickly changes after the success of the boycott became apparent. However it is difficult to tell whether this represented a genuine shift in support, or the fact that the success of the boycott persuaded activists that they had been successful.

vanguard – and those with more ambiguous relations with the state, particularly older blacks. Drawing on their experiences of disadvantage and the boycotts of 1980 this vanguard came to understand political transformation as the key stepping stone to a better life. For them organisation was always a mechanism for challenging state power and they remained committed to the cause regardless of the circumstances. However, for the large majority of Capetonians involvement in collective action was selective and dependent upon the immediate costs and benefits it entailed; the organising tradition of the early 1980s recognised this and sought to use bread-and-butter grievances to draw people into action. However, the apartheid state created deep fissures within the black population. This meant that few campaigns were able to define issues with the universal salience to draw large numbers of people into action. It also meant that people did not necessarily conceptualise hardship as a result of apartheid. Insider identities conditioned by apartheid channelled much conflict over the urban political economy into struggles between black groups, rather than between a united oppressed black mass and the state. In attempting to build a community of interest activists discovered race and class cleavages that no amount of planning or organising could overcome. Taken collectively, these barriers prevented organisation at this time becoming a broad progressive movement.

At the heart of anti-apartheid activism during this period was a common experience amongst a group of educated young black Capetonians of material hardship and thwarted ambition. As noted in chapter two it was the highest academic achievers who were most affected by apartheid's labour market discrimination and the artificial ceiling it placed on opportunities for this group and it was these Capetonians who dominated civil society at this time. An analysis of the social base of activism in the early 1980s shows how it was current and former university students that dominated the leadership of progressive organising in the two communities. During the schools boycotts it was students with the best academic or sporting records who were drawn into the SRCs and leadership structures. After the boycott in Bonteheuwel the civic and youth movement were established by students from UWC. Regular participation was dominated by

university students and some high achievers within the schools. Similarly, within Guguletu many of the activists who formed the early youth movement were students at either UCT or UWC. Much of the early activity of the youth in Guguletu was supported by activists from the white National Union of South African Students.<sup>113</sup>

The heavy presence of educated Capetonians within progressive organisation was a result of two interrelated dynamics. Firstly, apartheid discriminated most against young blacks, particularly university graduates who had education but few occupational opportunities beyond the teaching profession. Secondly, the experience of the great boycott season had a profound impact within the schools and universities as it demonstrated new ways of organising and saw the rapid spread of more political understandings of struggle.

Crucial to the transformation of large numbers of young educated Capetonians from students to activists was a collective experience of disadvantage that became increasingly conceptualised in political terms. As discussed earlier, conditions within black schools were poor. There was also growing opposition to the restrictions that apartheid placed on people's life chances after they left school, as shown by the opposition to gutter education not only because it was poor quality, but also because it was designed to prepare people for subordinate roles in the economy.<sup>114</sup> It was these grievances which lay behind the schools boycott and, despite the boycott's ending, these grievances did not disappear. Furthermore, these grievances were experienced collectively by young people from very similar social backgrounds and with similar ambitions in life. This helped shape a collective understanding of inequality embedded within existing social networks.

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<sup>113</sup> In Guguletu the key activists in the early youth movement include Oupa Lehulere and Dinga Sikwebu who both studied at UCT and Zoliswa Kota who studied at UWC. In Bonteheuwel Leon Scott, Quentin Michels and Denis Grootboom all studied at UWC in the early 1980s. They also received considerable assistance from Trevor Manuel and other former UWC and UCT graduates when they were establishing the civic and youth movement.

<sup>114</sup> "Manifesto to the People of Azania..."

The role that the combination of educational quality and labour market discrimination had in drawing people into progressive politics was reflected in discussions with activists of this time. The following interview with an activist who was involved in the Congress of South African Students in the early 1980s shows how students resented not only the very clear material deficiencies of apartheid education, but also the fact that as a system it simply prepared people to be 'cheap labour.' It also shows how it was through shared experience of these inadequacies, and discussions around them, that organisation began to coalesce:

We didn't have basic infrastructure, that is such as electricity. There were no ceilings in the classrooms, there was inadequate learner support material. There were also problems just about the curriculum itself. The extent to which it was not even preparing us to become professionals, but rather reservoir, reservoir for cheap labour. In school there was no sporting facilities. There were range of problems that we were experiencing. It is in that context that some of us began to be conscious of the fact that these groups do not have these facilities is not the making of our parents, but more a system that deliberately sought to deny black people access to adequate facilities and adequate education system... That's how we got involved.<sup>115</sup>

In a similar vein activists in Bonteheuwel recalled how educational issues and educational achievement were the cornerstone of their organising.<sup>116</sup>

This growing recognition of the relationship between apartheid discrimination and personal disadvantage was compounded by a common experience of repression and conscientisation that was not shared by people outside the schools and universities. 1976 and 1980 had exposed many young blacks to the repressive nature of the apartheid state in a way that their parents had not been. This was most apparent in 1976 when the use of deadly force was widespread, but it also occurred in 1980 when the state clamped down on the activities of progressive organisation. Furthermore, 1980 exposed students to radical ideas that were disseminated through the boycott structures and which were confirmed by the

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Themba Nobantana, 22/11/2005, Cape Town

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Gary Holtzman, 13/2/2008, Vriedendall; Interview with BYM/CAYCO Youth activist, 7/6/2006, Mitchell's Plain

state's reactions. Within these new networks shared understandings were formed.<sup>117</sup> The role of the schools boycott in transforming students political consciousness is clearly reflected in the publications of the Committee of 81, which consistently called for not only improvements in schooling but also made clear the role of apartheid in poor schooling outcomes:

We start off from the premise that all our educational disabilities flows [sic] out of our political disabilities and our subordinate economic roles.<sup>118</sup>

We can ask at this stage:

Can we have non-racial education in a racial society?

Can we have non-racial education in an exploitative society?<sup>119</sup>

The fact that within apartheid educational institutions large numbers of people were exposed to the same experiences of poor education and living conditions, harsh home lives and frustrated ambitions, played a role in developing a specific student consciousness. The discussion of the formation of COSAS in the African schools above reveals how common experiences led to students talking together and coming to shared understanding in one school in Guguletu. Similar dynamics are also apparent in Bonteheuwel. One of the first activists to join the BYM recalls how the BYM was not only political, but also a social network bringing together people with similar life experiences.<sup>120</sup> Another activist recalled how she found many people in a similar position to herself in the BYM and was able to expand her horizons and meet like minded people.<sup>121</sup> It was this student consciousness that drove the young activist elite during the early 1980s and a belief in the need to end apartheid that drew these activists into organisation during this period, whether it was community structures or the UDF.

However, it is important to note that whilst experiences of poor schooling were widespread during the early 1980s it was a relatively small group of activists

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<sup>117</sup> Trevor Manuel, interviewed by Jeremy Seekings, 4/7/1992, Johannesburg

<sup>118</sup>“Manifesto to the People of Azania...”

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Youth activist and BYM founding member, 10/5/2006, Cape Town

<sup>121</sup> Interview with BYM/CAYCO Youth activist, 7/6/2006, Mitchell's Plain

that formed the basis of progressive organisation, a fact which stands in contrast to the rapid expansion of student/youth activism with the unrest of late 1985. Furthermore, this group of activists were united by their strong educational achievement, whether it was in the universities or the schools. Activism at this time, therefore, remained rooted amongst those people who were most severely restricted by apartheid. For those people in the apartheid education system more broadly the hardships of the early 1980s were not yet pushing people into action, perhaps because in spite of discrimination unemployment remained relatively low and opportunities still existed in the labour market.

Whilst young activists during the early 1980s increasingly sought ways to challenge apartheid this enthusiasm was not shared by the older generations. In the coloured communities the organising tradition failed, whilst in the African communities it hardly got started. Similarly, the shift to the UDF did not see the majority of coloureds or Africans brought within progressive organisation on a consistent basis.

Whilst the explanation for the growth of an activist elite at this time relies upon the existence of a politicised understanding of inequality and communities of interest that allowed people to be drawn into a single campaign against apartheid, the explanation of adult disengagement at this time relies on the converse. Progressive politics struggled to draw in large numbers of older Capetonians because whilst apartheid discriminated against black adults it did so in ways that did not lead to the politicisation of their hardships and could not form the basis for a uniform programme of action.

In Guguletu there were three barriers to the expansion of progressive organising amongst older residents. Firstly, rental levels remained very low. Consequently, local government did not become politicised in the way it did in other South African townships. Secondly, the acute housing shortage combined with the construction of a new township at Khayelitsha created a release valve as people in dire need of housing were moved out of the township. Thirdly, the

continuing existence of divisions between residents with section 10 rights and those without (even after the abolition of influx control) restricted the level of support available for progressive organisations that sought to remove such distinctions and led to the conceptualisation of urban disadvantage as a consequence of challenges from rural outsiders, rather than because of state policy

The first reason adult activism in Guguletu did not benefit from the growing focus on community issues was that there was little within the immediate residential political economy to challenge. Seekings' explanation of the emergence of political mobilisation in the PWV area in the mid-1980s shows how financial pressures on township residents and the devolution of powers to African community councillors led to large increases in service charges and rents amidst considerable poverty. This caused the councillors to become seen as a cause of urban poverty and led to their delegitimation in the eyes of their constituents.<sup>122</sup> Seekings also argues that whilst in some cases councillors sought to resist rent increases they tended to cave in to demands from the administration boards.<sup>123</sup>

The situation in Guguletu stood in direct contrast to this. Local councillors in LAGUNYA were well aware of the dangers of rental increases and the likelihood such moves could lead to protest. In 1982 they opposed increases put forward by the BAAB to site and service charges on the grounds that similar increases in Pietermaritzburg had caused unrest.<sup>124</sup> Similar reticence was reported throughout the whole decade and whilst the township was in clear need of upgrading and the provision of services to Africans was dire, no rental increases were implemented between 1978 and 1992.<sup>125</sup> As a result rental rates in Guguletu were extremely low. Whilst comparable figures for the mid-1980s are not available, by 1992 the rental

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<sup>122</sup> Seekings, J, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in the PWV Townships, 1980-84', in (eds.) Cobbett, W & Cohen, R, Popular Struggles in South Africa, (London, 1988), pp.59-75

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66

<sup>124</sup> 'Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Cape Town Community Council Held in the Fezeka Hall, Guguletu on Wednesday 6 October 1982 at 14h45, 6p., typed, 1982, CTAR, PACG, vol.18, 3/2/10/3, p.6

<sup>125</sup> Cape Town Community Council, in Committee, Item 15, 'Increase in Site and Service Charge', 1p., typed, August 1985, PACG, vol.30, 3/2/10/3.; Memorandum, 'Implementation of the Five Year Plan', 4p., typed, ss, A4, CTAR, PACG, vol.1, 3/7/7/1A



and service charge levels were so low that it was estimated that for local government in LAGUNYA to become self sufficient they would need to be increased by 2000%.<sup>126</sup>

The consequence of such low rents was that the local authority did not become politicised. Local councillors were opposed by people within the progressive movement and there was opposition to corruption in the allocation of houses and business licences.<sup>127</sup> However, councillors' actions rarely infringed on people's immediate lives. The fact that there was little money either spent or collected within the township meant that there was little to mobilise people against.

The second barrier to progressive organising was the lack of resource provision within the township, combined with the growing provision of resources elsewhere in the province. In 1983 the state announced plans to build a new township on the Cape Flats, thirty miles from Cape Town at Khayelitsha. Simultaneously, the availability of existing housing within Guguletu and the other LAGUYNA townships almost completely dried up. Table 4.2 reveals the clear disjuncture between housing need and allocation.

	<b>Langa</b>	<b>Guguletu</b>	<b>Nyanga</b>
<b>Houses Allocated</b>	1	3	0
<b>Applications for housing</b>	21	53	14
<b>Waiting List</b>	1399	2177	760

<sup>126</sup> Memorandum, 'Implementation of the Five Year Plan', 4p., typed, ss, A4, CTAR, PACG, vol.1, 3/7/71A

<sup>127</sup> Letter from Athlone Advice Office to Mr. Pieterse, 1p., handwritten, 7/3/1979, CTAR, PACG, vol.1, 17/7/1; Cape Town Community Council General Meeting, Item 7(z), 'Allegations Concerning Allocation of Housing', 2p., typed, CTAR, PACG, vol.16., 3/2/10/3; Memo from the Chief Superintendent of Housing to Director Labour and Housing, 4p., typed, 21/12/1982, CTAR, PACG, vol.4, 17/7/1

<sup>128</sup> Memo from Chief Superintendent Nyanga to Director of Labour and Housing Goodwood, 24.6.83, 'Waiting List June 1983' 1p., typed, ss, A4, 1983, CTAR, PACG 1229, vol.5

Whilst it could be imagined that the desperate need for housing would lead to conflict between the state and residents it actually had the opposite effect. In the absence of housing in Guguletu there was a willingness to move to Khayelitsha. This willingness was in spite of a campaign by UDF affiliated organisations to resist any relocations. Indeed, this campaign noted that whilst people did not want to move they were moving because they 'are desperate, they want houses.'<sup>129</sup> Consequently, because resources were scarce within LAGUNYA there was no real conflict over their allocation; people who already lived in a house were catered for (and also paid little), whilst those looking for a house had to look beyond the bounds of the township. This apathy was made clear by several activists. One activist from the women's movement recalled that, 'in African communities. Very few of them wanted anything to do with politics. They accepted life as it was.'<sup>130</sup> Another civic activist recounted how difficult it was to organise people in the formal townships, in contrast to the squatter areas, arguing that, 'the people in brick houses, they didn't quite realise that they had problems.'<sup>131</sup>

This is of particular interest because it stands in contrast to the situation in the early 1970s discussed in chapter three, when there were still resources to be allocated and people were therefore involved in civil society that sought to access these resources. It suggests that far from causing action within civic society, an absence of distribution can actually lead to quiescence as people have little to organise around. It certainly suggests that hardship and poverty alone are not sufficient explanations for mobilisation.

The final factor inhibiting progressive organising was ongoing tension between Africans with section 10 rights and squatters from the Eastern Cape. African Capetonians did not in general support apartheid. However, the fissures apartheid created amongst Africans diverted conflict over resource allocation away

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<sup>129</sup> Untitled notes of a meeting of the UDF Western Cape Forced Removal Committee, 5p., handwritten, 8/10/1984, SAHA, AL2431, A4.12.4

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Women's activist, 28/7/2006, Charlesville

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Basil Stuurman, 31/7/2006, Guguletu

from the state. A consistent theme in residential township politics during the 1980s was ongoing conflict, both physical and rhetorical, between Africans with section 10 rights and squatters. This was reported by activists from both the squatter communities and the formal townships and centred around insider-outsider identities and the rights that these gave to accessing resources:

There were no good relations between people from the shacks, people from the hostels, *and* people from the established townships. Formal houses to say. Because there was that mentality that people in the formal houses are Capetonians. People who have got so called section 10 rights. And those that are staying in the hostels are contract workers. Those that are in the squatters are just people with no rights you see. And in the minds of the people in the established townships they are saying that people are taking their jobs and all that kind of an argument... it was a mentality you would find if you mingle communities of different stratas. You cannot mix areas of middle class area and lower class area. There will always be divisions among them. That was how it was. There were not very good relations.<sup>132</sup>

Generally people that were not part of the [progressive] organisation[s], they used to undermine people that were in the squatter camps... they are from the rural areas, they know nothing. They can do nothing. Even when... houses were built, they were denying that those houses were built for people from the squatter camps... because those houses looked good, [too] beautiful to be owned by the squatter camps.<sup>133</sup>

The fact that Africans with section 10 rights conceptualised their access to resources as in conflict with squatters and migrants served to push conflict away from the state. It was also a clear consequence of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy and the operation of apartheid within the province. Prior to the breakdown of effective influx control Africans in the Western Cape had had priority access to services and resources, even if these resources were far from adequate. As influx control collapsed greater numbers of people started to place demands on resources within the city, just as the state's ability to provide such resources was contracting. This pushed Africans with section 10 rights to conceptualise their hardships in terms of growing immigration into the City, rather than as a result of the privations of apartheid.

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<sup>132</sup> Interview with Rose Sonto, 7/11/2005, Cape Town

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Women's activist, 27/7/2006, Cape Town

Like in Guguletu the dynamics restricting adult mobilisation in Bonteheuwel were linked to the apartheid political economy and the collective identities this precipitated. These dynamics operated on three levels. Firstly, coloureds were integrated into apartheid in a way which offered benefits as well as discrimination; consequently, whilst progressive organisation sought to demonstrate the benefits of opposing apartheid and campaigning against the state, many people relied on the state and progressive organisation could not deliver the same benefits. Secondly, particularly whilst the focus was on grassroots mobilisation, class divisions within the coloured population made it difficult for activists to construct a coherent narrative of change. Finally, moving into the UDF period, just as Africans conceived of their lack of resources in terms of a challenge from the rural areas, coloureds tended to see Africans as competitors rather than allies and this 'race consciousness' undermined attempts at building non-racial alliances.

The first barrier to coloured organising was that coloureds' intermediate position under apartheid saw the state provide a range of benefits that were accessed through the articulation of apartheid identities. Being coloured in the Western Cape meant that people were able to access better quality housing than Africans, were more likely to be employed in higher skilled and higher paid occupations and were eligible for a range of state grants and handouts. All these benefits were recognised by older coloured residents and influenced their attitude towards progressive organisation.

This ambiguous relationship with the state meant that the desire to challenge certain aspects of apartheid policy was tempered by what may be lost in doing so: in the words of a UDF assessment on organising in the coloured areas the 'state strategy towards coloureds of cooption has led to conservatism.'<sup>134</sup> This was one of the main reasons why the grassroots organisations of the early 1980s ultimately failed; many people were simply unconvinced of the case for opposition.

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<sup>134</sup> Untitled notes of the volunteer group, 'Agenda: What are the task ahead of us in the democratic movement...', UWO, 7p., typed, 13/4/85, UCTMA, UWO, B94

There was also the issue of patronage from the state, as the state worked on a divide and rule basis, so they would provide some social security for people, grants for people, and people were afraid to lose that, so that they weren't willing to join an organisation in case they would lose those benefits.<sup>135</sup>

State patronage was a particular problem for coloured organising in the early 1980s because of a major theoretical weakness in the organising tradition. Activists sought to show how bread-and-butter demands could be met if people organised themselves to demand them. However, it was the state that controlled rental rates, hospital buildings and street lighting, not progressive organisations.<sup>136</sup> Consequently, when the state refused to make concessions organisations struggled to sustain activism.<sup>137</sup> This was crucial for the decline of many civic organisations as it was a failure to deliver material benefits that was recognised as the largest barrier to successful organising:

The concessions were very hard won and very few... you fought for everything. In fact our danger was how do we sustain the mobilisation, given the fact that we were not winning the concessions fast enough, because you were coming back to the community saying we've got nothing and they say. 'What the hell, you guys are hopeless'<sup>138</sup>

This dynamic intensified after the tricameral parliament started functioning, and increasing resources flowed into the coloured communities. The state stopped engaging with civic organisation and began to increase the supply of resources through tricameral politicians. Civic activists in Bonteheuwel recall how the state provided a range of benefits and subsidies which drew people into dependent relationships with apartheid administrators and tricameral politicians. Food parcels were distributed and large numbers of disability and child maintenance grants were paid, often with limited supporting evidence. Because of the low incomes in

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with Peter Gabriel, July 2004, Cape Town

<sup>136</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that the civics were most successful in those areas in which state structures had collapsed and the civics were performing some of the roles of local government. This placed them in a position to distribute some resources and therefore heightened their popular appeal.

<sup>137</sup> Seekings, J, 'Civic Organisations in South African Townships', p.228

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Peter Gabriel, July 2004, Cape Town

communities such as Bonteheuwel these state benefits played a significant part in people's lives. Consequently they were highly valued and people were unwilling to risk them. By the time of the schools unrest civic organisation had fallen completely away in Bonteheuwel:

[T]here was no civic activity at that time... Because those people that were part of the... tricameral parliament system, they... won people over to support them.... money was given to them to spend in the areas they represented. And they could use it as they want to... I could hurt my finger somewhere and then I apply for a disability grant and I would get a disability grant and you would be my saviour because you came. I got a grant from you. And we had a child maintenance system at that time also in the country, which people abused. Anybody could just go them and tell them I've got 5 children... and they would provide the children cash every month... So that is how they won over the hearts and minds of the people in the area.<sup>139</sup>

The second barrier to coloured organising was the fact that even had people been willing to risk their current position for a better future, the differential impact of apartheid made it difficult for activists to construct a clear narrative of what this future would look like. There was no single experience of apartheid discrimination and therefore no clear counter vision that could draw people into unified action.

When the focus of progressive action was on bread-and-butter issues at the start of the 1980s involvement was hindered by internal differentiation within the coloured population. The organising tradition sought to unite people around their shared day-to-day grievances. However, such shared grievances remained elusive. Socio-economic and geographical divisions had a clear impact upon organisation and mobilisation at both the city and local level. People who owned their own homes and paid rates had different concerns to people who lived in council rented housing. Similarly, whilst in Bonteheuwel the need for a day hospital and maintenance were key issues, in Mitchells Plain, it was a lack of schooling and leisure facilities. As one activist, working in the Lotus River areas of the City, said:

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<sup>139</sup> Focus group with Bonteheuwel civic activists, 10/11/2005, Bonteheuwel

It wasn't easy. There were actual contradictions between the classes... between people who owned their own homes and paid rates, and those, the working class, who lived in council owned properties... so there were huge differences in the sorts of issues that were addressed.<sup>140</sup>

As a result of this diversity progressive organisations in different communities took up different campaigns, each representing local conditions.<sup>141</sup> Whilst this allowed activists to build locally relevant campaigns it simultaneously prevented the creation of a universal platform of opposition. As early as 1982 CAHAC was admitting that the diversity of the experiences of the coloured population was making it, 'difficult to decide on a uniform action [that] can be successfully applied in all areas.'<sup>142</sup> A CAHAC workshop held in 1983 attempted to understand why the civic movement was weak and unable to make a considerable impact. One of its central findings was that the various affiliates were involved in a diverse range of campaigns and had different priorities to both CAHAC as an umbrella body and each other.<sup>143</sup>

The socio-economic diversity was even more problematic when the interests of different members of the community clashed and it became impossible to simply run separate campaigns for different groups. A prime example of this was reaction to government proposals to sell council housing to sitting tenants. Those who had the money to buy their houses were often enthusiastic, as they felt it would give them increased security. However, those who could not afford to buy the houses opposed the plan, particularly as it was to be accompanied by a rise in rents. This led to divisions within community organisations and whilst some civics did adopt a

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<sup>140</sup> Interview with Peter Gabriel, July 2004, Cape Town

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> *CAHAC Speaks*, 1982, MA, MCH50

<sup>143</sup> 'Report on Housing Workshop, held at St. Francis Church Hall Langa', 10 April 1983, MA, MCH50

position on the rises, the general approach was to explain the policy, but not campaign on it in either way.<sup>144</sup>

Interestingly, whilst civic structures in Bonteheuwel did see a decline in support in the mid-1980s the BCA remained more active than civics elsewhere. Whilst there is only limited evidence from which to seek an explanation it is possible that this was a result of the limited socio-economic differentiation within the township. As the first council built township on the Cape Flats Bonteheuwel was a relatively homogenous community. There were at this time no home ownership areas and all the housing, excluding the infill scheme, had been built at the same time. Consequently, people in Bonteheuwel did have a relatively common experience of apartheid in a way that other more diverse communities did not.

As the focus of progressive activism moved from bread-and-butter issues to an explicitly political rejection of apartheid the difficulties of creating a unified coloured progressive movement were compounded by the difficulties of selling non-racial political struggle to a group with an antipathy towards Africans that was firmly grounded with apartheid's distributional networks. The unwillingness amongst coloureds to risk the benefits of apartheid was reinforced by the fact their access to resources was dependent upon their articulation of a coloured identity and the denial of rights to Africans. Interviews with activists revealed that creating a unified platform of action and drawing coloureds into progressive organising was heavily constrained by the impact of the coloured labour preference policy and a belief that improvements for Africans represented disadvantage for coloureds.

This operated on two levels. Firstly, just as cleavages within the coloured communities made it difficult for united platforms of action to be forged, so divisions between coloureds and Africans made it difficult for joint campaigns to be sustained:

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<sup>144</sup> The housing deal was a problematic issue for both congress and Unity Movement aligned civics. See; 'CAHAC: Draft Reply to the Statement by BBSK, Parkwood and Manenberg on their Withdrawal', May 1983, MA MCH50 & *Civic Newsletter 1/5*, MA, MCH50



How do we deal with some of the issues that's peculiar to a black area, a white area? In your area you might be more concerned about squatters... that problem's completely foreign just across the railway line. Do we get caught up in all sorts of different campaigns? Am I able to mobilise half of Bonteheuwel to protest against squatters living on a field in NY130 [Guguletu]?<sup>145</sup>

Very few campaigns during this period were truly non-racial insofar as they mobilised people around issues that applied equally to both Africans and coloureds. However, beyond this there was also little involvement by coloured activists in campaigns run in African areas, and vice versa.<sup>146</sup>

However, racial cleavages did not simply making it difficult for organisations to campaign on common issues across the colour line. The fact that coloureds gained considerable advantages over Africans through their articulation of a coloured identity, and the fact that for many less educated and skilled coloureds the major risk to their livelihoods was not restrictions on taking jobs and resources currently allocated to whites, but the challenge from Africans for resources and employment, led to a clear race consciousness amongst poorer coloureds. This race consciousness was a major barrier to progressive organising:

Coloured Labour Preference Act. That did create divisions. Because those unemployed Africans will see the coloureds that are getting the crumbs as being more privileged than them. And being envious of them. And those coloureds who are getting crumbs will look at these Africans as the ones who are taking little thing that they can get and naturally there will be tensions.<sup>147</sup>

[Cape Town was not] very ripe for non-racialism in the sense that the pecking order. You would find that many people had the false consciousness in terms of coloured people, they are actually better than African people. So that could be one of the reasons... There wasn't a class consciousness, the race consciousness was strong and it was actually in terms of the pecking order.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Interview with Joseph Aranus, 12/5/2006, Cape Town

<sup>146</sup> For example, in July 1984 the UDF's forced removals committee discussed the squatting situation in Cape Town. The organisations present at the meeting were UWO, the WCCA, the Cape Town Region of the UDF and NUSAS. All these groups were dominated by either white or African activists and not a single organisation with a strong presence in the coloured communities was present. See: Untitled Minutes, UDF Forced Removals Committee, 30/7/84, 1p, handwritten, DS, A4, AL2431, A4.12.4

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Joint SRC Activist and Founding Member of TOSCO, 25/8/2006, Cape Town

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Gertrude Fester, 24/4/2006, Cape Town

This view that African advancement represented disadvantage for coloured was widely reported and was linked into the very clear patterns of discrimination that apartheid created. A common theme (as it was between section 10 Africans and squatters) was access to housing:

If you look at the coloured community, particularly in your working class areas, they wouldn't have loved to move away from the government. Because you see, to them whites were of the same kind of housing. There's were better than ours. They had toilets inside and all the likes. And they sort of got better treatment than African people. And they, they saw themselves as better than us.<sup>149</sup>

Employment and the division of labour were also sources of tension and these tensions led to many coloureds rejecting the idea of non-racial struggle inherent within the UDF:

Working class people are bloody reactionary some times. Racist also. The building trade for example its clear. I mean the people who did the skilled work. The bricklayers and plasterers and painters and plumbers, they were coloured mostly. The people who mixed the dada by hand they were black. It was a division within the working class. And those guys were racist. So even though when they get home they hear the political story, 'guys, there will be non-racialism' it [racism] comes out. It comes to the fore.<sup>150</sup>

Well, once again, because the Western Cape is a coloured preferential area. In terms of jobs coloureds would say blacks are coming to take our jobs, they are coming from Transkei to take our jobs. That also was not something that was coming from organisations or leadership or whatever. It was something coming from the rank and file... coloureds regarded themselves as having privileges in the Western Cape and they were protecting their privileges.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with Women's activist, 28/7/2006, Charlesville

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Bennett Bailey, 15/8/2005, Cape Town

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Rose Sonto, 7/11/2005, Cape Town

## 4.6. Conclusion: Race, Class and the Limits of Organisation

The period between 1977 and 1985 in Cape Town shows in strong contrast the limits of theories of collective action and social movements that focus on the resources and opportunities for activism without also seeking to understand the underlying pressures that push people into protest.

In 1979/80 a series of boycotts emerged across Cape Town and the two case studies which were based not on strong organisation, but the intersection of material grievances in the schools and townships with emerging activist networks. It is clear that these boycotts would not have taken the form they did in the absence of the nascent activist networks that joined up and organised protest and helped to frame people's grievances in a way that sustained action. However, it is equally clear that opportunities and organisation alone cannot explain the fate of progressive activism at this time. The boycotts broke down not primarily because political opportunities shifted, but because internal contradictions amongst the oppressed undermined the social base of activism.

The development of activism after 1980 confirms this interpretation. After 1980 considerable effort was put into building strong progressive organisation and using this to spread activism into the black communities. However this organisation failed. Lying behind this failure was not an absence of hardship – both Africans and coloureds were poor and politically disenfranchised – but the fact that the apartheid political economy acted to undermine progressive activism. Both coloureds and Africans accessed resources through the articulation of identities that reflected apartheid's differential discrimination. These identities, and the structural divisions

behind them, prevented the building of both universalisable discourses of change, and practical programmes of action.

However, there was one group of black South Africans in the city who did increasingly become drawn into progressive organisation. These were the young and educated blacks who benefitted little from apartheid distribution and who experienced clear and immediate limits to their life chances. These were the activists who formed the backbone of progressive organisation and activism at this time and who dominated progressive politics and organisation in the first half of the 1980s.



## Chapter Five

# Differentiation within Revolt: Youth and Student Politics 1985-7

### 5.1. Introduction

By mid-1985 many areas of South Africa had already seen violent political unrest. In the Eastern Cape and Vaal Triangle youths were battling police, students had come out of school on boycott and in some communities civic associations were taking on the duties of local government as the state ability to administer the townships collapsed. Yet, in the Western Cape all was quiet. This was to change in the second half of the year as schools throughout Cape Town went on boycott, rioting took place in the streets, mass rallies became commonplace and a consumer boycott was launched. ANC activity in the city and province also escalated.

Cape Town's experience of unrest, whilst located within the broader national context, was unique. Rent and consumer boycotts that elsewhere broadened community support for the struggle were short-lived and a collapse of state authority never occurred.<sup>1</sup> However, whilst the struggle in Cape Town saw limited adult participation organised student politics were perhaps the strongest in the country. After the initial unrest student representative councils (SRCs) were formed in most black schools and these SRCs came together in local and regional networks. These networks gave student politics in Cape Town a unique flavour – politicised and active, but with a heavy focus on education and centred within the schoolyard.

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<sup>1</sup> In some of the squatter communities community structures did have control and the state had little effective authority. However, this was less a result of the collapse of state authority than an inability of the state to implement control in the first place. Furthermore the local power structures in these areas tended to reinforce the power of conservative elements within the communities, rather than act as channels of opposition to the state. See: Cole, J, Crossroads: The Politics of Reform and Repression 1976-1986, (Johannesburg, 1987)

The extended boycotts that ultimately undermined student politics elsewhere never materialised. Violent youth protest also developed in both the case studies. Buses were burnt, local councillors attacked and barricades manned. The initial picture of mid-1980s in Cape Town is of a youth in revolt.

However, whilst political struggle in Cape Town at this time was dominated by young people, this chapter will show how beneath the surface of a youth in revolt sat two very different struggles. On one side was a student protest. This was defined by the aspirations of an expanding school population that, despite achieving academic success, was experiencing a closing down of opportunities. The aims of this protest, whilst focused on apartheid, sought to simultaneously maintain and expand educational opportunity and tackle the immediate barriers to self-improvement. On the other side was a youth protest. The participants in this protest had little education to fall back on and little to lose. For the youth, the messianic proclamations of the ANC and the emergence of violent repertoires of action created a political discourse and practice which provided meaning and benefits in the present, whilst offering a long-term egalitarian utopia in which their current socio-economic disadvantages would be blown away.

At heart these two protests, which sat uncomfortably alongside each other sometimes cooperating and sometimes conflicting, lay the broader unravelling of the apartheid political economy as unemployment rose and opportunity collapsed. Increasingly educated students could have neither their material nor political demands met by a system that continued to promote racial inequality, whilst poorer blacks and coloureds saw recession and economic decline pull away even the limited benefits apartheid had offered to their parents. As political opportunities for the articulation of these grievances expanded, particularly after the state reacted to protest with repression, these underlying contradictions coalesced into a period of unrest.

However this was never a single protest. Indeed, beyond the divisions between students and youth there were also differences within the student

movement. In Guguletu student politics saw a continued demand for the resolution of immediate material grievances, such as text books and schooling numbers, alongside political transformation, because the quality of education remained poor. In Bonteheuwel, the focus of protest was primarily political. This represented the fact that coloured education did allow people to achieve academically, but beyond the schoolyard this education could not overcome broader discrimination in the labour market and society. However, like in 1980, experiences of apartheid produced simultaneous and overlapping discontent which permitted the building of a broad student movement. Amongst adults, however, the economic crisis of the mid-1980s did not sufficiently undermine the structural basis of quiescence. Indeed, growing recession did little to undermine the importance of insider status as competition for resources grew and unemployment rose.

### **5.1.1. Structure, Violence, Organisation and Differentiation: Revolt in Cape Town**

Three broad overlapping themes are apparent in current interpretations of the move to unrest in the mid-1980s. Firstly, many authors locate unrest in local manifestations of a structural crisis of the apartheid state and economy. Secondly, state repression is seen to have moved people from disorganised protest against the immediate manifestations of this crisis to a period of violent revolt against the state. Thirdly, the development of organisation and ideology over the preceding decade is seen to have provided the networks and ideological coherence to change this revolt into a politicised challenge to state power. Within this broad field of study, however, interpretations vary. It is almost universally accepted that revolt and repression were key in the movement to violence.<sup>2</sup> However the role of

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<sup>2</sup> Carter, C, 'Community and Conflict: The Alexandra Rebellion of 1986', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18/1, 1991, p.131; Seekings, J, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in the PWV Townships, 1980-84', in (eds.) Cobbett, W & Cohen, R, *Popular Struggles in South Africa*, (London, 1988), p.71; Bundy, C, "'Action, Comrades, Action!": The Politics of Youth-Student Resistance in the Western Cape, 1985', in (eds.) Wilmot, J & Simons, M, *The Angry Divide, Social and Economic*



organisation, ideology and the structural underpinnings of the revolt are more contested.

The strong presence of students and youth within the unrest has led to a focus upon the collapse of the apartheid schooling system and the labour market in pushing people into revolt. The expansion of education, combined with rising unemployment, is seen to have created a group of young black South Africans predisposed to political messages and sharing similar experiences of collapsing life chances. These students are then placed at the heart of unrest.<sup>3</sup> Hyslop, for example, argues that because Bantu education had existed for twenty years before it first caused protest, and these protests escalated as the government loosened the strict implementation of Verwoed's Bantu education, the schooling protest must be seen to represent a specific socio-political juncture, rather than a direct result of discriminatory policies. This crisis is located in the growing school enrolment, falling pass rates and collapsing job opportunities of the mid-1980s recession.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst students are often at the heart of unrest, several studies have also focused on the widened social base of the mid-1980s unrest, when compared to the protests of 1976 and 1980. Murray presents a simplistic view, seeing the unrest of 1984 as a broad political challenge to state power with 'deeper roots in working-class dissatisfaction [than 1976/80].' He then proceeds to argue that the civics that had grown up during the early 1980s were able to translate the grievances of residents 'into a broad political assault on all oppression and injustice in South Africa.'<sup>5</sup> Seekings, in a more nuanced argument, demonstrates how in the townships of the PWV protest emerged from the transformation in the local structural context over the preceding decade as growing social differentiation and moves to increase rent to unaffordable levels led to a delegitimation of the local

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History of the Western Cape. (Cape Town, 1989), p.211; Murray, M, South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny: The Upsurge of Popular Protest, (London, 1987) p.376

<sup>3</sup> Bundy, C, "Action, Comrades...", p.209;

Seekings, J, Heroes or Villains?: Youth Politics in the 1980s, (Johannesburg, 1993), pp.12-13

<sup>4</sup> Hyslop, J, 'School Student Movements and State Education Policy: 1972-87', in (eds.) Cobbett, W, and Cohen, R, Popular Struggles in South Africa, (Sheffield, 1988), pp.183-4

<sup>5</sup> Murray, M, South Africa: Time of Agony..., p.256

authorities, leading to councillors (often corrupt and wealthy) becoming the target of protest. This interacted with growing student protest and state violence to coalesce into an overall challenge to the state with a broad social base.<sup>6</sup>

However interpretations of a universal revolt have also been challenged. In the coloured areas of the Western Cape Van Kessel detects not a broadening of the social base of progressive activism, but a widening gap between the youth and their parents.<sup>7</sup> Taking this view further Bundy in his study of the township revolt in the Western Cape identifies at the heart of revolt not a universal challenge to state power, but a specific generational (i.e. youth) consciousness, located within in the defects of black education, the expansion of black schooling over the previous decade and the level of unemployment.<sup>8</sup> Similarly Seekings shows how in the township of Tumahole, where rent rises did not politicise the local environment, older residents were not involved in initial moves towards protest.<sup>9</sup>

Debates around the social base of the unrest feed into the final area of debate – the role of organisation and ideology. Authors who see this period as a broad national political challenge to the state also tend to see this challenge reflected in strong organisation which either helped precipitate revolt, or developed to lead it.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, in the Western Cape, the weakness of the anti-apartheid challenge has been explained by the lack of coherent organisation due to the ideological factionalism of the region.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, authors who locate protest in broader structural contradictions tend to see a more complex relationship between organisation and action. Seekings,

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<sup>6</sup> Seekings, J, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation ...', pp.59-75

<sup>7</sup> Van Kessel, I, Beyond our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and The Transformation of South Africa, (Charlottesville & London, 2000), p.273

<sup>8</sup> Bundy, C, "'Action, Comrades...'" A similar dynamic was also noted by Van Kessel in the youth revolt in Sekukhuneland. See: Van Kessel, I, Beyond our Wildest Dreams ..., p.108

<sup>9</sup> Seekings, J, 'Political Mobilisation in Tumahole, 1984-1985', *Africa Perspective*, 1/7 & 8, 1989

<sup>10</sup> Murray, M, South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny..., p.256; Houston, G F, The National Liberation Struggle in South Africa: A Case Study of the United Democratic Front, (Ashgate, 1999), pp.6 & 22

<sup>11</sup> Nasson, B, 'Political Ideologies in the Western Cape', in (eds.), Lodge, T & Nasson, B, All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s, (London, 1991), pp.220-221

whilst acknowledging that the UDF had little involvement in the initial outbreak of the township revolt, when it was left 'trailing behind the masses', locates the importance of organisation at this time in its ability not to lead protest, but to provide the material and ideological resources and personal networks to locate isolated protests within a broader framework of anti-apartheid challenge.<sup>12</sup> Such an interpretation is echoed by Hyslop in his study of the schools crisis. He argues that whilst student unrest emerged from conditions in the schools, COSAS played a central main role in transforming these spontaneous actions into a response with a national and political flavour.<sup>13</sup>

Drawing on data from the case studies this chapter will challenge two views within the current literature on the unrest sketched above. Firstly, it will argue against the view that the revolts of this time represented a unified challenge with a broad social base. It will be shown how in Cape Town the township revolt was, and remained, dominated by young people. However, in accounting for this it will also demonstrate that the township revolt of the mid-1980s was not specifically a youth revolt shot through with generational consciousness. Whilst it is clear that young people dominated the struggle in Cape Town it was not their age that drew them into struggle, but their experiences of apartheid discrimination, or to put it another way their class positions within the apartheid political economy.

To demonstrate the importance of the apartheid political economy in defining the nature of the unrest in Cape Town this chapter will examine the two key forms of politics during this time – youth and student politics. It will also consider the continuing disengagement of adults from progressive politics. It will start by outlining a narrative of the unrest in Cape Town. It will then move to consider in more detail the reasons why adults, students and youths involved, or did not involve, themselves in action at this time. In doing so it will consider both the role of organisation and ideas, and the way that the apartheid political economy

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<sup>12</sup> Seekings, J, 'Trailing Behind the Masses...', pp.93-114; Seekings, J, The UDF: A History of the UDF in South Africa 1983-1991, (Oxford, 2000), p.190

<sup>13</sup> Hyslop, J, 'School Student Movements ...', p.196

influenced protest.

It will show how in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel state repression again played a key role in the initial drive to protest. However, as the dust settled two overlapping but distinct struggles emerged, reflecting the very different education and life experiences of those most disadvantaged by apartheid. Firstly there was the student struggle, driven by the collision of rising education with apartheid discrimination that closed down people's life chances. This student struggle was driven by a desire for a better future, rather than the absolute hardships of the present, and consequently combined a focus on political change with clear demands for immediate transformations to expand the opportunities available to its participants under apartheid. Secondly there was a youth struggle which stood in contrast. Dominated by a less educated youth which had seen an almost complete collapse in life opportunities the youth struggle was more utopian. Drawing on the repertoires of political action that were accessible to people without formal education it developed within a discourse of radical political transformation and military sacrifice which would lead to a new South Africa where all, regardless of their current hardships, would be catered for.

Alongside this consideration of political struggle the role of organisation and ideology will also be considered. As in the earlier periods both will be seen to have played a key role in the struggles that developed. However, like in the early 1980s, the limits of organisation will also be apparent in the continued quiescence of older Capetonians. The interaction of the hugely expanded organisational networks developed in South Africa at this time with the political struggles of the students and youth was crucial to their scale and success. However, organisation and ideology could still not overcome adult disengagement.

## 5.2. Unrest and Revolt: South Africa and Cape Town 1985-1987

As the campaign against the tricameral elections faded in late 1984 South Africa entered a new period of protest and unrest. This unrest eclipsed anything that had come before and was only put down through the declaration of two states of emergency and the detention of tens of thousands of activists. Starting in the townships of the Vaal Triangle, before spreading to the Eastern Cape and then nationwide, this unrest saw around 750 people killed in political violence between September 1984 and September 1985.<sup>14</sup> This catalyst for this violence varied. In some areas it was rising conflict between residents and town councillors that led to protest; in others school boycotts caused unrest.

This unrest was so severe that parts of South Africa became 'ungovernable.' As the state lost the ability to administer, many communities constructed their own forms of self-government or, in the parlance of the time, 'organs of people's power.' The development of street and area committees and their interlinking into township-wide civic structures was pioneered in the township of Cradock but quickly spread.<sup>15</sup> These street committees and civics became a central unit in the emerging quasi-autonomous township governance structures that replaced collapsing local government<sup>16</sup> alongside other structures such as 'peoples' courts which administered justice,<sup>17</sup> advice offices and township anti-crime and clean up campaigns.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Seekings, J, The UDF: A History ..., p.120

<sup>15</sup> Adler, G & Steinberg, J, 'Introduction: From Comrades to Citizens', in (eds.) Adler G & Steinberg, J, From Comrades to Citizens: The South African Civics Movement and the Transition to Democracy, (Basingstoke, 2000), p.7

<sup>16</sup> Cherry, J, 'Hegemony, Democracy and Civil Society: Political Participation in Kwazakele Township, 1980-93', in (eds.) Adler, G & Steinberg, J, From Comrades to Citizens..., p.93

<sup>17</sup> Seekings, J, 'People's Courts and Popular Politics', in (eds.) Moss, G & Obery, I, South African Review5, (London, 1990), pp.118-133

<sup>18</sup> Seekings, J, 'The Development of Strategic Thought in South Africa's Civic Movements, 1977-1990', in (eds.) Adler, G & Steinberg, J, From Comrades to Citizens...

Alongside unrest there was a growing radicalisation of progressive politics. Seekings' study of the UDF shows how after the election boycott failed to change state policy the organisation underwent a period of 'introspection.' However the unrest, which was not itself a result of the UDF's actions, transformed its strategy. It no longer tried to build organisation and activism; instead it sought to represent and influence those struggles that had already emerged:

Rather than organising at the grass roots in order to transform popular consciousness and prepare for subsequent political struggle, the UDF would involve itself in the existing political struggles being waged in the townships. And rather than struggling over the middle ground, it would harness the militancy of the most revolutionary sections of society.<sup>19</sup>

This increased militancy and politicisation was reflected in the growing prominence of the banned political organisations, particularly the ANC. A range of organisations adopted the Freedom Charter and ANC iconography proliferated. COSATU adopted the Freedom Charter at its second congress in 1987, as did the UDF in June 1987. At the local level the flags of the banned movements were regularly unfurled, particularly as political funerals proliferated.

In mid-1985 Cape Town appeared to have avoided the unrest unfolding elsewhere. However, in the second half of the year politics transformed as large numbers of Capetonians became drawn into revolt. The shift from quiescence to revolt happened rapidly and was driven by the actions of school and university students. On Friday 26<sup>th</sup> July 1985 10,000 students gathered at the UWC sport stadium to demonstrate against the state of emergency and show solidarity with students boycotting nationally.<sup>20</sup> Then, on the 29<sup>th</sup> July, a school boycott was formally launched and a march on the same day in the African townships saw a student from Crossroads Number 3 School shot dead by police. From this time low level unrest simmered across the city.<sup>21</sup> Coloured communities became drawn into

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<sup>19</sup> Seekings, J, *The UDF...*, p.132

<sup>20</sup> 'Time to Act', Ad Hoc Students Committee, 2p., typed, July 1985, SAHA, A2675, III (945), p.2

<sup>21</sup> 'City Townships Sealed Off for Funeral, Roadblocks Set Up', *Cape Argus*, 10/8/1985; '3 Dead, 20 Hurt in Guguletu', *Cape Argus*, 12/9/1985;

the action as meetings supporting the boycotts spread<sup>22</sup> and a consumer boycott was launched.<sup>23</sup> However, the key event in the outbreak of open and sustained revolt was a planned march to Pollsmoor prison on the 28<sup>th</sup> August. This march was violently dispersed by police and in its aftermath rioting spread across the peninsula and the school boycott escalated.<sup>24</sup> By the end of August 1985 most of the UDF Western Cape leadership had been detained under anti-terrorism legislation and street battles were commonplace in both African and coloured communities. The situation became so severe that on the 6<sup>th</sup> September Carter Ebrahim, Minister of Coloured Education, closed all coloured schools in the Western Cape.

In the last three months of 1985 mass action escalated, predominantly focused around the schools.<sup>25</sup> Coloured parents and pupils marched to reopen the schools in defiance of their closure and then returned on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, one day after their formal reopening. In the African areas the boycott continued unabated. Then a city-wide call was made for pupils to boycott the summer exams by the Inter Regional Forum, a body representing 80 of the 110 black schools in the Cape Peninsula. The boycotts were well supported. Interviews with African activists reveal that in the LAGUNYA townships support was almost absolute<sup>26</sup>, whilst in the coloured communities only 2,000 of a potential 8,000 matriculants wrote exams in the city and overall 38,000 coloured students in the Western Cape did not write final exams in 1985. Some teachers became involved in the activism. In Arcadia High in Bonteheuwel the SRC was given support by teachers at the school and provided with a room to meet in. Similarly, in Bonteheuwel High at least one teacher was heavily involved in progressive politics, playing liberation songs in class and even, in 1987, sheltering the ANC guerrilla and former Bonteheuwel High pupil Ashley

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<sup>22</sup> See for example: 'Historic Night for Wynberg', Cape Youth Congress (Wynberg), 2p., typed, August 1985, MA, MCH 12-14

<sup>23</sup> 'Western Cape Consumer Boycott Briefing Document', 3p., typed, August 1985, UCTMA, UWO, B88

<sup>24</sup> 'Boycotts Take Off', *Grassroots*, September 1985

<sup>25</sup> For example in early 1986 the UDF noted that during late 1985 'Our focus has been largely on education struggles'. See: 'Some thoughts on a Programme of Action', UDF Western Cape, 5p., typed, February 1986, SAHA, AL2431, A4.12.2, p.2

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Student activist & JSRC leader, 4/8/06, Goodwood

Kriel in her home. Overall, 130 teachers were detained, suspended, dismissed or transferred during late 1985.<sup>27</sup>

These school boycotts were both a reaction to, and cause of, escalating unrest that saw growing numbers of people killed in open conflict with the police and security forces. During late 1985 rioting and stone throwing became endemic and the air was often filled with tear gas and the acrid smoke of tyres burning on makeshift barricades. By the end of 1985, 87 people had been shot dead by security forces in Cape Town.<sup>28</sup> In the coloured areas, including Bonteheuwel, most public opposition and street violence was undertaken by children still at school. However in the African areas unemployed and out of school youth became increasingly involved in running battles with the police as they began to identify themselves under the broad banner of the ANC and the Congress aligned youth movement, CAYCO. In Guguletu the unrest became widespread and threats against people involved with the state escalated to the point that four community councillors had resigned by the beginning of November,<sup>29</sup> and in an attempt to regain control several hundred troops and police sealed off a section of the community and conducted house to house searches.<sup>30</sup>

As the violence escalated public expressions of opposition to the state also grew. Mass meetings and rallies were held with speakers taking the platform to demand an end to violence and the abolition of apartheid. In turn these rallies became the focus of unrest as police sought to break them up by force. The most well attended events of this time were the funerals of activists killed by the security forces. One funeral, of a Muslim student killed outside a mosque, fetched a crowd of around 30,000 mourners.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the funeral of the Guguletu Seven, activists

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<sup>27</sup> 'Education Crisis 1985: Overview', UDF, 7p., typed, n.d, photocopy in author's possession, p.3

<sup>28</sup> Fullard, M, 'The State and Political Struggle: Strategies of Repression and Resistance in the Greater Cape Town Area from 1985 to 1989', M.A. Thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2000, pp.44 & 51

<sup>29</sup> '4th Council Resignation', *Cape Times*, 4/11/1985

<sup>30</sup> 'Soldiers, Police Surround Guguletu', *Cape Times*, 27/11/1985

<sup>31</sup> 'The Call of Islam', vol 2, no 12, 2p., A3 folded, ds (8), November 1985, MA, Peter Williams, box 2



who were set up by a government informer and shot by apartheid security forces, attracted between 15,000 and 20,000 people in March 1986.<sup>32</sup>

The state responded to the growing unrest through a mixture of repression and reform. Its immediate response was the extension of the state of emergency to cover 8 magisterial districts in the Western Cape on the 25<sup>th</sup> October and the banning, two days later, of over 100 organisations. As already noted, police raids were carried out in Guguletu in late 1985 and security forces were also regularly present on the streets of Bonteheuwel. The coloured schools were closed to prevent students using them as a base for organising and when they reopened security forces were ever present. When the end of year exams were sat in Bonteheuwel they were done so with security personnel armed with R1 rifles patrolling the corridors.

Many activists were also detained or forced into hiding. Regional UDF leaders were the first to be detained but, as the emergency progressed and the second emergency was declared in 1986, increasing numbers of local activists were arrested. In Guguletu early detentions included youth activists, such as Whitey Jacobs, a key CAYCO leader in the township and the region. It also included people from the women's and civic movements, such as Nomaindia Mfeketo. In Bonteheuwel few arrests were made in 1985, however the police started searching for known activists, such as Ashley Kriel, who had been a central figure in BISCO and CAYCO and who was also involved in the ANC underground. In December 1985 he fled into exile.

However, unlike other areas of South Africa where the school boycotts extended from months into years and state authority broke down, as events in Cape Town progressed students in the black townships returned to school. Furthermore, whilst incidents of unrest continued these were sporadic (albeit often fierce) rather than sustained outside of the squatter areas.<sup>33</sup> The return to school and the decline of

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<sup>32</sup> 'The Day the People Ruled', *Sunday Tribune*, 23/3/1986

<sup>33</sup> Fullard, M, 'The State and Political Struggle...', p.26 For records of some of the various unrest incidents that took place in Guguletu during 1986 see the archives of UMAC, an

street confrontation accompanied a shift in the nature of progressive politics. Direct conflict between security forces and township residents declined, although it never fully disappeared. Only 16 people were reported shot by the security forces in the whole city during the first 6 months of 1986.<sup>34</sup> Instead violence became focused within black communities, specifically the African squatter communities. Coloured residents were rarely involved in these violent clashes. Residents of the formal African townships however did become involved. This was sometimes as a result of violence spilling over from the squatter areas into the townships and sometimes as direct participants in the squatter violence.

### **5.3. Insurrection and Transformation in Progressive Organisation**

The impact of the unrest on organisation was profound. Student and youth organisation underwent rapid expansion. In Guguletu and Bonteheuwel SRCs became the key organising and decision making structures. In Bonteheuwel the decision to boycott exams was made by classes voting on the decision and sending representatives to the school SRC.<sup>35</sup> Coordinating structures were also developed to link schools together within townships.<sup>36</sup> In Bonteheuwel BISCO brought together activists from all three secondary schools whilst the Joint SRCs (JSRC) was formed to represent all African secondary schools. These structures were modelled on the workplace democracy that had proliferated within the trade union movement, with meetings attended by school representatives. In turn, these representatives came with mandates from their individual schools:

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organisation set up to monitor state repression by the Progressive Federal Party 'Conflict Monitoring Guguletu Affidavits, Statements and Reports', 1985-1989 and 1994, UCTMA, UMAC Collection, B5.1.

<sup>34</sup> Fullard, M, 'The State and Political Struggle...', pp.44 & 51

<sup>35</sup> Interview with BISCO activist, 11/1/06, Bonteheuwel

<sup>36</sup> 'Western Cape Youth League Bulletin', 4p., A3 folded, ds (16), March 1986, MA, CACE

COSAS was banned nationally. We then thought of the best way to close that gap was to establish, unlike '76, an open forum of reps from different schools, and then get SRCs... we took that union imprint of workplace, shop steward, shop steward sending people to a branch executive.<sup>37</sup>

In 1986 school level organisation was consolidated and in response to the growing repression and return to school activities were developed that could be sustained alongside continuing education. Outside the case studies most townships developed action committees similar to the Joint SRCs and BISCO. These committees began to meet regularly as part of the Western Cape Student Action Committee and later the Western Cape Student Congress (WECSCO). Like the school structures the regional bodies modelled themselves on the trade unions, with the local action committees sending representatives with mandates to regional meetings.

The return to school and focus on organisation building was mirrored in campaigns. Rather than open conflict students began to focus on political education, transforming schooling and challenging the day-to-day injustices of apartheid. The key theme of this period within the schools was 'People's Education for people's power.' Students gained increased control over the curriculum and could still take students out of the school when required. One JSRC member remembers, for example, that during 1986 students would integrate political discussion into their day-to-day lessons and would also take one day a week to distribute pamphlets.<sup>38</sup>

Student activists also organised campaigns that would maintain political pressure, but were executable under the state of emergency. In Bonteheuwel a campaign was run to secure promotion for students who had boycotted the end of year exams. Mass meetings of all 3 Bonteheuwel schools were called which mixed the demand for promotion with political messaging.<sup>39</sup> In the LAGUNYA townships the students organised a rent boycott explicitly in support of their demands which, interestingly, did not get the backing of the WCCA, though they did get some

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Dinga Sikwebu, 15/11/2006, Johannesburg

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 4/8/06, Goodwood

<sup>39</sup> 'Police Fire Teargas After Stoning', *Cape Times*, 25/4/1986

support from UWO.<sup>40</sup> Instead the impetus came from the students themselves, organised and implemented through the Joint SRCs:

We then came to a decision... [W]e felt that you can't have a permanent [school] boycott, we were not ready for that revolution... that was one of the discussions that we had... Was this boycott going to lead to a revolution... Therefore there was a need for continuity in terms of the so called normalisation... but what is it that we will do to ensure that we will keep the pressure, and this now must be [a] broader community project. And we then declared the rent boycott. That rent boycott took us [a] very very [large amount of work]... it was a good two to three months because we had to do door to door... But it was very successful because we were able to launch that rent boycott and it was sustained for about another six to seven months.<sup>41</sup>

Parents were also drawn into organisation around the schools, with the formation of Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs). In Guguletu the formation of PTSAs was particularly successful. A Joint PTSA, which mirrored the Joint SRC, became involved in the day-to-day running of many African schools. The strength of this structure was such that by 1987 a paper presented to the National Education Coordinating Committee noted that:

The concept of PTSA is now firmly established and is at present growing even more... [D]uring the past year PTSAs have virtually replaced the Parent Management Councils within the DET [i.e. African] schools here in the Cape Town area.<sup>42</sup>

PTSAs were also built in coloured communities, though not Bonteheuwel.

The growth of strong organisation around the schools was a key feature of Cape Town at this time and marked it out from other parts of South Africa. SRCs, inter-school coordinating committees, PTSAs and city-wide student structures such as WECSCO successfully functioned throughout 1986 and into 1987. In both the case

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Tandi Ngamlana, 27/7/2006, Nyanga

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 4/8/06, Goodwood. See also, Untitled notes from 1986 UWO conference, 'Comrades, we are meeting just six months after our last conference...', UWO, 8p., typed, February 1986, UCTMA, UWO, B17, p.2

<sup>42</sup> Untitled paper on Parent Teacher Student Associations, 'The concept of the PTSA is now firmly established', NECC, 1p., typed, n.d. (c. 1987), MA, MCH 24-7

studies student leaders were able to force changes to the curriculum. Material victories were also secured. The SRC at Bonteheuwel High was able to secure agreement that all students who boycotted their exams in 1985 would be promoted and in Guguletu PTAs came to play a central role in running the Township's schools. Such was the success of student politics in the City that the Western Cape was widely recognised as the strongest student region in the country after the banning of COSAS.<sup>43</sup>

Alongside the development of schoolyard organisation the unrest in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel also saw the rapid growth of a form of politics that drew its inspiration and repertoire of action from the banned political movement's military activities and rhetoric and which sought opportunities to openly and violently challenge state power.

In Guguletu there was a very clear division between student and youth politics. The radical youth operated under the broad banner of CAYCO and very few students were involved in its structures.<sup>44</sup> The growth in participation in political action amongst the youth started during late 1985 when there was regular and open unrest on the streets. However, it continued, more clandestinely, through 1986 and 1987.

Unrest transformed the role of the youth in Guguletu. Whilst there had always been a focus on the ANC and underground activities, unrest saw increasing participation in explicitly violent and insurrectionary activities. One MK underground activist recalled how during 1985/6 most progressive organisation ceased to function. CAYCO, therefore, became both the most proactive organisation in the community and increasingly focused on engaging the state. Underground

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Interview with Nikita Vazi, 4/8/06, Goodwood; Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Several other youth organisations were also active; however it was widely recognised even amongst of the ANC that CAYCO was the most significant youth movement in the community and during this period was also able to attract large numbers to its meetings, usually counted in hundreds. Interview with Mhlobo Gunguluzi, 8/2/2006, Cape Town

MK activists also developed growing influence, regularly meeting with key figures in the organisation, and providing them with direction.<sup>45</sup>

The main campaigns of CAYCO in 1987 show how violence and political change had become central to youth activism. These included a 'release Mandela' campaign, supporting and (often violently) enforcing a consumer boycott, and a campaign against gangsterism. People's courts were also established. Whilst formed to regulate crime as state authority broke down they became increasingly out of control and on occasions were used to punish people for political dissent.<sup>46</sup> CAYCO activists also began to focus attention on the squatter communities, where battles between conservative residents supported by the state and ANC aligned activists were escalating.<sup>47</sup>

In Bonteheuwel the local branch of CAYCO also expanded, with meeting attendance growing from around 20 before the unrest to over a hundred.<sup>48</sup> However, unlike in Guguletu, CAYCO functioned as an organising and politicising vehicle for school activists, albeit with some participation from older and out of school youth, and was not the organisational fulcrum of violent opposition to state power.<sup>49</sup>

Whilst CAYCO did not play a central role in ungovernability in Bonteheuwel political violence continued. During the early unrest Bonteheuwel was not an area of particular radicalism.<sup>50</sup> However, as unrest progressed it gained a reputation as a centre of militant action. The schools continued to be the flashpoints

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with CAYCO & MK operative, 1/8/2006, Cape Town

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Nomaindia Mfeketo, 3/8/06, Parow. For a discussion of these courts see: Burman, S & Schärf, W, 'Creating People's Justice: Street Committees and People's Courts in a South African City', *Law and Society Review*, 24/3, 1990, pp.694-744, although note that this paper over estimates the strength and reach of the Western Cape Civic Association and the roll it played in coordinating struggles in the African townships, arguing, for example, that all street committees were under the WCCA and that as a body it represented both African and coloured areas.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with CAYCO & MK operative, 1/8/2006, Cape Town

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Nazeem Dramat, 13/11/2006, Johannesburg

<sup>49</sup> 'Spring School Opened my Eyes', *Learning Roots*, October 1985; Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> 'Lock-Out', *Learning Roots*, October 1985:- In October 1985 *Learning Roots* reported that the main focus of unrest had been Alexander Sinton High School in Athlone and Bonteheuwel was not mentioned.

for unrest. To cite just a few of the many examples from this period: in April 1986 pupils tried to set fire to a van delivering concrete to Bonteheuwel Senior Secondary School; in May 1986 200 pupils were holding an illegal placard demonstration at Arcadia when police went into the school and found waste paper bins filled with stones and 47 placards were confiscated. Later that day 400 Bonteheuwel High School students burnt tyres and 300 pupils at Modderdam High stoned cars;<sup>51</sup> in August 1986 a bus was burnt by pupils throwing petrol bombs.<sup>52</sup> This level of protest and organisation continued well into 1987. In July 1987 Ashley Kriel, a former Bonteheuwel pupil who had left the country to join MK in exile, was shot by police at a house in Athlone. In response to this 'several thousand' pupils protested and at the main commemoration ceremony at Bonteheuwel Senior Secondary School, freedom songs were sung and placards supportive of the ANC were produced.<sup>53</sup>

However, whilst the level of unrest distinguished Bonteheuwel from other coloured communities, its most unique feature was the development of a militant student youth that executed an unprecedented amount of violence and organised itself in a paramilitary fashion. Coming to be known as the BMW, or Bonteheuwel Military Wing, a group of students within Bonteheuwel sustained a campaign of violence well beyond that in any other coloured community.

The events leading to the emergence of the BMW are highly contested.<sup>54</sup> However, on the basis of interviews undertaken with key protagonists during this time it appears that the BMW first emerged during May 1986 as a vehicle through which some individuals involved in UDF organisations could encourage, organise and direct some of the more militant school pupils within a context of heightened

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<sup>51</sup> 'Lashed Pupils Ignored Police Says Brigadier', *Cape Argus*, 7/5/1986

<sup>52</sup> 'Bonteheuwel Bus Guttled', *Cape Times*, 6/8/1986

<sup>53</sup> 'Cape Pupils in Massive Demo', *Herald*, 16/7/1987

<sup>54</sup> In part this is because post-apartheid acrimony has seen activists make claims and counter claims about their own and others' involvement in progressive structures. However, as will be discussed later, it is also in part because the organisation underwent constant evolution and some people who were involved in the BMW during its early formation had, by the time arrests were made, already left the country and therefore are unable to account for (and sometimes accept) the subsequent evolution of structures they had formed.

politicisation and ongoing unrest. The catalyst for the formation of the BMW was a Free Mandela rally held in Bonteheuwel on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1986. At this rally attendees were given an ANC rosette. Everyone who attended was also given a copy of the January 8<sup>th</sup> statement and Johnny Issel, who was banned, spoke and quoted from the statement. Three people were delegated to organise the rally and to interpret the release Mandela campaign and out of their discussions they identified people on the schools that they wanted to politicise and encourage in their actions:

On the forth of May we decided we unbanning the ANC and we all publicly displaying that... That committee then sat. We identified people at school and so on that we were going to... politicise.<sup>55</sup>

Once organised these students started working within the schools, bringing people into their confidence and planning violent activities. In turn, through their links with the BMW, people in the UDF area committee were able to create unrest on demand.<sup>56</sup>

Many of the activities undertaken by the BMW were similar to those undertaken by youth activists within Guguletu. Buses were burnt, policemen's homes attacked and barricades erected in the streets. Such was the level of violence that in September 1987 Patrick McKenzie, Bonteheuwel's tricameral MP, made a statement in which he claimed that 'radicals in the area have made it "unmanageable."<sup>57</sup> This interpretation was supported by the trial of the surviving members of the BMW in late 1987 which saw the youths charged with over 300 offences.

Whilst in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel unrest accompanied a clear move towards more militant politics and a desire to challenge the state, as the unrest relented and activists sought to adapt to the new context disagreements over how to continue the struggle proliferated, particularly between youth and student activists.

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<sup>55</sup> This account was reported in off the record comments by one of my interviewees. It was also broadly supported in the account of one of the key members of the BMW.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> 'Statement in Parliament: Organisations Respond', *Grassroots*, September 1987



In Guguletu the main fissure was between out of school youth which coalesced around CAYCO and in school youth organised by the Joint SRCs. Throughout this period these organisations had a tense relationship, punctuated by ideological division and on occasion physical confrontation.<sup>58</sup> In Bonteheuwel the main division was between more militant school activists, broadly organised around the BMW, and activists operating within BISCO. However, unlike Guguletu where there was little interaction between the two groups, the relationships between the 'moderates' and 'militants' in Bonteheuwel were not consistently acrimonious, although tensions were ever-present.

In Guguletu divisions predated the unrest and revolved around two themes. Firstly, there were differences over tactics. CAYCO was involved in clearly political opposition and, particularly during unrest, sought to actively promote violent opposition. In contrast school politics revolved around campaigns on day-to-day issues in the school, which intertwined, but did not prioritise explicitly political demands and unrest. An early example of this conflict occurred in 1984 when school pupils in Guguletu refused to leave school to assist the KTC youth in resisting forced removals, leading youth activists to attack one of the Guguletu schools.<sup>59</sup> These conflicts escalated with the unrest. The ANC's call for ungovernability saw an immediatism seize the youth which had little room for the more careful organisation building and discussion of the SRCs. For example, a CAYCO pamphlet from 1986 talks of CAYCO:

'pu[s]hing ahead with the people's struggle for LIBERATION... WE CALL ON THE YOUTH to step up MASS ACTION to bring nearer THE SEIZURE OF PEOPLE'S POWER IN THIS COUNTRY.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with CAYCO & MK operative, 1/8/2006, Cape Town

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 4/8/06, Goodwood

<sup>60</sup> Untitled pamphlet, 'The Cape Youth Congress (CAYCO) was born...', 1p., typed, 1986, photocopy in author's possession

In contrast the school youth continued to promote organisation-building and did not accept that the apartheid state was about to collapse. In 1986 this led them to ask students to return to school - a call which was opposed by CAYCO:

I'm sure it [was] '86... We asked the students to go back to classes... to reorganise themselves... but the ANC structures said no. There was a call, a call by O.R. Tambo saying lets make 1986 ungovernable. But we said no, we can't make it ungovernable, we don't have the proper way to control the students. Students were going back to look for jobs, others getting pregnant... So we need to call them back to order to organise ourselves... They were saying the Joint SRCs were not listening to the call from Lusaka. But they did not have the base... Why should student leaders listen to their leaders?<sup>61</sup>

The above quote also highlights the second division. CAYCO sought and took leadership from the ANC in exile and within the community. In contrast, student activists represented a diverse constituency which was defined not by political commitment but by the fact they were students. Consequently they refused to unquestioningly reproduce political lines and there was a strong ideological diversity and 'ultra left' tendency within the student movement at this time. In another instance of this dynamic disagreements emerged over the political funeral of a pupil shot in July 1985. Congress activists wanted to organise the event but the students resisted because they felt it was the students who had made the sacrifices and this should be recognised:

[T]he very first mass funeral in '85. It was a big contestation as to who was going to lead that thing... we had claimed it because it was out of our own struggles and most of the victims were students, young kids. And it was a big, big thing. In fact we never imagined that how big it was. Because it would have reflected that the stalwarts of the ANC, if I may use the term, who were inside, were in control of the struggles. Whereas we claimed that we were in control, as young students at the time... and I suppose this was our non-sectarian attitude, that we are not going to give a platform to people who were not there when we were struggling simply because we know their credentials. We were going to get people who were part of the struggle, who were part of the campaigns that have subjected themselves to oppression and repression.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Focus Group with Members of the JSRC, 11/7/2006. Guguletu

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 4/8/06, Goodwood; Interview with CAYCO activist, 11/9/2006, Guguletu

This interpretation was also confirmed by CAYCO activists:

They [the students] didn't want to be under the umbrella of the African National Congress. It was a political interpretation of things. Which is why I'm saying to you these are the because they operating influenced by Neville Alexander operating from London, who was chased away from the ANC in exile. So there was those conflicts of ideas, in terms of understanding the way things should be done.<sup>63</sup>

In Bonteheuwel divisions were not ideological as Congress dominated progressive organisations. However, divisions emerged over tactics between BISCO, who were building above ground organisation and representing a broad constituency, and the BMW, who focused on ungovernability. Again these divisions arose over the immediacy of revolution and the most appropriate tactics within the current environment:

At BISCO level... '86, '87 there was a big issue between the militants and the moderates... The high school leadership that was responsible for the legal stuff, organisational stuff, education and training, support and so on. Sometimes felt that the militants were acting completely out of their political brief and putting them under pressure. Obviously the militants were saying "you guys are too slow. You sit in meetings, you talk a lot and read books. Now it's to battle, it's to war."<sup>64</sup>

Whilst student and youth politics gained a new urgency as a result of the unrest there was far less of an impact on adult politics and organisation. Discourses of revolution drew heavily on the concept of working class leadership. However, the lack of adult involvement in progressive politics discussed in the chapter four was not reversed by the outbreak of unrest, though adults did on occasion become drawn into unfolding struggle as a result of the demands of their children.

In general both coloured and African adults opposed the involvement of students and youth in politics. This was not always a rejection the anti-apartheid movement, with opposition often reflecting a concern for the people involved, or the repercussions of repression within the community. However, many activists do talk

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with CAYCO activist, 11/9/2006, Guguletu

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Desmond Grootboom, 7/6/2006, Cape Town

of how their parents discouraged or explicitly forbade their involvement in political activism. As one CAYCO activist in Guguletu recalled:

[My parents] didn't like my involvement in politics. [Laughs] [But] I was convinced that I was actually doing the right thing... We had that understanding that our parents were afraid... So they ended up doing nothing, because they were saying 'why are you doing this, why are you doing this'. Go to school and after you have going to school (sic) go to work.<sup>65</sup>

In Bonteheuwel parental opposition was reported in the majority of the interviews undertaken. One activist recalled how her mother saw her friends involved in politics as 'the evil, as the devil'.<sup>66</sup> It was also a common experience for activists to be banned from the family home because of political involvement<sup>67</sup> and some parents would even inform on their children to the police.<sup>68</sup>

Adults themselves were also rarely involved in progressive organisations. Across the city unrest saw a collapse in civic activism, with most civics either having no public campaigns, or ceasing to function completely.<sup>69</sup> This was reflected in Bonteheuwel where the carefully built civic structure of the early 1980s stopped operating after the unrest started.<sup>70</sup> As the civics collapsed local issues became taken up by service organisations which were aligned with progressive politics, but staffed by paid employees.<sup>71</sup> However, the extent of adult disengagement from progressive politics during this time in Bonteheuwel is best reflected by the fact that

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with CAYCO activist, 11/9/2006, Guguletu

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Henrietta Abrahams, 8/5/2006, Kenilworth

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Judith Kennedy, 21/11/2005, Observatory

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Henrietta Abrahams, 8/5/2006, Kenilworth

<sup>69</sup> Staniland, L, Struggling for Community: Civic Activism in the Coloured Townships of Greater Cape Town, 1980-86, (Edinburgh, 2005); Also, for the limited nature of coloured civic activism across the city at this point see 'Minutes of the CAHAC Meeting Held on Sunday 13/4/86', CAHAC, 3p., typed, 13/4/1986, MA, MCH 50. This shows how in early 1986 only 11 affiliates were attending CAHAC meetings and of these 5 were either trying to re-establish themselves or were not undertaking any activities.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Nazeem Dramat, 13/11/2006, Johannesburg; focus group with civic activists

<sup>71</sup> 'Flood Ht Heideveld says no to Hendrickse' *Grassroots*, August 1986; 'We Want a Hospital', *Grassroots*, May 1986; 'News Flashes from the Western Cape', 2p., handwritten notes on campaigns of UDF affiliates, December 1986, SAHA, AL2431, A4.13.6; Letter from D. Grootboom, Advice Office Forum Secretary, to the Secretary, COSATU, 2p., typed, 24/10/1986, UCTMA, BC721, box 203

despite it seeing considerable militant action at this time, there was no PTSA functioning in the community.<sup>72</sup>

In Guguletu the WCCA, which was only ever intermittently active, collapsed under the weight of unrest and repression.<sup>73</sup> The student called rent boycott was not supported by the civic and it played no role in its organisation, although individual civic activists were involved. The older residential organisations in Guguletu continued to function in spite of the unrest and in 1988 street committees were still communicating with housing officials in the same way as in the preceding decade.<sup>74</sup> Few street committees were involved in political action.<sup>75</sup>

However, whilst adult organisation collapsed in both communities, more general support for political action differed markedly between Guguletu and Bonteheuwel. Mass responses to two forms of activism common during the 1980s, the political stayaway and rent boycott, reveal far more sympathy for political action amongst Africans than coloureds.

Coloureds were consistently less supportive of political stayaways than Africans. A survey of large employers during a stayaway to commemorate Soweto in 1986 revealed that in the Western Cape 78% of African workers stayed away, whilst only 26% of coloured workers did so.<sup>76</sup> Similarly a stayaway arranged by COSATU to mark Mayday in 1986 saw 'considerably lower' support in Cape Town than the rest of the country, with 51% of African workers staying away, compared to only 2% of coloured workers. This disparity even existed in COSATU organised workplaces, suggesting the difference did not reflect the different pattern of unionisation amongst coloured workers, but a deeper antipathy towards political

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with Henrietta Abrahams, 8/5/2006, Kenilworth

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Rose Sonto, 19/4/2007, Cape Town; Interview with Basil Stuurman, 31/7/2006, Guguletu

<sup>74</sup> Assorted letters from street committees, 17/7/2/2, PACG, Box 1234, vol. 1; See also, Burman, S & Schärf, W, 'Creating People's Justice ...', p.719

<sup>75</sup> Burnman, S & Schärf, W, 'Creating People's Justice...', p.719

<sup>76</sup> 'The Stayaway in the Western Cape', edited version of a paper presented by Hilary Jofee, 12p., typed, June 1986, MA, CACE

action. Within COSATU organised workplaces coloured support only reached 31%, compared to 92% amongst Africans.<sup>77</sup>

Responses to rent boycotts also varied. A call for a boycott in Bonteheuwel at the height of the unrest failed.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, the 1986 student organised boycott in the LAGUNYA Townships attracted considerable support with rental collections declining during mid-1986 before returning to normal at the end of the year (table 5.1 and 5.2). In Nyanga between March and September rental collections were far below average. In Guguletu the picture is less clear as records are missing. However a council report at this time reveals that the state was unable to deliver eviction and rent reminder notices as youths were confiscating them, suggesting the lack of data actually reflects the strength of the boycott.

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<sup>77</sup> This strike is particularly interesting because employers were not overly hostile to the action of the strikers, suggesting that fear of reprisals could not have played a central role in decision making. Only 1 employer out of the 66 surveyed intended to dismiss participants in the strike. Cobbett, W, 'May Day Stay-away 1986', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11/6, 1986, pp.78-89; <http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/webpages/DC/LaJun86.0377.5429.011.006.Jun1986.16/LaJun86.0377.5429.011.006.Jun1986.16.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> 'Statement Adopted at the Close of the UDF Conference on Education held on 8 March 1986 and Attended by over 250 Students, Teachers and Concerned Parents from over 60 Senior Secondary Schools throughout the Western Cape and Schools from Various Parts of the Boland, West Coast and South Cape', 4p., typed, 1986, MA, UDF Collection, Box 4

<b>Table 5.1: Rent owed and paid in Nyanga, March 1986 to July 1987.<sup>79</sup></b>			
<b>Month</b>	<b>Rent Owed</b>	<b>Rent Paid</b>	<b>Percentage of Rent Paid</b>
<b>March 1986</b>	30032.41	12931.14	43%
<b>April 1986</b>	30032.41	4660.49	16%
<b>May 1986</b>	30025.27	3996.63	13%
<b>June 1986</b>	30025.27	4103.39	14%
<b>July 1986</b>	30025.27	9997.36	33%
<b>August 1986</b>	30025.27	12421.15	41%
<b>September 1986</b>	30025.27	22952.02	76%
<b>October 1986</b>	30003.31	27834.65	93%
<b>November 1986</b>	29996.77	61585.65	205%
<b>December 1986</b>	30716.77	30274.81	99%
<b>January 1987</b>	30716.77	23611.06	77%
<b>February 1987</b>	30704.44	29372.01	96%
<b>March 1987</b>	30716.77	47458.66	155%
<b>April 1987</b>	-	-	-
<b>May 1987</b>	30662.08	33834.45	110%
<b>June 1987</b>	30401	24571.02	81%
<b>July 1987</b>	30529.39	31108.95	102%

<sup>79</sup> Information taken from rental reports, CTAR, PACG 1232, vol. 11

<b>Month</b>	<b>Rent Owed</b>	<b>Rent Paid</b>	<b>Percentage of Rent Paid</b>
<b>March 1986</b>	137406.51	127621.63	93%
<b>April 1986</b>	-	-	-
<b>May 1986</b>	-	-	-
<b>June 1986</b>	-	-	-
<b>July 1986</b>	-	-	-
<b>August 1986</b>	-	-	-
<b>September 1986</b>	-	-	-
<b>October 1986</b>	137337.51	154529.38	113%
<b>November 1986</b>	137164.34	149151.07	109%
<b>December 1986</b>	137043.96	141845.07	104%
<b>January 1987</b>	132215.31	12885.78	10%
<b>February 1987</b>	136901.26	111914.54	82%
<b>March 1987</b>	136492.89	184536.77	135%

However, Guguletu's rent boycott had limits and the mid-1980s did not see a sustained shift to conflict with the state around the urban environment. As the figures show, in late 1986 rental payments came to exceed monthly charges, as residents started repaying their debts. This contrasts with other parts of South Africa where rent boycotts were sustained into the 1990s. It is also significant that the boycott was undertaken in response to a call by students, not by issues affecting adults as residents.

The final development in this period was the rapid expansion in underground military activity. Before 1985 the presence of MK in the Western Cape was limited.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Information taken from rental reports, CTAR, PACG 1232, vol. 10



In the African areas veterans of the 1950s maintained contact with the ANC in exile, whilst in coloured communities some links had been made between internal activists and MK in exile. However, armed activities in the province were rare and involved people infiltrated from exile, not people living within the country. By 1987 this had transformed. Unrest radicalised many people pushing them into violent confrontation; simultaneously, underground networks mushroomed. The unrest of 1985 changed into a period of rumbling violence which ranged from sporadic street unrest to explicitly military action, such as bomb attacks and sabotage. Activists linked into MK supported, provoked and sometimes explicitly mobilised the general unrest, whilst many militants were drawn into underground activities as a result of their actions.<sup>82</sup>

## **5.4. Books, Bombs and Continuing Quiescence: Differential Responses to Township Unrest in Cape Town 1985-7**

The unrest of late 1985 opened a Pandora's Box in Cape Town, making change appear possible whilst simultaneously demonstrating apartheid injustice. Into this space fell the organisations and networks developed over the previous five years,

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<sup>81</sup> Underground military activity in the Western Cape during this period was almost exclusively undertaken by MK, with no reported military activities by the PAC or APLA between 1985 and 1989 in the Western Cape. See: Fullard, M, 'The State and Political Struggle...', p.100

<sup>82</sup> A wide range of documents exist in archives providing details of the ANC in the Western Cape at this time and this would be a fascinating study to undertake: Indeed, the main reason this was not covered in this thesis was because of space. These include records of the Ashley Forbes trial, held at the University of Cape Town Library Manuscripts and Archives section. The Mayibuye Archive holds the records of the Tony Yengeni Trial. Records also survive in the High Court in Cape Town although it appears that a lot of the documents were taken away by the truth and reconciliation commission and the filing system from the 1980s is somewhat in disarray. However, the author was granted access to these files and the files include the original exhibits of the Forbes trial, not present in the UCT files. The original file of the Cecyl Esau trial has also survived, including the banned literature seized and the passport of Quentin Michels showing his visits to Botswana. Many of the interviewees also commented on their involvement in MK networks at this time. See for example: interviews with: Quinton Michels, Leon Scott, a CAYCO & MK operative, Colin Lawrence and Joseph Aranus.

allowing protest to be harnessed in a way previously impossible. However, whilst unrest and existing organisation provided the spark and initial framework through which protest was articulated, activism was transformed by the unique pattern of discrimination in the city. The extent people would go to to achieve change varied markedly, as did the view of the good society driving their actions. Consequently, a range of different organisations and identities coalesced with the political space opened by the unrest, informed by the differential impact of apartheid discrimination. The impact of this discrimination is considered here through the reaction of three different groups within the two case studies: students, youth and adults.

#### **5.4.1. Adult Disengagement: Continuity of a Trend**

In both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel the outbreak of unrest did not see a major expansion of progressive organisation or activism amongst older residents. This quiescence needs little explanation beyond that provided in chapter four as the same dynamics continued to function, in spite of the expansion of conditions conducive to political activism. Mass support could be generated in response to particularly harsh police action, as shown by the strong shows of support at funerals and the growing involvement of adults in support groups for detainees. However, in general, coloured adults continued to offer only lukewarm support for progressive action whilst Africans were supportive of specific instances of protest but did not get drawn into sustained protest as the local environment remained depoliticised.

Two interesting points do emerge from this period, however, both of which reinforce the points made in chapter four. Firstly, despite the fact that student/youth protest was far more sustained in 1985-7 than it had been earlier, and the police response was equally brutal, coloured support for progressive action compares unfavourably with that recorded in 1976 and 1980. Support for the stayaways at this time amongst coloured workers averaged between 15 and 30% and was far lower than in 1976 when 80% of all workers stayed away, including between 70% and 90%

of coloured garment workers. Similarly, boycotts, such as bus and consumer boycotts, saw falling levels of support as the decade progressed. This decline in support coincided with the growing collapse of apartheid discrimination and the growing Africanisation of the Western Cape. It is not possible to prove a direct link between these transformations and coloured disengagement from progressive political activism. However, it is the case that in 1985/6 with the country in recession and increased competition from the city's growing migrant African population, support for progressive politics was less apparent than in the early 1980s.

Secondly, this period reinforces the importance of the low rental levels in the African townships in depoliticising the urban environment. Studies of rent boycotts have shown that whilst they were often instigated to support political demands they could easily become self-perpetuating, as people became unable to afford to pay off their arrears.<sup>83</sup> However, as was revealed in the figures on the rent boycott in the LAGUNYA area, there was an overpayment of rent in both Guguletu and Nyanga after the boycotts had ended. The low rental levels meant that people were able to settle their arrears and therefore did not need to organise to defend themselves against eviction, or to negotiate with the local authorities. Throughout the township unrest, therefore, African adults became drawn into student struggles as parents but never became politicised through their personal hardship.

#### **5.4.2. Aspiration, Organisation and Realism: Student Politics in 1985-7**

In contrast to adult politics, between late 1985 and 1986 student politics rapidly expanded from scattered pockets of activism into a city-wide movement. State repression of peaceful protest caused a violent reaction in which students were heavily involved; this both politicised the state for students whilst the failure of repression demonstrated its weakness. This political space then interacted with the

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<sup>83</sup> Chaskalson, M., Jochelson, K. & Seekings, J, 'Rent Boycotts and the Urban Political Economy', *South African Review* 4, 1987, pp.56-8

grievances of black school students and the organisations and networks that had developed over the preceding decade. Rising levels of education and urbanisation led students to aspire for more, at the same time as economic recession, rising unemployment and the persistence of apartheid discrimination thwarted these aspirations. Organisations and ideologies also existed in a way they had not previously and these provided explanations for hardships and structures through which action could be organised and spread. Combined, these changes led to the development amongst school children in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel of a collective understanding of their social, political and economic position within apartheid, linked into an organisational and ideological context which supported its articulation in action.

The immediate cause of widespread student involvement in unrest was not the actions of progressive organisations, but the state security forces.<sup>84</sup> In both communities activists recall how violence created anger and pushed people into fighting back, leading to a spiral of protest and violence. As one student activist in Bonteheuwel recounted:

To see that [the actions of the police] It makes you angry... And then you go and you throw stones ... And then there's retaliation from their side... And the police would come and they would shoot teargas and whatever and the kids would throw stones.<sup>85</sup>

Surviving copies of a newsletter published at Manenberg Senior Secondary School – a draft produced before the Pollsmoor march and an edition published afterwards – show just how important violence was. The draft detailed an unenthusiastic response to ongoing calls for boycotts. However, after the march the situation had transformed with large numbers saying, as a result of the police action, 'they will

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<sup>84</sup> Studies of collective action have pointed to the fact that whilst repression often acts as an effective barrier to organisation and protest, when it is ineffective and seen as illegitimate it can encourage collective action as it both reveals the vulnerability of the state and simultaneously expands people's feelings of injustice. See: Goldstone, J. 'More Social Movements or Fewer? Beyond Political Opportunity Structures to Relational Fields', *Theory and Society*, 33, 2004, pp.346-7

<sup>85</sup> Interview with BISCO activist, 11/1/06, Bonteheuwel

not stop boycotting until their demands are met.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, because the violence was relatively indiscriminate, especially as it spread to the schools, it not only created a reaction amongst politicised students, but also developed a common experience of oppression that delegitimised state power for all students. This led to even conservative students being pulled into protest:

The conservative element were calling for our expulsion... Because they were of the view... we were derailing their educational progress. But... as events unfolded... even those that were conservative began to see the light. Because, you know, I mean once the apartheid security forces decide to shoot they shoot randomly. So that the issues that we were raising began to make sense to them.... and they began to realise that it may be anybody's turn to die unless you confront the system.<sup>87</sup>

As well as pushing students into protest unrest broke down state authority, creating political space for action and the impression that apartheid was vulnerable. Following the outbreak of unrest Bundy identifies a clear militancy amongst students located in the belief that apartheid was about to fall which he calls 'immediatism'.<sup>88</sup> Whilst Bundy may be overstating the case, the archival record does show that in late 1985, as the students began to win concessions, a sense of power was achieved that made them increasingly feel that transformation was possible and action was delivering results. A pamphlet issued by the Athlone Student's Action Committee encouraged students to sacrifice their year's schooling as the time was ripe for mass action:

Yes the boycott is temporary. But we cannot end it now – not now we have the government on its knees... Can we afford to lose all the power we have fought for simply because we feel the boycott should end because of the exams?<sup>89</sup>

Similar views were also clear in Bonteheuwel and this played a key role in encouraging activists to continue organising. As one activist recalled:

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<sup>86</sup> 'Manenberg SRC: The Official Newsletter of Manenberg Senior Secondary School SRC' Vol. 1, No. 1, 1p., A4, Typed with pictures, ds (4), August 1985, MA, CACE; Draft of 'Manenberg SRC Newsletter' Vol. 1, No. 1, 1p., A4, card with typed sections attached, parts handwritten, ds (4), August 1985, MA, CACE

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi activist, 22/11/2005, Cape Town

<sup>88</sup> Bundy, C, 'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth and Student Resistance in Greater Cape Town, 1985', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13/3, 1987, pp.303-330

<sup>89</sup> 'Who is in Charge of Our School – The Students or Carter', Issued by Athlone Students Action Committee, 1p., typed, October 1985, MA, Bundy Collection

Being able to challenge the state constantly that's what gave you the adrenaline rush... There was a realisation that... we could make this happen... we could bring the state down. And there was this energy that drove everybody.<sup>90</sup>

This expansion of the possible took place in an environment relatively free from repression. In the Western Cape the UDF and its affiliates were still able to operate, despite low-level harassment. Even when the unrest escalated and the state clamped down on activism there was still, at least until the second state of emergency, space for student organisations to operate in and there were not mass detentions of student activists in either Bonteheuwel or Guguletu.<sup>91</sup>

Whilst unrest opened political space and created an immediate reaction, alone it does not explain the consolidation over the next two years of a sustained challenge to the state. This sustained challenge owed much to progressive organisation, as school organisation and politicisation was sustained in a way that had not occurred in either 1976 or 1980. The roll of organisation in student protest in this period was similar in the two case studies. Progressive activists integrated into regional and national networks and inspired by developments elsewhere in the country organised events during late 1985 that led to the violent police crackdown. Once unrest exploded these networks and seasoned activists were then able to harness the energy unleashed and draw local struggles into a city-wide movement. Furthermore, the organisational and ideological development of the preceding five years provided frameworks that helped explained repression and present an alternative future around which students could mobilise.

With the outbreak of unrest, activists used their networks to organise rallies both within townships and, linking into the UDF, city-wide. They also coordinated and published demands, negotiated with the authorities, organised boycotts and took mandates to coordinating structures. This role of pre-existing organisation in channelling and sustaining the response to repression was recalled by activists in both communities. A former COSAS activist from Guguletu recalled how the careful

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with BISCO activist, Claremont, 13/6/2006

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 4/8/06, Goodwood

building of organisation in the period before the unrest meant that they were quickly able to organise students once the opportunity arose:

Now a student by the name Sithembele Matiso was then gunned down by the apartheid security forces... we then instructed all activists to have meetings in their schools to discuss the matter. Obviously from our side we have already done our preparatory work and it was easier for us now because the death of this student has sparked off tensions.<sup>92</sup>

Similarly in Bonteheuwel the spreading of unrest, organisation and the mass rallies that marked this period was facilitated through BISCO and the SRCs:

At the beginning of the year [1985] I think it [BISCO] was almost inoperative... it was a couple of individuals... but... with the boycotts, because we had that structure... I think that was what set us apart from many other areas, was that we had a area coordinating structure for the three high schools already, so we could just fall back into that. Get our various representatives from our SRCs.<sup>93</sup>

The crystallisation of protest into organised action also created new points of conflict which maintained confrontation. Activists organised protest and the state reacted, leading to further protest and increased organisation. One incident in Bonteheuwel, recounted by several activists, provides an illustration of how this took place:

We picked up on issues as they came along. I'll give you an example ... There was a pastor called Pastor Kratz... [he] got involved in the anti-apartheid movement. The government decided to deport him. We didn't know him from a bar of soap in Bonteheuwel... [but] the reason why he's being deported is because of his anti-apartheid stance... so we organised a bus. We filled up the bus... and we went to the airport the day he was being deported with our placards... Full well knowing we were going to be arrested... about 60 students.<sup>94</sup>

Unsurprisingly the students were arrested and the trial of the activists then became a focus for action. As one of the students arrested recalled:

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Themba Nobantana, 22/11/2005, Cape Town

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Henrietta Abrahams, 14/8/2006, Kenilworth

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Nazeem Dramat, 13/11/2006, Johannesburg

[W]e need[ed] media coverage. So we needed the students to support us ... so we mobilised the students. We did it radically. We stopped a train at Bonteheuwel station where the conductors and the train driver had to wait. We put, most of the students from the three schools we put in that train and we went through to Bellville. I mean that train was full of students and they was singing and dancing and singing freedom songs.<sup>95</sup>

Similar tactics were also used in Guguletu:

Our [mode of operating] was to communicate a message that says lets go to the street and show them that we don't want this system. Without saying throw stones. But we know that the strength of the message was such that it will motivate people to change the streets into the battlefields. So that's how we used to operate in that period.<sup>96</sup>

The second role played by organisation was the articulation of clear narratives of protest that allowed students to understand unfolding events, and their discontent, as part of a broader movement which offered a better future. The regular workshops, videos and discussion groups of the early 1980s produced a group of activists with explanations for inequality which they used, and perpetuated, when organising responses to the ongoing unrest. Students came to see the end to apartheid and capitalism as central to their own future. The iconography and rhetoric of the banned political movements was ever present. People's education classes, supported by the growth of progressive service organisations, taught students about racial capitalism and the need to overthrow the state to achieve true liberation. Furthermore, progressive organisation provided a whole repertoire of political action that was rapidly adopted by student activists. Students toyi-toyed and sang freedom songs passed down from the exiled political movements. In both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel students came to accept that for their immediate demands to be met the political system needed to be transformed. As the UDF argued in one of its internal discussion documents published a year before the unrest broke out in the City:

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with BISCO activist, 11/1/06, Bonteheuwel

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Themba Nobantana, 22/11/2005, Cape Town



To say that the UDF has weakened organisations without qualifying that statement is incorrect. The ideological gains we have made has created a political climate where the possibilities of engaging in struggle have been heightened.<sup>97</sup>

These ideological gains, whilst not immediately apparent, played a key role when unrest returned to the city.

Although student politics in the mid-1980s were supported by organisation and ideology this is not sufficient to explain the strength of the movement for, as was noted in chapter four, strong organisation and ideology alone could not create protest. Two additional features of the city's student population at this time were therefore crucial. Firstly, the intersection of the economic crisis with apartheid schooling created considerable (and widely shared) discontent. Secondly, this discontent came to inform both ideology and organisation, leading to the development of a form of politics that, because it reflected and represented the student experience was widely adopted.

At the heart of student organisation in the mid-1980s was not simply political protest, but also the articulation of clear demands located within the student experience and a marked realism about what was achievable. Throughout 1985-7 student activists issued demands to the authorities, using these to build support. Interestingly, political demands were just part (and in Guguletu often a small part) of the overall call to action. Instead activists focused on the immediate concerns of their constituency, a fact which led to different demands in Guguletu and Bonteheuwel but which helped sustain the student movement within the townships.

In Guguletu pupils suffered from poor quality education, a lack of facilities and high school fees, as well as the immediate consequences of unrest. This heavily influenced their protests, as revealed in a list of demands issued by the Joint SRCs and the Parent's Action Committee in late 1985 which demanded:

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<sup>97</sup> 'Minutes of a UDF GC Workshop 19/9/84, Session 2', UDF, typed, 1984, UCTMA, UWO, B88, p.2

An end to the state of emergency  
Release of detained students  
Recognition of SRCs  
Age limits to be abolished  
St Francis School (for adults) be abolished because it is well equipped and is causing divisions within the students  
Exam fees to be decreased from R36 to R20  
Subsidising of transport fares  
Quota system must be abolished  
The building of more schools and technikons  
Free choice of academic subjects for all students  
Introduction of a free and equal education system.<sup>98</sup>

This strong focus on educational issues is of particular interest because it suggests that pupils in the African schools did not see apartheid education as pointless. Indeed, combined with this desire for improved education was a strong belief in the value of education as a vehicle for personal advancement. The focus on people's education and the rapid return to school within the African schools allowed pupils to continue education whilst protesting, ensuring their futures were not compromised. SRC members were also clearly focused on the need to achieve academically and set a good example. Amongst ordinary students education was also highly valued:

[Students] themselves were viewing themselves as disciplined and as having a sense of purpose in life and that sense of purpose was to go through this inadequate education system.<sup>99</sup>

When considered in more detail the focus on improved access to education was relatively unique and cannot be linked simply to rising unemployment amongst pupils, for if matriculating gave little hope of advancement a strong focus on education would be unlikely. Instead, the importance placed on the continuation of education alongside protest appears to reflect the nature of Cape Town's political economy. The Coloured Labour Preference Policy had, before the mid-1980s,

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<sup>98</sup> 'Meet our Demands Now', Issued by Parents Action Committee and Joint SRCs, 5p., typed, Late 1985, MA, Bundy Collection. A range of other campaigns run by the Joint SRCs also reveal the importance of day-to-day concerns in schooling protests.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Themba Nobantana, 22/11/2005, Cape Town

seriously restricted African schooling in the Western Cape and its expansion was only just beginning to be implemented. Consequently educational achievement was still relatively rare and this may have led to it being highly prized.<sup>100</sup>

In contrast to the African areas demands in Bonteheuwel and other coloured communities did not focus on the quality of education or widening access; instead responses to the unrest and demands to organise dominated. The main campaign in Bonteheuwel in 1985 was for the promotion of students who had boycotted the exams. Similarly, whilst there is no archival record of demands issued by BISCO, demands issued in Athlone show how the demands of coloured students made only limited reference to the material conditions within the schools:

An end to Police and SADF presence at schools  
The removal of the Department's security at our schools during school hours.  
The release of all detainees and those arrested.  
We demand the right for the SRC's and the Teacher Union to meet at school.  
The reinstatement of our teachers  
The right to form democratic SRC's  
The right to make use of all school facilities and equipment.  
Amendment to excessive authority (e.g. corporal punishment)  
That our principals stop negotiating with Carter.  
End the state of emergency<sup>101</sup>

However, the absence of demands around the quality of schooling did not represent contentment. In an inversion of the situation in Guguletu interviews with activists in Bonteheuwel saw the quality of schooling rarely raised as an issue. Instead the impetus towards action was a belief that in spite of educational achievement there were few opportunities and no real hope for achievement beyond the school yard:

The fact we having this education doesn't mean that when we finished with this education we gonna land good jobs ... Whatever they implemented was to keep you

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<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately figures on unemployment by level of education are not available for 1985/6. However chapter two's examination of the increase in unemployment amongst Africans in the Western Cape between 1980 and 2001 reveals that amongst Africans with degrees unemployment fell between 1980 and 1991 whilst unemployment amongst people with matric rose far slower than for people with lower levels of education, all demonstrating that education did continue to have a marked impact on people's life chances during the decade.

<sup>101</sup> 'The Boycott Continued Until Our Demands are Met', pamphlet issued by Athlone Students' Action Committee, 1p., typed, 1986, MA, Bundy Collection.

back. And we noticed that and we tried to explain that to the kids... And that is why we felt so passionate.<sup>102</sup>

Yes, people latched on to it [the struggle] as a way out. It's breaking down that ceiling. I would give my everything to see... a new South Africa, because there is opportunity for me... I fought for an equal opportunity. That each and every one, be you from whatever background or from what race, you have the same opportunity at whatever is available.<sup>103</sup>

Similar motivations were also apparent in the publications of progressive organisations. In October 1985 a pamphlet was issued in Athlone calling for a continuation of the boycott. In this pamphlet they articulate the reasons why the boycott should continue and why the education system needed transforming. This analysis chimes closely with the structural conditions that were restricting coloured advancement in the mid 1980s:

Students and parents believe that once students have a matric certificate they will be ensured a job. The reality is there is no work and that the majority of students will be *forced* into the cheap labour market. The majority of students will not be able to attend universities. The majority of students will be forced into the factories as cheap labourers or form part of the 6 million unemployed.<sup>104</sup>

Like in Guguletu the key activists within the school movement were amongst the most academically successful in the school.<sup>105</sup> However, unlike Guguletu their focus was not primarily on improving their education. This reflected the coloured student experience. Coloured per capita spending on education was far higher than provided to Africans, coloureds did not have to pay for books or exam fees, and education had seen increasing investment with the advent of the tricameral parliament. For coloured students, therefore, it was not the quality of education that was felt to be restricting advancement. Instead it was the inability of the apartheid political economy beyond the schools to fulfil people's aspirations. Consequently

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with BISCO activist, 11/1/06, Bonteheuwel

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Gary Holtzman, 13/2/2008, Vriedendall

<sup>104</sup> 'Who is in Charge of Our School – The Students or Carter', Issued by Athlone Students Action Committee, 1p., typed, October 1985, MA, Bundy Collection

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

demands focused on the daily fallout from struggle, yet underneath this ran a deeper vein of animosity driving protest.<sup>106</sup>

As a result of the shared experiences of apartheid education and repression, the existence of effective organisations to structure discontent and the growth of shared understandings of discontent unique political cultures emerged in both Bonteheuwel and Guguletu. In Bonteheuwel a common theme in interviews was the importance of the social aspects of activism. Workshops and political rallies were not just about dry political action, but also occupied people's spare time and provided them with friends, whilst the opportunity for violent protest could bring with it a sense of excitement. Activists wore parka jackets, jeans and boots and addressed each other as comrade.<sup>107</sup> People made friends in the struggle and political action was intertwined with deep personal bonds:

So here you had a bunch of likeminded people... we had a cause for which we were struggling and we liked each other's personalities... we were fun loving people at the same time. We weren't your nerdy, booky type persons. We had vibrant lives and politics made it even more vibrant. You know. We had time to work and we had time to play. If we worked, we worked, if we played, we played hard... We are life-long friends at the end of the day, simply because we worked through a very traumatic youth as well.<sup>108</sup>

Similarly, in Guguletu, student activists shared friendships as the struggle became the centre of people's social lives. They also developed strong traditions and practices of democracy and debating, which drew people together and imparted a specific student identity on action.<sup>109</sup>

This development of political subcultures sustained participation by making activism fashionable and commonplace. As activism became widespread the risks of

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<sup>106</sup> Interestingly this lack of material grievances stands opposite to the coloured experience in 1976 and particularly 1980, when material demands were at the heart of organising. This suggests that the move towards the tricameral system and changes to coloured schooling after the 1980 boycott had removed many of the immediate inadequacies of coloured education. However, the continued existence of discrimination, combined with economic malaise, meant that educational reform alone could not depoliticise apartheid for young coloureds.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Gary Holtzman, 13/2/2008, Vriedendall

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Henrietta Abrahams, 8/5/2006, Kenilworth

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Marc Jansen, 14/8/2006, Goodwood

participation reduced whilst being part of the struggle gave students status and increased the rewards of participation. Combined with, and in large part a result of, the organisation and shared experiences of this period these subcultures were crucial to the continuing of protest.

Finally, it is worth noting that the success of student politics in Cape Town is of particular interest because it undermines a common explanation of the overall weakness of progressive politics in the Western Cape. It has often been suggested that ideological diversity was central to the limited success of progressive organising in the Western Cape because it undermined the ability of activists to coalesce around coherent programmes of action. However, this study provides little evidence to support this interpretation. As shown above, student politics in the Western Cape were widely acknowledged as the most effective and well organised in the whole country. However, student organisations in the Western Cape, and particularly the African townships, were marked by ideological heterogeneity and ongoing ideological debates and division. The existence of strong organisation alongside such ideological diversity shows that ideological splits did not necessarily lead to organisational weakness.

As already shown the Joint SRCs were a major force in township politics and a key player in both regional and national student politics. However, the Joint SRCs were also made up of people with a broad range of political views. Many activists were heavily influenced by the Trotskyite traditions of the Western Cape:

So the joint SRC. If you look at Cape Town. If you look at Athlone. And our, our ideological standpoint and that of the coloured middle class in the Athlone area, the Thornhill and the Vanguard, the people that were more New Unity Movement, so we had a natural click with them.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> There were strong links between the JSRCs and the Athlone Students Action Committee which was heavily influenced by a tradition of Unity Movement organizing within the community and the influence of Dullah Omar, a previous figurehead of the Unity Movement who moved over to the UDF. This ideological congruence saw a range of joint campaigns and working between the two organisations. See: See for example, '6 October: National Students Solidarity', issued by Joint SRC's and ASAC, 2p., typed, 6/10/1986, MCH 85, Box 2, also Marc Jansen, 14/8/2006, Goodwood

However other organising and ideological traditions were also accommodated. The collective decision making approach and bottom up democracy adopted by the Joint SRCs provided a context within which different ideological tendencies could co-exist and debate decisions, whilst also demanding that whatever outcome was agreed upon would be implemented by all students:

We treated the black consciousness movement as our comrades, although we knew we differ in approach. We treated the pan-Africanists as comrades, although we differ. So that was a conscious decision that we took because we said look, in the battlefield we can... we shine over these guys because we know they don't have the necessary skill and strategy to deal with mobilisation and running campaigns.<sup>111</sup>

This ideological heterogeneity was not always welcomed by organisations committed to the Congress cause and the ultra-left presence within the Joint SRCs made it difficult for activists to access resources controlled by Congress aligned service organisations, especially when there was opposition to the campaigns they were running. This led Joint SRC activists to build a range of different alliances and contacts. As well as Congress aligned organisations such as Grassroots they also linked with individuals in organisations such as the South African Council for Higher Education which was closely linked to Neville Alexander and the Unity Movement influenced South African Council on Sport and LAGUNYACRO.<sup>112</sup> The fact that the Joint SRCs were ideologically diverse and at times had resources denied to them because of this heterogeneity, yet were still recognised nationally for their schoolyard strength, provides clear evidence that ideological heterogeneity did not always weaken organisation and cannot easily be used as an explanation for the weakness of progressive politics amongst other communities and within other arenas of struggle in the City.

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 4/8/06, Goodwood

<sup>112</sup> Interview with JSRC Marc Jansen, 14/8/2006, Goodwood; Interview with Mhlobo Gunguluzi activist, 8/2/06, Cape Town

### **5.4.3. The Rationality of Radicalism: Youth Politics in Guguletu and Bonteheuwel 1985-7**

Like student politics, the youth radicalism of this period owed much to the transformation of political opportunities as a result of unrest. However, unlike student politics, which was shot through with a desire for education and self-improvement, radical youth politics was driven by a desire for immediate revolutionary transformation. This radicalism reflected the life experiences of a group of young people who, lacking education, were unlikely to benefit from the simple removal of discrimination or the improvement of schooling. Instead, they were drawn by a call to revolution which contained utopian messages about the possibility of a brighter future and a method of violent struggle that was understandable, easily actionable and contained within its day to day practice the possibility for personal and sometimes material gain.<sup>113</sup>

In both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel the unrest led not only to the growth of organised schoolyard politics but also the emergence of radical youth activism. The immediatism that Bundy identified remained present amongst CAYCO and the BMW long after the return to school. Indeed there was conflict in both communities between militant youth activists and students over whether the focus should be on building organisation within the constraints of apartheid, or maintaining a violent challenge to the state. In Guguletu there were clashes between the militant youth under the banner of CAYCO, and members of the Joint SRCs when the decision was made for students to return to school in 1986:

We are accountable to the students, we report back to them about what is happening. But where do we get the students. In schools. So we must go back to

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<sup>113</sup> The focus of the analysis of youth politics is on the actions of youth broadly affiliated to the Cape Youth Congress in Guguletu and the Bonteheuwel Military Wing in Bonteheuwel. At first this may seem an inappropriate comparison, as there was a functioning CAYCO branch in Bonteheuwel. However, as has been seen above, the actions of people organising around the two groups were broadly similar, with both representing a radical militancy and an ongoing violent challenge to the state. In contrast, CAYCO in Bonteheuwel was primarily concerned with political education and did not become the organisational loci for more violent & radical protest.



school... But the others [CAYCO] were saying 'no, lets keep the momentum, let the fires roll' ... So that's where we differed.<sup>114</sup>

Similar conflicts were ever present in Bonteheuwel between members of the schools' SRCs, BISCO and the BMW:

[W]e were more the guys that debated things and analysed things and workshoped things... And then we had Bonteheuwel Military Wing and they decided. No. You guys were too moderate or conservative or diplomatic or whatever you want to call it. There were lots of talk and lots of meetings and lot of workshops, but they felt there should be more action.<sup>115</sup>

In time this focus on violence led to growing divisions as organisation building in the schools was affected by a continuation of violence which undermined agreements made within the schools to reduce violence in return for concessions.<sup>116</sup>

Interestingly, this radicalism was not buttressed by any clear demands for immediate improvement. CAYCO publications reveal no clear cut 'youth' demands. For example, in late 1985 a CAYCO pamphlet was which simply reproduced the students' demand for the postponement of exams.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, in a pamphlet that was released in late 1986 or 1987 CAYCO demanded the following:

A living wage  
Rents we can afford  
Lower bread prices  
Troops out of the townships  
Stop spending money on weapons of destruction  
An end to detentions  
A stop to the murder of our comrades on death row.<sup>118</sup>

Not one of these demands represented an issue which could be argued to specifically affect a youth constituency. Rather than individual demands, youth

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with Nikita Vazi, 14/8/2006, Goodwood;  
see also: Interview with Themba Nobantana, 22/11/2005, Cape Town

<sup>115</sup> Interview with BISCO activist, 11/1/06, Bonteheuwel

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Henrietta Abrahams, 8/5/2006, Kenilworth

<sup>117</sup> 'Unite Against Gutter Education', CAYCO, 2p., typed, late 1985, MA, CACE,

<sup>118</sup> 'Workers Students Youth Under Attack', CAYCO, 2p., typed, n.d., probably 1987, SAHA, AL2457, J4

politics became characterised by a revolutionary militancy. The centrality to CAYCO and the BMW of revolutionary violence demonstrated in their actions mirrored in the few surviving publications:

So many have died, but not in vain... we shall fight until the death of those who have been slaughtered by the regime has been avenged, we shall fight until we attain people's power in our country.<sup>119</sup>

If youth activists were not driven to activism by clear demands then what lay behind their radicalisation and consistent involvement in struggle? Just as students became involved in politics because it offered a chance to make immediate gains and also to challenge a system which offered little hope of future advancement, so too did youth activists. However, the youth activists had less to lose and more to gain through violent action than students. In Bonteheuwel, whilst members of the student movement tended to be successful at school, members of the BMW were both younger and generally less academically successful. Consequently improved schooling offered little. However, the transformed state with prosperity for all promised in the rhetoric of the banned political movements had much to endear itself whilst the future without transformation offered little. The struggle therefore became a way of negating immediate hardships through commitment to future transformation. In the words of a member of the BMW:

The struggle is like a religion, the more you learn about it the more crazy you become, the more addicted you become. Because it's playing with your heart and your feelings... I want to give my life for the struggle, and die for the struggle. Because in the whole they will achieve from my death or from my blood and my country's going to be the winner and they will achieve from the growth of my country itself. That's what we felt, and that's what we lived for, and that's what we felt at that time for the struggle.<sup>120</sup>

Similarly, in Guguletu the youths that flocked to the struggle were driven by the belief of immediate transformation. As a key CAYCO regional executive committee

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<sup>119</sup> 'A Tribute to Our Comrades who were killed Monday 3.3.86', CAYCO, 3p, typed, 1987, NLSA, Cape Youth Congress AP. -324, p.2

<sup>120</sup> Interview with member of the BWM 1, Anonymous

member recalled of the many new recruits that had flocked to the struggle at this time:

[T]here are young people, they are seeing freedom. They see nothing, they see freedom, they see death, they feared nothing.<sup>121</sup>

However, as the above quotes also show, youth politics not only represented a vision of sacrifice and transformation that appealed to people with little to lose and much to gain; it also provided a repertoire of political action that was easily accessible and in itself offered a sense of belonging. The organisation building of the early 1980s was the preserve of an educated elite who had the skills to run meetings, take minutes and print pamphlets. In contrast, collective action in the mid-1980s could be engaged in by anyone willing to sing a liberation song, wield a placard, throw a petrol bomb or burn a bus. In large part this was a result of the unrest, which transformed the relationship between citizens and the state and created the political space within which such action could be undertaken. People who had been disempowered by apartheid were suddenly able to achieve a sense of belonging, power and esteem.

When former members of the BMW were interviewed about their involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle two key themes came through consistently. Firstly, the fact that their involvement created a sense of belonging that was missing both before they became involved, and also after liberation and, secondly, that along with this belonging became a clear sense of purpose and status:

It was the best times of my life... There was something to live for. Something to die for. And there were comrades in the true essence of comrades. Where people were prepared to die for you. To, to give their life for you. You enter a house, you don't even know the people. They were eager to accept you, they would give you a place to sleep... and a plate of food to eat, even if it's the last plate of food in the house they will give it to you... You're fighting for what they could not have fought for in those years. And they were proud of you. They were our parents, wherever we went... the reception you received from these strangers, that's what built you. Made you strong in the struggle. I mean most of us, our own parents, they never gave us

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with Whitey Jacobs, 12/9/2006, Cape Town

the love we received from the mothers of the struggle or the families of the struggle themselves.<sup>122</sup>

I was always a nobody now I'm somebody. People listen when I speak... all of a sudden everybody's looking at me because I partake.<sup>123</sup>

In Guguletu contacting youth activists who were not involved in the more politicised leadership was difficult. However, the work of Schärf and Ngcokoto looking at the emergence of people's courts in the Lagunya townships confirms that similar dynamics of belonging, status and purpose were generated amongst the out of school youth in Guguletu:

[Comrade] was the term appropriated by most young people... particularly the newer recruits who, until quite recently had been shunned by organizations [sic]. Finding a legitimate "organizational" home, and acquiring the powerful status of "comrade" at this time of heightened expectations, could only enhance their sense of power.<sup>124</sup>

Furthermore, this sense of purpose was based on the undermining of existing status distinctions. They identified in youth activism an 'anti- intellectualism' and a belief in equality regardless of education which suggests a desire amongst militant youth activists to overturn a social order which offered little in favour of a more utopian, and egalitarian future.<sup>125</sup>

Youth politics was driven by the limited life chances of African and coloured youth who saw little hope in a future defined by education. However, unlike student politics, which built on existing organisation, youth organisation and repertoires were transformed by the unrest. The role of pre-existing above ground organisation was therefore less significant than in student politics, though its role in

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with member of the BWM 1, Anonymous

<sup>123</sup> Interview with member of the BWM 2, Anonymous

<sup>124</sup> Schärf, W and Ngcokoto, B, 'Images of punishment in the People's Courts of Cape Town 1985-7 - from Prefigurative Justice to Populist Violence' in (eds.) Manganyi, C and Du Toit, A, Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa, (London, 1990), p.352

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

laying the ideological groundwork which underpinned the unrest was not insignificant.

However, the commitment to revolutionary violence amongst the youth draws focus onto the role of the military underground at this time. During this period the ANC often claimed responsibility for the myriad forms of unrest that were developing. Similarly, activists saw their actions as representing the wishes of the banned political movements. There were also clear links between the ANC underground and many of the key figures in youth politics at this time. During 1986 in Guguletu people with links into MK attended CAYCO meetings and people were recruited via this route. Similarly, the key figures in the BMW, Anton Fransch and Andrew November, left the country to join MK in exile.

However, whilst many people have argued the underground played a central role in events its relation to action was complex. Barrell argues that in exile the ANC was unable to exert much control over activists within the country. Instead the ANC was an organisation with links into scattered military units, but lacking coherent internal structures to link these cells together, and to coordinate political and military activities.<sup>126</sup> This interpretation closely reflects the picture in the two case studies. There was little centralised ANC command, but there were a growing number of activists who came within the orbit of ANC aligned networks and through the growing exposure to propaganda, military tactics and on occasion arms, these activists became integrated within underground networks that played an increasing, if often ad hoc, role in escalating violence and unrest.

The ANC in exile had little role in directing events within the province. Underground structures that would have allowed the coordination of unrest did not exist in Cape Town in late 1985. Indeed, even in 1987 unified command structures that could effectively relay information and command activists city-wide were not

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<sup>126</sup> Barrell, H, Conscripts to their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy 1976-1986, PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1993, Chapter eight. Accessed at: [http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/thesis/barrel\\_thesis/index](http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/thesis/barrel_thesis/index).

fully functioning. For example, in July 1987 MK cadre Ashley Kriel was shot dead by police. However, despite training in exile he did not link into an underground support network when he returned; instead, he moved into the house of a former teacher, who was a known supporter of progressive politics but was not an MK operative and herself questioned why her house had been chosen.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, the development of strategies and tactics during the unrest period was not a result of instructions from underground activists, but emerged from the interpretation of proclamations made by ANC leaders outside the country by internal activists. Activists in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel recall how a major guide for action was the annual January the 8<sup>th</sup> statement issued by the ANC in exile. This statement was analysed in workshops and on the back of these discussions programmes of action were developed.<sup>128</sup> One activist from Bonteheuwel explained how the linkages between statements in exile and conditions on the ground worked in practice. After the ANC's call for ungovernability, activists within Bonteheuwel sought ways to provoke violence and encourage people to attack symbols of the state. However the actions they undertook were not directly commanded by underground ANC cadres:

[W]e would have a march and we would consciously direct the march past a known policeman's house, or town councillor's house. And when we reached there the call would go out... The situation was so volatile you could say one word within that crowd and that's the last word. And that person's house would go up in flames... We were basically operating from the word that came through. It wasn't specific instruction what to do. But the word came through to make the area ungovernable.<sup>129</sup>

Because the ANC in exile did not have formal route-ways into communities and organisations the ANC as a formal organisation had a limited role in developing unrest and militant youth politics. However, the ANC's iconography and its very existence had a key role to play in militant youth politics (and politics

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<sup>127</sup> Focus Group with BMW Activists Undertaken by Salma Ishmael

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Student activist, 28/8/2006, Cape Town, Interview with Henrietta Abrahams, 24/8/2006, Guguletu ; Coloured activist, off the record comments.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Gary Holtzman, 13/2/2008, Vriedendall

in general in the two case studies). Indeed, it was the fluidity of the ANC as it existed on the ground that helped create a context within which militant politics could flourish.

Far from weakening anti-state action the fluidity of messages and the lack of clearly defined underground command structures allowed different people to pursue different forms of activism without having a single approach placed upon them. It also allowed individuals to build networks, and consequently the ANC, without needing to be formally linked into exile. Trial evidence and interviews with ANC activists during this period reveal just how complex and shifting the ANC structures in the province were. Anwar Dramat, a Bonteheuwel activist convicted of ANC activities, provided evidence at his trial that sketched out the nature of political violence in the township and its dynamic relationship with the underground political movements. In his evidence he described how as a result of his involvement in the school unrest he formed a 'mobile unit' along with several others of the accused. This mobile unit came out of the need to create a more structured and disciplined response to the constant police repression and operated as a form of underground cell:

At that time there were various mobile units in the area or groups which – activities [were] normally building barricades and so forth but I had a particular problem in the way that it was done is that it was done openly. Police could usually pinpoint who the people were and for this reason I thought in joining a mobile unit but using underground tactics.<sup>130</sup>

During its early inception this mobile unit, which drew in other activists tried alongside Dramat, did not undertake underground military activities, instead being involved in things like spray painting slogans. However, as the situation developed and arms became available it became involved in undertaking limpet mine attacks. Interestingly, at no point was there a clear turning point where Dramat moved from above ground activities to underground military actions; instead his activities

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<sup>130</sup> Ashley Forbes Trial, UCTMA, pp.2391-2401

escalated along a continuum which saw him move from manning barricades to receiving and using arms smuggled into the country.<sup>131</sup>

Whilst this mobile unit emerged as a semi-organic response to the ongoing unrest in the townships, its members were quickly drawn into linkages with the ANC underground. However, these linkages were not into clear command structures but the joining up of often long and complex chains of activists, many of whom had no experience of exile or formal contacts with the ANC outside the country. Further evidence from the trial demonstrated how joining the ANC often involved simply being asked by somebody who saw themselves as a member. There was no universal process of scrutiny and no membership records. Niclo Pedro, who was closely involved with Dramat, described how his recruitment into the ANC involved just being asked:

[W]e spoke quite regularly about the ANC. Now when he approached me, he basically said that he is an ANC member and he asked me, I mean do I want to become an ANC member and I said yes and I trusted his words. Now I think that is – joining the ANC.<sup>132</sup>

The simplicity of the act of joining the ANC, combined with a lack of clear command structures, provided an organisational context which allowed diffuse networks to spread. Once recruited an individual could recruit additional members without permission from elsewhere. By providing an organisational framework, and collective identity, within which individuals could forge their own networks and use these networks to undertake actions in the name of the ANC, the considerable militancy that was being precipitated by the unrest could be harnessed. It was this which underlay the growth of underground political action in this period in the city, rather than an influx of MK activists sent or commanded by the ANC in exile:

One particular guy comes to... one area. And he meets with one or two leadership people from that particular area. And he give the message to them and they start

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p.2028, (Niclo Pedro evidence), pp. 2196-8



spreading the message to other leaders in the areas. And they start forming their own thing individually among a group of people, say two, three, four, five... So this is how it went on. And that is where most of us came to find out a lot of things. What we need, what the areas needs, and what we lack and what needs to be done.<sup>133</sup>

The actions of the CAYCO youth and the BMW both broadly reflect this pattern. The BMW were led by activists who were selected by leaders within Bonteheuwel to push militant action. Once brought within the ideological and organisational space owned, at least rhetorically, by the ANC these activists themselves went out and brought other people within their organisation. Their organisation then grew and, perhaps as importantly, was able to continue even after its initial founders had moved into exile. Similarly, in Guguletu ANC rhetoric and the proclamations of ANC activists within the community created a context within which the militant youth undertook violent action (sometimes beyond the control of these same activists; sometimes supported by them) in the name of the military underground and liberation.

Overall, therefore, youth politics in the mid-1980s was characterised first by action and subsequently by organisation. Consequently it cannot be seen as an organised response by the banned political movements. However, organisation was still crucial. Specifically, the existence of activists and networks in the two communities which were willing and able to engage with a more radical and revolutionary style and rhetoric of politics was crucial to the development and sustenance of youth militancy. In Bonteheuwel key activists were willing to support and encourage violent action, and themselves became drawn into underground structures. Similarly, in Guguletu CAYCO activists pushed militant and revolutionary rhetoric which supported the actions of the radical youth.

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<sup>133</sup> Interview with Civic & UDF activist & underground MK operative (2), 29/6/2006, Bonteheuwel

## 5.5. Conclusions: Race, Class and the Myth of Youth Revolt

Whilst the picture that emerges from a cursory glance at progressive organisation and activism in the mid-1980s is of a youth in revolt, this chapter has shown how such an interpretation misreads the fundamental dynamics driving activism. Whilst adults continued to be disengaged from progressive political action this was not simply a revolt of young people. Behind the progressive action of 1985-7 in Cape Town sat two distinct protests, patterned by the operation of apartheid's political economy.

The shift to revolt took place as organisations organised protest and the state repressed. Networks that had strengthened links between activists and communities over the preceding five years then provided the mechanisms through which protest was spread, organised and understood. Yet this diffusion of protest did not occur uniformly. It interacted with the complex patterning of race and class in the city to produce two separate, if overlapping revolts. Increasing numbers of students in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel were experiencing curtailed life chances under apartheid and this led to the demands of student activists achieving considerable salience, particularly as repression opened political space and created conflict. Similarly, within the broader youth population, which did not share the same aspirations as school activists, the explosion of unrest created opportunities for status, belonging and the promise of a better future.

This led to the development of a student politics focused on education for liberation and a youth politics focused on liberation before education. Educated activists opposed apartheid because of the ceiling it placed on their current and future advancement; they therefore developed a form of activism that allowed for continued educational achievement alongside demands for transformation. The importance of personal achievement was clearly revealed in the different nuances between student politics in the two cases, which reflected their different experiences

of apartheid discrimination; African students sought improved schooling quality, whilst coloured students sought better opportunities beyond the classroom. In contrast, youth activists were driven by rising unemployment and a desire for an egalitarian future in which their current disadvantage would be overturned; when they supported liberation before education they were not simply articulating a tactic, they were also expressing the fact that for them education could not provide liberation.

## Chapter Six

# From Conflict to Negotiation: Five Transitions amidst the Shifting Terrain of Progressive Activism 1988-1994

### 6.1. Introduction

The second state of emergency, declared on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1986, marked a watershed in internal opposition to apartheid. Public meetings were banned, grassroots organisations restricted and many of their members interned. By 1988 the UDF and many of its affiliates were decimated.<sup>1</sup> In this climate few people would have expected that within two years Nelson Mandela would be free and the African political parties unbanned. However, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February South Africa's new President, F.W. DeKlerk, announced these actions and by 1994 all South Africans were voting in the country's first non-racial elections.

Accompanying the move from revolt in 1986 to democracy in 1994 was a transformation in local civil society. The state of emergency removed the space within which organisations could operate and as space started reopened from 1989 it did so alongside a growing centrality of political organisation and negotiation. This was implicit throughout 1989 when it was becoming increasingly clear that a negotiated settlement would take place, and explicit after the unbanning of the African political movements in 1990.

This chapter examines civil society during this transition period, asking how and why civil society changed in the two case studies. In doing this it broadly accepts the view, put forward in a range of studies, that the opening of political

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<sup>1</sup> Seekings, J, The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991, (2000, Cape Town), p.231

space led to a movement of activists from civil to political society and a corresponding decline in grassroots activism. However, it also expands these interpretations. In Cape Town not all civil society organisations declined, indeed the student movement remained strong and the civic movement underwent a rapid expansion. Furthermore, whilst activists moved into political society this process was not uniform; many activists abandoned progressive politics completely whilst others who had moved out of organising in the mid 1980 became re-engaged. These differential reactions to the same national political transformation mean it is impossible to argue that shifting opportunities alone were responsible for the fate of civil society during the transition.

Instead, this chapter argues that to understand the differing trajectories of activism it is necessary not simply to understand changes in political opportunities at a general level; it is also necessary to understand how they interact with, and are mediated by, the local political and socio-economic context. As Oberschall argues, political opportunities are just one of several different dimensions that need to be understood when considering why people act collectively; with the other dimensions not only including the material and ideological resources available to organisations, but also the 'basic conditions of life' most likely to produce discontent.<sup>2</sup>

It identifies three broad changes that were experienced across the case studies, but which led to different reactions amongst different organisations. These are: 1) the shifting loci of politics from the local to national level as a result of the move to national political negotiations; 2) the increase in legal political space for civil and political society; 3) shifting patterns of resource distribution as the state sought partners through which to administer its black population. These transformations encouraged some forms of activism and discouraged others. They

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<sup>2</sup> Oberschall, A, *Social Movements: Ideologies, Interest and Identities*, (London, 1995), p.17. For an international, comparative, study of how political opportunities are mediated by the nature of inequality in different countries see: Schock, K, 'A Conjunctural Model of Political Conflict: The Impact of Political Opportunities on the Relationship between Economic Inequality and Violent Political Conflict', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 30/1, 1996, p.128

also provided opportunities for some activists, whilst removing opportunities from others. Youth activists who had flowed into the progressive during unrest became disengaged as activism no longer offered the chance for empowerment and radical transformation through militant action, whilst educated activists thrived as they were better able to engage with the demands of transitional organisation building. Adults who had previously avoided involvement were drawn into organisation as the state sought partners to build legitimacy and resources flowed through organisations that had previously been driven by political concerns. The only organisation not to be radically transformed by the initial transition was the student movement in the African areas, which due to the severity of the schooling crisis continued to campaign on schooling issues.

This chapter starts by outlining current understandings of the transition in literature. It then discusses the broad changes that took place within progressive organisation and activism between 1998 and 1994. Finally, it focuses on five specific transitions within civil society to show how the unbanning interacted with the broader structural context to create differing responses to the opening of political space. These transitions are: the collapse of youth politics; the growth of factionalism within Bonteheuwel; the continued strength of the African student movement; the growth of civic activism in African communities and the collapse in support amongst coloureds for progressive politics. It shows how, in each transition, the same broad dynamics were experienced, but that their intersection with local traditions of activism, historical experience, and the local political economy to create different responses. These responses reflected not just national political change, but were firmly rooted in the local experience.

### **6.1.1. Current Literature and Argument**

Specific focus on the impact of the transition on civil society has been less prominent in studies of transition that debates about the appropriate role that civil society

should play/have played within the process of democratisation and afterwards.<sup>3</sup>

However, several studies have sought to outline how and why transition impacted on anti-apartheid activism and civil society. Broadly these discussions deal with two key dynamics. Firstly, they focus on changing political opportunities within the country and the way that political transition affected organisation. Secondly, they focus on the decline in social compression within the black communities and the declining social base of activism.

With regards to political opportunities, there is a widespread acceptance that the movement of activists from civil society into political society served to weaken many progressive organisations as people could openly organise for their political aims and therefore neglected local organisation building.<sup>4</sup> This is most universally accepted in terms of the youth and women's movements which collapsed themselves to form the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) and reflected by the relatively limited focus in academic studies on the impact of transition on these organisations.

However the broader impact on civil society is more contested. Drawing on the movement of activists from civil society into political organisations, the focus on national political transition rather than people's immediate concerns, and a growing focus on leadership, rather than democratic decision making, some of the more simplistic analyses of this period see the transition as representing a large scale demobilisation of civil society as politics shifted from being based in mass action to elitist deals and civil society ceased to concern itself with political change. As Neocosmos argues:

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<sup>3</sup> For a summary of some of these debates see: Glaser, D, 'South Africa and the Limits of Civil Society', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23/1, 1997, pp.5-25

<sup>4</sup> Seekings, J, *The UDF...*, p.284; Neocosmos, M, 'From Peoples' politics to State Politics: Aspects of National Liberation in South Africa', in (ed.) Olukoshi, A, *The Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa*, (Uppsala, 1998), p.213; Seekings, J, *After Apartheid: Civic Organisations in the 'New' South Africa*, in (eds.) Adler, G, & Steinberg, J, *From Comrades to Citizens: The South African Civics Movement and the Transition to Democracy*, (Basingstoke, 2000) p.207; Lanegran, K, 'South Africa's Civic Association Movement: ANC's Ally or Society's "Watchdog"? Shifting Social Movement-Political Party Relations', *African Studies Review*, 38/2, 1995, pp. 101-126;

[T]he period 1990-1994 was, in South Africa, largely... characterised by a process of popular demobilisation as an elitist deal was struck behind closed doors... While whatever popular structures that remained were largely destroyed through systematic, state-inspired violence.<sup>5</sup>

Although there is certainly much truth in this narrative of demobilisation the decline of civil society was not absolute, nor was it driven solely by a growing elitism within politics. Even in the case of the women's movement, which did move directly into the fold of liberation politics, Hassim demonstrates how, by focusing on influencing the national constitutional negotiations, activists were able to influence the nature of the post-apartheid settlement. In this way continuity in aims was achieved, making the break between civil and political society appear somewhat more artificial.<sup>6</sup>

More significantly for this thesis, at the local level the unbanning and negotiations did not always lead to a decline in activism. Rather activism was on occasion transformed. Most widely considered within studies of transition has been the fate of the civic movement including both individual civics and the fate of the South African National Civic Association (SANCO) which was launched in 1992. Interpretations vary. In one paper Zuern identifies the high point of civic activism in 1990 and argues, in a similar vein to Neocosmos, that the growth of political society squeezed out civil society, although civics did still continue to operate:

During the transition period, the existing state structures and the developing opposition political party structures increasingly squeezed the space for civic action. In this tighter space, civics found their own choices increasingly limited as they attempted to continue to champion the goals of popular democracy defined during the pre-transition period.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Neocosmos, M, 'From Peoples' politics...', p.199.

<sup>6</sup> Hassim, S, Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority, (Madison, 2005)

<sup>7</sup> Zuern, W, 'South Africa's Civics in Transition: Agents of Change or Structures of Constraint?', *Politikon*, 28/1, 2001, pp.5-20, p.9



In keeping with this view Zuern sees the ability of civics to engage in local negotiations as highest in 1990 and falling rapidly after this as 'government actors assumed greater control of local negotiation processes.' However she also makes the interesting point that just because national changes were closing down political space for the civics this did not necessarily mean that locally these changes would be recognised and acted upon by the civics.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to Zuern both Cherry et al and Lanegran see the early 1990s as representing a moment of expanding opportunity for the civics. Lanegran provides a periodisation of civic activism that sees the civics, until 1993, seeking to create an autonomous space for themselves aside from the ANC, albeit simultaneously supporting many of its aims. She focuses on the numerous local negotiations that took place in spite of both SANCO and the ANC's calls for all local government negotiations to be undertaken nationally to argue that the civics were actually asserting their autonomy.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Cherry et al see within the collapse of local government from 1989 and local government's desire for partners, opportunities for the civics during transition. They therefore locate the decline of civic activism not solely within transition, but in the period after democratisation as people gained increasing faith in political society (an issue which will be discussed in the next chapter).<sup>10</sup>

The second explanation of post-apartheid transformation sees change not simply as a result of the changing opportunities for organisations *vis a vis* political society but also within changes to the social base of anti-apartheid activism. Van Kessel, writing about the civic movement in Katlehong, notes that to be successful community organisations depended upon a lack of social differentiation interacting

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.14

<sup>9</sup> Lanegran, K, 'South Africa's Civic Association...'

<sup>10</sup> Cherry, J, Jones, K & Seekings, J, 'Democratisation and Politics in South African Townships' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24/4, 2000, pp.889-905, p.890. See also, Seekings, J, 'Civic Organisations in South African Townships', in (eds.) Moss, G. & Obery, I. South African Review 6, (Johannesburg, 1992) and Adler G & Steinberg, J, 'Introduction: From Comrades to Citizens', in (eds.) Adler G & Steinberg, J, From Comrades to Citizens: The South African Civics Movement and the Transition to Democracy, (Basingstoke, 2000), p.10

with repression and disenfranchisement to create mobilisation. Consequently, as society became more fragmented, state repression eased and political change came onto the horizon, people became less likely to organise as communities and more likely to organise along the basis of social class.<sup>11</sup>

Overall the picture presented in current literature on South Africa in transition is of a radical change in political opportunities and a growing socio-economic differentiation amongst the black population. The analysis presented here does not radically depart from the broad focus within current literature on political opportunities. It would be remarkable if such a radical change as the unbanning of the African political movements did not have a massive impact on a civil society that had always been focused in part on political issues.

However, what it will also show is that the impact of these political changes was mediated at the local level by the same complex terrain of racial and class divisions that had influenced civil society over the preceding fifteen years. The five transitions examined all demonstrate how the same national and regional context, was experienced differently by South Africans as a result of their position within the apartheid political economy. The collapse of youth politics demonstrates how the shift from local to national negotiations simultaneously stripped the youth movement of its most effective leaders whilst creating a repertoire of activism foreign to the lived experience of the youth that had been active in the mid-1980s. The development of factionalism within Bonteheuwel shows how the growing allocation of resources through political society combined with shifting repertoires of activism to create conflict over which form of activism (democratic organisation building or a history of militant sacrifice) was most worthy of post-apartheid reward. The growth of civic activism in African communities reveals how the need for the state to find partners in administering local government (and distributing resources) led to a rapid expansion in organisation to fill this gap. The continued

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<sup>11</sup> Van Kessel, I, Beyond our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and The Transformation of South Africa, (Charlottesville & London, 2000), pp.151-2

strength of the African student movement reveals how political change could have only limited impact on activism when there was considerable, and ongoing, hardship as represented by the continued crisis of the schooling system in the province. Finally, the collapse in support amongst coloureds for progressive politics demonstrates the importance of the legacy of coloured preference policies and the continuing relevance of apartheid's differential discrimination to people's lives and political choices. Specifically, coloured disengagement is located in changing patterns of urbanisation and labour market engagement in the province which led to a growing opposition to non-racial politics by coloureds threatened by these changes, and in a shift from local to national politics and the creation of a progressive political culture that was focused on the concerns of Africans and failed (in part because structural cleavages made it highly problematic to do so) to articulate a coherent vision for political transformation that could resonate with the coloured experience.

## **6.2. Civil Society in South Africa and Cape Town: 1988-1994**

Between 1988 and 1994 local civil society across South Africa underwent considerable transformation. Within this three broad periods can be located: 1) 1988, when resistance and organisation saw a marked decline as a result of the state of emergency; 2) 1989-1990, the re-emergence of organisation and activism around acts of defiance to the restrictions introduced by the regime; 3) 1990-1994, the return to the country of the banned political movements and negotiations towards a political settlement.

In 1988 most local organisations which had been so strong during the insurrectionary period of the mid-1980s had ceased to function effectively. Public meetings were banned, large numbers of activists were in detention and those

activists still free were either restricted through banning orders or were in hiding from the police. The UDF had ceased to operate effectively and mass action based on public meetings and local grassroots organisation fell away. Defiance became more personal and the trade unions and churches began to play an increasing role. Protests such as stayaways and rent boycotts replaced mass marches and insurrection.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst 1988 was a low point in internal opposition, it saw the forging of the alliances that allowed the re-emergence of protest. The growing importance of the trade union movement saw increased cooperation by the UDF with its activists. In May 1988 a special COSATU conference was called at which UDF and trade unionists agreed to hold three days of 'peaceful national protest'. The stayaway called to accompany this was supported on its first day by between 2.5 and 3 million workers.<sup>13</sup> From late 1988 internal organisation began to slowly re-emerge and campaigns, such as that against the 1988 municipal elections, started to revitalise internal opposition. Then, in mid-1989, the Mass Democratic Movement (the term adopted for the alliance between the UDF and COSATU) called for a nationwide campaign of defiance against apartheid. Restricted organisations declared themselves unbanned and held mass meetings. Activists invaded white only beaches and attended white only hospitals to demand treatment. Large scale marches also took place across major cities.

The impact of this upswing on local civil society was complex and uneven. The growth in mass organising clearly relied, at least in part, upon the efforts of local activists and from mid-1989 Seekings identifies growing actions by the civic movement as a result of the defiance campaign.<sup>14</sup> However, the opposition of the late 1980s was very different to that of the mid-1980's. Whilst earlier activism had been planned and implemented locally, around local issues, by the late 1980s

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<sup>12</sup> Seekings, J, The UDF..., p.231; Lodge, T & Nasson, B, All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s, (London, 1991), p.114

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Seekings, J, 'Civic Organisations...', pp.223-5; Seekings, J, 'After Apartheid...', p.205

regional and national leaders had assumed the central role and the forms of action being undertaken, such as mass marches and beach invasions, did not rely upon tight networks of local organisation. As Lodge says:

In contrast to the mid-1980s, when the insurrectionary movement was being pulled onto uncharted courses by cadres of youth in the streets of the townships, the popular protest in the late 1980s was choreographed and coordinated and seemed much more under the control of its leaders.<sup>15</sup>

If the late 1980s represented a new, more national, stage in progressive politics the unbanning of the African political movements transformed civil society again. Yet, this was not a uniform process, with different elements of civil society reacting differently. Some civil society movements, most notably the civics, expanded as their activities were no longer restricted. Indeed in several areas, most notably Soweto, civic organisations began to engage in direct discussions with the all-white local authorities and conclude agreements on service provision and rental arrears.<sup>16</sup> This new found strength was compounded in 1992 when SANCO was launched as a national umbrella body representing the vast majority of civics nationwide. In other cases, the growing prominence of the political movements led to the collapsing of organisations which had previously been central to internal opposition into the newly unbanned political movements with the formation of the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL). Finally, the early 1990s also saw an escalation of conflict within African communities as so-called 'black on black' violence reached levels unseen even in the heyday of the insurrectionary 1980s. This was most notable in the conflict between Inkatha and ANC supporters in Kwa Zulu, Natal and the Transvaal which claimed thousands of lives as people fought for control of territory in townships and hostels.

Broadly transformations in Cape Town followed a similar pattern to those elsewhere in the country. The state of emergency decimated activism; the opening

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<sup>15</sup> Lodge, T & Nasson, B, All, Here, and Now ..., p.114

<sup>16</sup> Seekings, J, The UDF..., pp.257-8

of political space from 1989 allowed for an expansion of organisation; the unbanning of the African political movements decapitated some organisations and provided space for others. However, within this broader narrative different movements had different experience reflecting the complex patterning of race and class in the City.

Like elsewhere the second state of emergency had a devastating impact on civil society in both the Western Cape and the two case studies. Large numbers of activists were detained or went on the run and organisations could no longer meet publicly. This decline was widespread. As noted in chapter five the civic movement was far from active in both communities before the unrest. By 1988 this collapse was complete. In Bonteheuwel the civic association was no longer being run by progressive activists and instead was being run by people with links to the local Labour Party.<sup>17</sup> In Guguletu the ban on public meetings led to the effective collapse of the civic. As the chair of the Guguletu branch of the WCCA said:

You see there was a year when all the organisations were banned. Even civic organisations. All groupings were banned. So we couldn't hold meetings. Because we couldn't hold meetings, I couldn't go on with the civic association.<sup>18</sup>

The Women and youth movements also suffered as a result of the emergency; although the main impact of the repression was to transform the way they operated, rather than causing their complete collapse. In Bonteheuwel there had never been an effective women's organisation. Yet in Guguletu the United Women's Congress (UWCO), formed from the merger of UWO with the Women's Front Organisation, had continued to function. However, with the second emergency UWCO in Guguletu transformed from an organisation based on mass action to become a semi-underground organisation run by activists in hiding. Meetings were organised through a checkpoint system with locations announced at the last minute to prevent informing. Whilst these precautions allowed UWCO to

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Civic and SANCO activist (1), 7/3/2006, Bonteheuwel.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Basil Stuurman, 31/9/2006, Guguletu

keep operating, they removed the mass base of the organisation, restricting participation to activists linked into existing networks:

‘Naturally people took cover... So [under the] state of emergency... the structured way of organisations meeting suffered... we were trying by all means not to expose those who haven’t been exposed already... So [only] those who are known will meet.’<sup>19</sup>

CAYCO in Guguletu also suffered as many of its central activists were detained. Just like UWCO its activists moved away from holding mass meetings, with one member reporting that during the emergency they tended to work in small ‘units’ of around five people.<sup>20</sup> The impact of the emergency on CAYCO as a regional structure was revealed in a retrospective assessment by the organisation, undertaken in 1990, which remarked:

We were restricted on 23 February 1988 and since then we had to endure continuous harassment, detentions and even the killing of some of our members. The restrictions had a telling effect on us and we were almost reduced from a political youth organisation to an “administrative youth club”. Many of our leadership figures were detained or scared of being detained for the whole of last year... Our political programme of action could never really be implemented because of constant repressions.<sup>21</sup>

Similar transformations were taking place within Bonteheuwel. By 1988 the BMW had been broken by police arrests. More generally, many activists had been detained and for those who remained it was increasingly difficult to meet. One member of the Bonteheuwel UDF Area Committee remembered how under the state of emergency, ‘We had no organisation left. We had to restructure all our

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Nomaindia Mfeketo, 3/8/2006, Parow

<sup>20</sup> It is particularly difficult to uncover the activities of CAYCO during the emergency as it operated as a semi-clandestine organisation and as the state of emergency developed it was pushed increasingly underground. Taken with the ban on reporting unrest the detention of a lot of key activists at this time and difficulties of locating activists to interview this has led to very little data from which to draw conclusions. This makes it difficult to draw a conclusive picture of the organisation under the unrest. However it is certainly the case that mass public organising had fallen away by 1988 as a result of the emergency. Interview with CAYCO youth activist and branch executive member, 24/8/2006, Guguletu

<sup>21</sup> ‘CAYCO Special General Council Annual Report: 15 July 1990’ 2p., typed, A4, ss, MA, MCH51, 2.2.2.3, p.1

organisations.<sup>22</sup> This led to the Area Committee, which had been established to coordinate progressive organisations, becoming the instigator of actions on its own. For example, one activist recalled how the Area Committee started to organise pamphlet production and distribution without any direct involvement of its affiliates, as the same activist said: 'the area committee became the organisation.'<sup>23</sup>

However, whilst most activism was repressed during 1988 organisation continued in two areas – the schools and, outside the focus of this thesis, the squatter communities. Although not replicating its earlier intensity organisation and low level conflict between the students, authorities and police continued despite the emergency. WECSCO was able to organise effective city-wide protests during 1988 including on the 18<sup>th</sup> April a day of protest at which 'students protested against the hanging of the Sharpeville Six; the locking out of students and the dismissal of teachers and the continued detention of students and teachers.'<sup>24</sup> Students also supported the three-day April stayaway. The African high schools 'stood empty for three days as pupils and teachers displayed their protest' whilst 'Hundreds of pupils in DEC [coloured] schools were absent from school'.<sup>25</sup> The two case studies were amongst the most active in their respective communities. Of the twenty two schools which had stayaways in support of WECSCO's April day of protest all four Guguletu schools (Fezeka, I.D. Mkhize, Sizamile and the Guguletu comprehensive) were represented. Equally, the three Bonteheuwel were amongst ten schools who staged walk outs later in the day.<sup>26</sup> Protest was mirrored in continuing organisation. The coordinated response to WECSCO's day of action reveals regional school structures able to undertake coordinated action. This picture was reflected in the case studies. Schools in Bonteheuwel were able to coordinate protests across the

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with BISCO activist (1), Claremont, 13/6/2006

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> 'Education Report: Background Report to the Education Crisis', 8p., typed, ss, n.d A4, MA, MCH78-2, folder 'other orgs', p.3

<sup>25</sup> 'Thousands Stay Away', *Learning Roots*, 4/4, June 1988

<sup>26</sup> 'Education Report...', p.4



township in the run up to the elections in October. 1988.<sup>27</sup> In Guguletu the Joint SRCs were linking into city wide support networks such as the Unrest Monitoring Action Committee where they were providing regular reports of unrest in the schools to the organisation.<sup>28</sup>

In Cape Town the defiance campaign was launched at the funerals of the ANC activists Robbie Waterwitch and Coline Williams who were killed in July 1989 by what many people suspect was a booby trapped limpet mine. At their funeral the ANC and SACP flags were flown and high profile figures spoke in contravention of their banning orders. The campaign rapidly escalated. The scale of the defiance campaign was revealed by the Repression Monitoring Group which in September 1989 recorded 1120 arrests, 43 detentions, 567 injuries and 20 deaths in the greater Cape Town area.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September around 60,000 people marched in central Cape Town to protest at deaths that had occurred during protests against elections to the Tricameral Parliament.<sup>30</sup> The Western Cape UDF was able to reopen its office and organise an AGM.<sup>31</sup>

However, it would be wrong to automatically associate the success of the defiance campaign with a large scale rebirth in grassroots organisations. The defiance campaign was based on public, high profile events, which could be called by leaders and did not rely upon tight-knit organisation. Indeed ongoing organisational weakness was recognised by figures within progressive politics. Dullah Omar, writing in late 1989, dismissed criticism of the campaign for not focusing upon organisation as 'unreasonable' given the prevailing circumstances.

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<sup>27</sup> UMAC, 'Report on UMAC Visit to Modderdam High School on Fri 21 Oct 1988', 2p., typed, ss, A4, UCTMA, UMAC Collection, D3.4

<sup>28</sup> UMAC, 'UMAC Visit to Guguletu Comprehensive School Monday 29 Aug 1988', 3p., handwritten, ds, A4, UCTMA, UMAC Collection, D3.4

<sup>29</sup> Repression Monitoring Group, 'The Week That Was', 13, 21<sup>st</sup> May – 27<sup>th</sup> May 1990, 2p., typed, A4, MA, MCH78-2, folder 'RMG', p.1

<sup>30</sup> Repression Monitoring Group, 'The Week That Was', 13, 21<sup>st</sup> May – 27<sup>th</sup> May 1990, 2p., typed, A4, MA, MCH78-2, folder 'RMG', p.2

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.1

However, he saw the main task of the MDM moving forward to 'consolidate and organise' through building grassroots organisations and trade unions.<sup>32</sup>

In Bonteheuwel the defiance campaign appears to have had an impact on organising. Towards the end of 1989 the civic association was 'taken back' by progressive activists, although the extent to which this led to new campaigns is not clear.<sup>33</sup> However, more generally organisation appears not to have recovered. The funeral of Anton Fransch, an ANC guerrilla who had been a key figure in youth politics in Bonteheuwel during the unrest of the mid-1980s as both a member of CAYCO and a founder of the BMW, reveals the organisational weakness in the township. Anton was killed on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 1989 after a 7 hour fire fight with police. In the immediate aftermath of his death a Committee was established to organise and coordinate the funeral. This committee was able to produce 125,000 pamphlets and thousands of posters.<sup>34</sup> However, organisational participation was limited. The initial meeting establishing the funeral committee was 'very poorly attended' and had to be postponed to the next morning, 'at which several organisations, mainly youth, were present.'<sup>35</sup> Even those organisations that were nominally functioning had returned to the relatively low levels of participation seen before the unrest, with the Bonteheuwel youth reporting membership of between 25 and 40.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast organisation in Guguletu did grow. By late 1989 there were 11 CAYCO branches in the township region, and whilst some were reported as weak, several were reported to be strong. These branches were meeting monthly in a township wide structure for 'administration and political education', held July 16<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Omar, D, 'After Mass Defiance – What?', 9p., typed, A4, ss, n.d. (October 1989), MA, MCH254-5, folder 'minutes/records October 1989'

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Civic and SANCO activist (1), Bonteheuwel, 7/3/2006; focus group with Bonteheuwel civic activists, Bonteheuwel, 10/11/2005

<sup>34</sup> Anton Fransch Funeral Committee, 'Media Report', 2p., handwritten, ss, A4, November 1989, MA, MCH245, p.2

<sup>35</sup> N.D., 'Introductory Report: by Funeral Com. Co-ordinator', 3p., handwritten, ss, A4, November 1989, MA, MCH245, p.2

<sup>36</sup> SAYCO, 'Township Regional Report', 7p., A4, SS, MA, n.d. (Late 1989 or January 1990), MCH51, p.4, 2.2.8.7.1.1, p.25

celebrations and were raising money through gumbas and cultural events. A campaign against gangsterism that saw youth activists patrolling the streets and violently punishing suspected gangsters was also launched, and was particularly well supported.<sup>37</sup> The UDF area committee started meeting more regularly and alongside CAYCO representative from UWCO, the Young Christian Students and the Western Cape Student's Congress were all involved in its meetings by late 1989.<sup>38</sup>

More generally student politics remained well organised and active, despite growing tensions in the African townships over whether students should continue to be organised solely through the Joints SRCS or whether political student organisations were more appropriate. These debates broadly split on ideological lines with Congress aligned students arguing in favour of the move to political organising and students supporting a one-stage socialist perspective against.<sup>39</sup> The congress activists ultimately won out, despite heated debates within the schools, and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1989 the Township Students' Congress (TOSCO) was launched in Guguletu.<sup>40</sup> However, in spite of these tensions the Western Cape student movement continued to stand out for its effective organisation:

[T]he repression wave of 1986-9 has restricted the activities of our organisation and consequently the potential problems within black education – founded upon the NECC's strategy of building democratic structures (SRCs, PTSAs) on the ground which we believed would translate into a maturation of parent-teacher-student relationships and create conditions upon which People's education can be founded – has by and large grounded to a halt in most parts of the country, with the notable exception, the Western Cape.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 'Township Regional Report', 14p., handwritten, ss & ds, A5 notebook sheets, MA, n.d. (late 1989), MCH51, 2.2.8.7.1.1

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Student/TOSCO activist, Cape Town, 30/6/2006

<sup>40</sup> Untitled Minutes, UWO Observatory Claremont Branch, 8p., Handwritten, ds, A4, 16/10/89, MCH258, folder 'Minutes/Records October 1989', p.2

<sup>41</sup> '1986-1989 The State of Emergency and the Emergence of a Mass Education Movement', authorless discussion paper, probably from within the NECC, 4p., typed, A4, ds, n.d. (1989), MA, MCH85 Box 3, p.1

However, in spite of the more general growth of organisation in the African communities civic activism did not re-emerge. There are no records of the Western Cape Civic Association functioning before the unbanning and there was no involvement by any progressive civic structure in the campaign against gangsterism, despite it being a clearly civic issue. Instead CAYCO, and at times other organisations, such as the Lakhagunya action committee which was linked to a community councillor and involved the SADF in its activities, were left to organise against gangsterism.<sup>42</sup>

With the unbanning of the African political movements both continuity and change in civil society and activism were apparent. The unbanning of the African political movements had a major impact on civil society across the City. At the most basic level the near hegemony of Congress politics amongst activists meant that people who had spent years fighting for the unbanning of the ANC were suddenly able to become members of an organisation which had long been their psychological home. Furthermore, with the unbanning the ANC assumed a crucial role in defining the country's future, a role which local organisations did not, and could not, play. Within this context activists moved into the ANC, leaving local campaigns and civil society behind. This was clearest in the youth and women's movements, which disbanded completely. However it occurred across all organisations and weakened many of those organisations which sought to continue operating. As one activist said:

[People] threw all their energies into building ANC branches. [People were preparing for the upcoming elections and] with that process a number of organisations suffered... organisations were weakened... our people then went into government... So we didn't do proper succession planning... in my mind we were focused on the short term... we weakened our structures.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> IKAPA Town Council Minutes, 'Gangsterism in Townships', 1p., typed, ss, A4, 19/9/1989, CTAR, PACG, vol.42, 3/2/10/3

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Student activist and BISCO executive committee member, 8/5/2006, Kenilworth

This shift into political organisation was intimately linked to the opening of political space and was not so much a rejection of civil society, as a reaction by politicised activists to new opportunities for political involvement. Liberal democratic dichotomies between civil and political society hold little explanatory value in apartheid South Africa where the two were always intimately linked in the minds of activists. With the unbanning political activism was more likely to produce results than local grassroots action and consequently many activists moved into political society. One interviewee clearly articulated this when they argued that any debate around the political nature of the women's movement had been settled back in 1983, when the UDF had been formed:

[F]or the majority of women in the Women's League that debate was started with the establishment of the UDF. That in a long term where do we see ourselves... The view was we see ourselves alongside our men folks. We see ourselves as women participating in something that is going to change this country, and holding key positions... we not just a women's group that is going to play with the nappies and the kids and that. We are a formidable group of people that wants to change, or to participate, in making sure that the policies of this country do what they are supposed to do... Are we going to be a structure that is opposed to the ANC? And we say no, because we want to be the structure that eventually will be part of that policy making.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, the movement of large numbers of activists from civil into political society depended upon the hegemony of political society, particularly the ANC, within discourses of transformation: for people to move into political society they had to believe it held a greater possibility of creating an improved South Africa than organising within civil society. Furthermore, the movement into the ANC depended on a belief amongst progressive activists that the ANC was the political organisation best placed to achieve this transformation. As noted elsewhere, both these beliefs had been commonplace amongst activists throughout the previous decade. However they had not been universal. Multiple ideological tendencies rubbed shoulders and activists were driven by a broad range of motivations, not all of which held political hegemony of the ANC in Pretoria as their ultimate goal. The

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Nomaindia Mfeketo, 3/8/2006, Parow

large scale acceptance of the ANC, therefore, needs further explanation. Two dynamics assisted this change. Firstly the state of emergency strengthened the hand of activists linked into covert networks *vis a vis* more locally based activists. Secondly, actions were taken by Congress activists to built hegemony within civil society organisations.

The increased centralisation of progressive activity as a result of the state of emergency reduced the diversity of progressive activism. As noted earlier meetings became clandestine, mass involvement collapsed and people would only deal with people that they knew and trusted. This scared away all but the most politically committed activists and eroded the mass nature of organisation. Combined with the defiance campaign, which was built through individual linkages rather than in mass organisation, this led to a situation in 1990 when most organisations were dominated by a politicised activist elite. It was this elite that made the key decisions within organisations and it is not surprising that this often led to a neglect of local issues in favour of national political issues (which in turn deterred mass involvement in organisations) .

In turn, this centralisation interacted with, and enabled, moves by Congress activists to entrench ideological hegemony within civil society. This started in the late 1980s with the dissemination of the SACP's theory of National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Diverse ideological positions existed within progressive organisations in the Western Cape, including those that considered themselves loyal to the ANC. However, the late 1980s saw concerted moves to counter this ideological diversity and to draw organisations more firmly under the control of explicitly ANC aligned political leadership. Within Congress aligned organisations moves were made to spread the correct political line. The growing centralisation and enforcement of ideological hegemony is best represented by youth politics in the Western Cape. After the formation of SAYCO in late 1987 one of the central focuses of the organisation became the adoption of a uniform political position

through the youth movement. As one discussion document circulating within congress youth circles during the late 1980's argued:

Our task is to build a dedicated and committed leadership and activist organiser. But whether leaders and activists are good or bad depends in the first place on the political line. Once a line has been worked out; the whole question boils down to how to organise its application. Organisation is the basic measure to ensure the application of the line.<sup>45</sup>

This represented a marked shift from the earlier focus on the community as the source of legitimacy and paved the way for the move from civil society into political society.

In Cape Town this uniformity was created through three mechanisms. Firstly, those organisations which provided educational and organisational support began focusing much of their education on spreading the South African Communist Party's theory of National Democratic Revolution, which argued for a national democratic revolution (i.e. a liberal democratic state) as the first stage in the transition to socialism.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, campaigns were organised nationally to draw youth across the country behind a unified (and political) programme of action. These included a Freedom Charter campaign and a save the patriots campaign based around ANC guerrillas who were on death row. Finally, those youth who would not accept the political line were expelled from the organisations as acceptance of the National Democratic Revolution became the key basis for political involvement.<sup>47</sup>

Alongside building ideological hegemony within Congress aligned organisation, deliberate moves were made to undermine organisations which did not demand ideological uniformity. This is best illustrated in the case of the student

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<sup>45</sup> 'Verslag van Die Noordelik Voorstede Werkswinkel', n.d. 1988/9, MA, Neville Naidoo Collection, 2.2.8.5.11, p.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Voli Maboe CAYCO ET Officer, 'Dear Comrades...', 17/11/1989, 6p., typed, ss, A4, MA, CACE, pp.2-3

<sup>47</sup> A group of one stage theorists were expelled from CAYCO/SAYCO in 1987 and there were struggles within SANSCO within the universities at the same time.

movement. The organisational framework of the student movement led to ideological heterogeneity as it involved decision making through the SRCs led by popular will, rather than decision making within ideologically homogenous organisations. Within this framework Congress struggled to build hegemony as many student leaders rejected the National Democratic Revolution in favour of a one stage move to socialism. As Congress activists were unable to dominate SRC level politics, and as the organisational structure of student politics did not permit the enforcement of ideological positions, Congress activists (encouraged by senior figures within the ANC) established TOSCO as a membership only organisation and used this to influence and dominate existing student structures. As one Congress activist involved in the process noted:

Joint SRCs were contested terrains from all sorts of ideological backgrounds. You know. AZASM, PASO, Marxist workerist tendencies would want to occupy the centre stage. All for their own ideological understandings. And the ANC would also want to have a stage. Now the disadvantage of the ANC is that it owns no property rights over... SRCs and Joint SRCs... But it had to be wise and clever. Using your words tactically strategic. To say lets deploy our key cadres into key portfolio. If not all positions of leadership of those SRCs and Joint SRCs to try to ensure that we safeguard our ideological understanding as the African National Congress... You see maybe wiser people saw that things are changing. Hence the establishment of TOSCO (Township Student Congress) to start to impart the traditions and the cultures of the ANC as and when we get free there's no difficulty in re-establishing the ANC within the country and within the Western Cape and within Cape Town in particular. Because nothing else we taught in student structures like TOSCO and the others except for the ANC background and so on. Even though you are a student leader. But you'll speak more on the African National Congress.<sup>48</sup>

Whilst neither of these strategies would have worked without considerable existing support amongst activists for positions aligned to the National Democratic Revolution, within the context of the emergency the decision to use political purity as an entry point into progressive organisation did help homogenise civil society. Within the Western Cape Congress organisations had a near monopoly on external

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with TOSCO and COSAS student activist and leader, Cape Town, 18/8/2006. For a direct statement from TOSCO itself on its role in ensuring ideological congress hegemony within student politics see: 'Statement: TOSCO', 4p., handwritten, ss, A3 folded, n.d. (late 1989/early 1990), MA, MCH24-8, p.3



resources which were distributed through service organisations within the country. Underground networks were also predominantly maintained by ANC activists or sympathisers. Exclusion from these networks, therefore, essentially meant exclusion from progressive organisation and this meant that, by late 1980, the key figures in key organisations were clearly politically aligned, smoothing the transition of activists from civil to political society.

By the transition period, considerable change had taken place in the nature of civil society across the country and city. ANC hegemony had become increasingly entrenched and was accompanied by a move from civil society into political society. Interestingly, however, the impacts of these broad changes within the case studies were not universal. Indeed, different segments of civil society reacted in different ways to these dynamics. Five main trends during the transition are of particular interest and are outlined below in greater detail.

Firstly youth activism declined in both communities. At a simplistic level the decision by former CAYCO youth activists (who had recently become members of the national South African Youth Congress (SAYCO)) to disband their organisation and move en masse into the ANCYL led to a withdrawal of youth activists from civil society. However more importantly, particularly as the focus of CAYCO/SAYCO had always been predominantly political, was the fact that many youth activists did not move with their organisation into the ANC. During mid-1990 Women's League activists were expressing concern about the effectiveness of ANC branches in general, and the Youth League in particular. As one UWCO/ANCWL report put it: 'work has started to build the ANCWL, but this cannot happen when no ANC branches exist.'<sup>49</sup> ANC weakness extended beyond the African Townships with one organiser noting that the ANC in the region was organisationally very weak and owed its popularity not to its organisation but its high profile activities. In the words of the author: '[The] ANC does not exist on ground. [It only] exists in

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<sup>49</sup> 'Inter-Branch Meeting Held on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1990', 2p., typed, ss, A4, 4/8/1990, pp.8-9

stadium.<sup>50</sup> The lack of mass participation by the youth was particularly noted. An inter-branch meeting of the ANC summarised the situation in the Western Cape thus:

On the whole the RIC [Regional Interim Committee] is satisfied by work in the region. There are at least 54 branches present today. There is, however, a great unevenness in work... We... note the poor participation of SAYCO members.<sup>51</sup>

Secondly, In comparison to a decline in youth involvement the strength of civic activism mushroomed after 1990. This was particularly marked in Guguletu where from a complete absence of organisation in 1989 a vibrant, if fractured, civic movement emerged. By 1991 the WCCA had begun to hold regular meetings and patrol the streets in a campaign to prevent gangsterism.<sup>52</sup> With the national launch of SANCO the picture became complicated as the civic movement split with both SANCO and the WCCA operating in the community amidst accusations that no local mandate had been taken on the decision to form SANCO.<sup>53</sup> By 1993 this split was beginning to be resolved as SANCO began to dominate. By 1993 SANCO was operating in all of the LAGUNYA townships and was increasingly active. In Nyanga they were submitting development proposals.<sup>54</sup> In Guguletu SANCO Section 3 branch was trying to acquire an office from the council.<sup>55</sup> The power of SANCO in the community also increased. By 1993 funds could not be released for the upgrading of squatter areas in and around Guguletu without a letter signed by

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<sup>50</sup> Handwritten notes from ANC Women's Meeting, Hardback notebook, A5, 4/8/1990, MA, MCH85, Box3

<sup>51</sup> 'Inter-Branch Meeting Held on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1990', 2p., typed, ss, A4, 4/8/1990, p.10

<sup>52</sup> 'WCCA Bid to Eradicate Gangsterism', *Sunday Times*, 6/1/1991; 'It's War on Township Gangs', *Cape Times*, 5/1/1991

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Rose Sonto, 21/11/2005

<sup>54</sup> SANCO, 'Nyanga Development Programme – 1993', 4p., typed, ss, A4, n.d. (late 1993), CTAR, PACG, vol.1, 17/17/1/1; Untitled note, 1p., 1p., handwritten, ds, A5, n.d. (1992), UCTMA, BC1246, L

<sup>55</sup> Letter to IKAPA Town Council from SANCO Section 3 Branch, 'Dear Sir, We the residents...', 1p., typed, ss, A4, 25/1/1993, CTAR, PACG, vol.5, 16/1/4/2

the SANCO regional office.<sup>56</sup> Similarly they also became an official component of the local authority's housing allocation committee.<sup>57</sup>

A similar picture also emerged in 1991/2 in Bonteheuwel as the Bonteheuwel Resident's Association became very active in the community. In July 1991 a sit-in was staged by around 50 people. Demands included the allocation of housing in Bonteheuwel to Bonteheuwel residents only, the scrapping of rental arrears, cleaning the streets, providing bus shelters and helping with transport. The sit-in itself was based around disconnection of electricity and water in the area. In response the council reconnected the services providing that the residents agreed to pay their accounts and some of their arrears.<sup>58</sup> In 1992 a similar sit-in was also successful in gaining a two week moratorium on rental payments for residents after two people were evicted from their homes for non-payment.<sup>59</sup>

Thirdly, the school movement in Guguletu remained strong throughout most of the transition period (although it declined in the coloured areas). This was despite considerable infighting in 1990<sup>60</sup> both between African and coloured schools

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<sup>56</sup> Letter from H J Smith of the Legal Resource Centre to SANCO Regional Office and SANCO Nyanga Branch, 'Mkhonto, Mpinga and Mpetha Squares Committees: IKAPA Municipality Provision of Rudimentary Service', 1p., typed, ss, A4, 30/3/1993, SAHA, AG3199, 7.11.1/2

<sup>57</sup> Zweig, P, 'The Lagunya Lacuna: Contestations of Legitimacy and Agency in Housing Allocation in a Black Local Authority', MA Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2005, p.63

<sup>58</sup> 'Scrap Rent Arrears – Bonteheuwel', *Cape Argus*, 15/8/1991; 'Switch-on Deal Ends Bonteheuwel Protest', *Cape Times*, 27/7/1991

<sup>59</sup> 'Bonteheuwel Rent Breather', *Cape Times*, 10/6/1992

<sup>60</sup> The problems in the student movement in the early 1990s revolved around two issues: race relations within the student organisations and the relationship between SRCs and political student organisations. With the unbanning COSAS was formally re-launched, as was the Pan African Congress aligned Pan African Students' Organisation. However, COSAS's re-launch was beset by animosity and recriminations between African and coloured schools. These divisions were also reflected within WECSO, which continued to function as a coordinating structure of school SRCs until the end of 1990. Suspicion abounded that Coloured activists were trying to marginalise Africans within their structures and the archives contain complaints made by African students about meetings being held to which the township schools were not invited. Debates also raged around how to interpret African leadership of the struggle – a key component within the ANC's theoretical understanding of liberation. There was hostility within the townships to leadership positions within the schooling structures being dominated by coloureds. However, there was also opposition amongst coloured activists to the idea that African activists should be given a share of leadership positions beyond the proportion of schools in the region. As records of one meeting show people were arguing: '[We] do not want 50/50 [share of African and coloureds in leadership positions] this is not our understanding of Af[Rican] leadership.' These divisions became so severe that during 1990 they began to severely impact on the student movements' effectiveness and reached the point where the township region of COSAS was asking for the NECC, UDF and ANC to give direction because 'students are not solving

over how African leadership should be realised in practice, and within the African schools as debates between TOSCO and the Joint SRCs rumbled on. Immediately after the unbanning student activists were able to take advantage of a new found willingness amongst government administrators to engage with grassroots structures and a series of concessions were negotiated in the African schools, such as the recognising PTSAs, allowing schools to affiliate to non-racial sporting bodies and agreement to discuss future teacher retrenchments.<sup>61</sup> From 1991 onwards, as infighting waned and the reformed COSAS was able to consolidate itself, student activism began to increase in prominence. The leadership of COSAS started pressing a range of educational demands including: deracialising access to all schools (including those in the white group areas) to reduce overcrowding; abolishing exam fees; upgrading existing school buildings; employment of more teachers; free access to school books and stationary; the ending of violence and the disbanding of the DET.<sup>62</sup> When the government failed to meet these demands a programme of mass action was run from August 1991. Interestingly, in a sign of how the loci of change was shifting from the streets to the negotiations of political leaders COSAS was criticised by 'progressive organisations' for continuing its campaigns and keeping its students involved in disruptive actions.<sup>63</sup>

This more active style was continued in 1993 when COSAS launched a concerted campaign in opposition to the charging of exam fees for matriculation exams. On the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1993 stayaway was organised in opposition to these fees. The campaign was supported by COSAS, the Pan African Student Organisation and the Azanian Student Movement. Protests escalated into 'Operation Barcelona', a campaign so named because one of the central activities of the campaign – the

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problems.' It also appears that the Township region of WECSCO had disaffiliated from the organisation due to problems with African leadership. See: 'UDF/NECC/ANC – COSAS Township 20/6/90', 7p., ss, A4, SAHA, AL2431, A4.5.2

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous, untitled paper on the Western Cape Education front, 'The Western Cape Education Front (WCEF) was launched...', 40p., typed, ss, A4, n.d. (January 1990), SAHA, AL2431, A4.4.2, p.17&19

<sup>62</sup> 'An Urgent Open Letter to State President Frederick Willem De Klerk from the National Executive Committee of COSAS', 2p., typed, ss, A4, 19/8/1991, MA, MCH 24-9

<sup>63</sup> 'COSAS Slated Over Boycott Action', *Sowetan*, 19/8/1991

burning of delivery trucks and municipal property – was linked to the Olympic torch from the Barcelona games. This campaign garnered widespread support within Guguletu and rapidly escalated into violent confrontations between the students and police. However the level of control over the actions of the students was limited. One key figure in the provincial COSAS leadership described Operation Barcelona as ‘very hectic’<sup>64</sup> and it was during this campaign that the infamous murder of the American student Amy Biehl took place. The violence and extent of the campaign revealed both the continued militancy of the student movement and how far the broader progressive movement had moved. Alan Boesak appeared on national TV on behalf of the ANC leadership to ask the students to call off their actions.

The fourth feature of the transition was the withdrawal of coloured communities, particularly working class communities, from progressive politics. Whilst much of the academic focus on coloured disillusionment has focused on the high proportion of coloured voters that supported the National Party in the first post-apartheid election in 1994 there were clear signs that coloured support for progressive politics was not as strong during the late 1980s as had been presumed. For example during the 1988 elections for the tricameral parliament coloured participation increased markedly on that achieved in 1984, standing at 45% of registered voters.<sup>65</sup> However there was also more general demobilisation even in areas where progressive politics had previously been strong. As early as 1990 the Unrest Monitoring Action Committee (UMAC) was reporting ‘relative calm’ in the coloured townships and its monitoring work was predominantly focused on the African areas.<sup>66</sup> By 1993 there was not even a COSAS branch in Bonteheuwel.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, like the student movement, significant splits also emerged within the activist community within Bonteheuwel. Interestingly, these splits developed

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with TOSCO and COSAS student activist and leader, Cape Town, 18/8/2006

<sup>65</sup> Seekings, J, *The UDF...*, pp.377-8

<sup>66</sup> ‘UMAC Report, 1 June – 30 November’, 9p., typed, ss, A4, 1990, UCTMA, UMAC Collection, D3.1, p.7

<sup>67</sup> ‘Organisations Review the Road Ahead’, *Learning Roots*, 9/1/1993

despite almost unanimous support for the ANC in the community, instead coalescing around allegiances to different figures from within the congress movement – the broadly defined Isselite/Manualite divisions.<sup>68</sup> These splits spread throughout both the newly forming political organisations and the community organisations. Within the ANC these divisions became so bad that a series of special meetings were convened to ‘settle the differences that have arose (sic) in our ranks.’<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the situation reached the point at which a group of ANC members walked out of the meeting which formed the Bonteheuwel ANC branch.<sup>70</sup> The same divisions also coalesced within and between community movements. Factions in Bonteheuwel developed to the point where physical fighting took place between activists. Activists associated with the Bonteheuwel Civic Association marched to the advice office in the community, which was also considered part of the progressive movement and was funded as such, and physically evicted them from their premises.<sup>71</sup>

### **6.3. Explaining Transition: Local Experiences of National Change**

The decline of civil society under the state of emergency is not surprising. The harsh repression of the state closed down space for action in a way that had not previously been achieved. However, the evolution of organisation and activism over the following five years, as political space reopened, is less obviously explicable. Whilst the ANC built a strong base for hegemony within civil society during the late 1980s

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<sup>68</sup> Divisions within the congress movement were common throughout the 1980s and coalesced around three different positions and four different personalities. Broadly, these included a more military and radical ‘Isselite’ position around Johnny Issel, a more revolutionary socialist position around Hedley King and a more organisational approach based around Trevor Manuel and Cheryl Carolus.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from ANC Bonteheuwel Branch Secretary, to W. Cape Interim ANC, ‘Re: Invitation to a Special Meeting’, 1p., handwritten, ss, A4, 6/8/1990, SAHA, AL2431, A4.1.8/11

<sup>70</sup> Letter from ANC Bonteheuwel Branch Secretary, to W. Cape ANC Exco, ‘Att: ANC W. Cape Exco’, 2p., handwritten, ss, A4, 21/7/1990, SAHA, AL2431, A4.1.8/10

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Leon Scott, 15/11/2006, Johannesburg

this did not lead to uniform responses within civil society to the unbanning as different groups of activists reacted differently to the changes that accompanied transition. The following discussion examines five separate transitions that took place between 1990 and 1994 and shows how broader changes in the political context interacted differently with different parts of the progressive movement. Three dynamics are identified as influencing civil society during this time: 1) there was an opening of legal space within which progressive organisations could operate without repression; 2) opportunities developed for organisations to gain increasing access to resources, either directly or through cooperation with the state; 3) the unbanning of the African political movements saw progressive politics become focused primarily on national political transformation. These three dynamics intertwined with existing forms of activism to produce very different results.

### **6.3.1. Youth Decline: The Nationalisation of Politics**

Chapter five demonstrated how youth involvement in progressive organisation was more than simply political. The very nature of activism provided a framework and repertoire of action which resonated with the life experiences of the City's youth. The transition, whilst providing more space within which people could organise legally, simultaneously removed many of the key motivations for youth activism. Legality saw an abandonment of the militant repertoires of action that had attracted many youth activists as street battles, boycotts and protests gave way to branch meetings, door-to-door recruitment and national debates. Simultaneously the shift from local to national politics and decision making saw the goals of progressive organisations lose their utopian flavour and become increasingly technical, whilst local level activists lost their ability to influence events. Combined these dynamics led to a decline in youth participation in progressive politics.

During 1989 civil society organisations increasingly shifted from campaigning around local concerns to explicitly supporting the ANC. With the unbanning this continued as campaigns became dominated by the need to support

the ANC in its negotiations with the government. This led to a focus on national political issues and a corresponding decline in focus on local concerns.<sup>72</sup> This shift saw a disjuncture develop between the campaigns of progressive organisations and the lived experiences of many activists. For example, during 1989 SAYCO announced a nationwide 'save the patriots campaign.' This campaign protested against the execution of MK members and sought to draw all youth congresses nationwide behind a single course of action. However, it was heavily criticised by youth activists as it was of little relevance to most people's lives, a fact that led to little support and organisational growth:

It is all very well having a campaign like save the patriots or let Govan Mbeki speak in which we expend enormous energy and money but at the end of which no concrete gains have been made in building organisation. That is a central weakness of the MDM.<sup>73</sup>

Similar changes were reported in Bonteheuwel, where the shift in focus saw activism after the unbanning retreat to an activist core concerned with national political issues, rather than local community concerns:

[W]hen the ANC was unbanned... a lot of the focus again went into the ANC and those kind of things and again, the focus was removed from the *issues of the people* to politics.<sup>74</sup>

As organisation ceased to take up and campaign on issues that were of relevance to people locally the desire to participate waned.<sup>75</sup> This is well demonstrated by the strong levels of support that SAYCO was able to generate when it campaigned on issues that did have strong resonance within communities.

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<sup>72</sup> An example of this was the campaign launched after the release of the Pretoria Minute. This campaign focused 'on the release of political prisoners, [the] stopping of all political trials, the return of exiles, police violence and us[ing] this opportunity to raise the demand for a constituent assembly. Of all these issues only police violence was directly engaged with local experiences. See: Letter from Miss H Abrahams, Office Administrator, UDF Western Cape Region, 'Re: Campaign around Pretoria Minute', 1p., typed, ss, A4, 1/11/1990, SAHA, AL2431, A4.8.2/4

<sup>73</sup> Anonymous, 'The State of Struggle', 15p., handwritten, ds, A4, n.d. (1988/early 1989), MA, MCH85, Box 3, p.10

<sup>74</sup> Focus group of Bonteheuwel Civic Activists, Bonteheuwel, 10/11/2005

<sup>75</sup> Interview with CAYCO youth activist and branch executive member, 24/8/2006, Guguletu



A report from the township region of SAYCO noted that whilst the Save the Patriots campaign had been unsuccessful a campaign being run that targeted gangsterism within the African townships, which had been an issue of major concern amongst residents, had gained considerable backing.<sup>76</sup>

This shift from local to national issues had two other effects which also caused a demobilisation of youth activism. Chapter five showed how many youth activists became involved in political action because of the sense of empowerment it could offer. With the unbanning the field of political struggle shifted from local issues and organisations where individuals could make significant personal impacts, to national negotiating forums. This saw local activism increasingly alienated from decision making. It also led to a new terrain of struggle which it was not easy for many more militant activists to engage with.

Disillusionment at the nature of the negotiations was clear in interviews with activists from both communities. As one activist recounted:

Even branches of the ANC cannot lie and say they have ever influenced any decision taken in the negotiations. The leadership took those decision all their on their own [from] the structures of the ANC. Including the leagues... They [only] come back to the masses when they have deadlock which is very much serious, [they come back] and say we need to mobilise, pickets and march and so on.<sup>77</sup>

Similar sentiments were also apparent within internal ANC reports, which noted the difficulties branches had in maintaining involvement when their role in decision making was minimal:

Our leadership [ANC nationally] has conducted meetings with Inkatha, the PAC and the South African government. Some of the decisions taken affect directly this volatile constituency: the youth. Our leadership did not consult with the Youth League before these meetings, nor were we briefed on the outcome of these meetings. We then have to rely on our political understanding and maturity to

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<sup>76</sup> SAYCO, 'Township Regional Report', 7p., ss, A4, n.d, (Late 1989 or January 1990), MA, MCH51, p.4, 2.2.8.7.1.1, p.1

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Student/TOSCO activist, Cape Town, 30/6/06

explain some of the undertakings made to our constituency, whether we agree entirely with all of the undertakings or not.<sup>78</sup>

This removal of local power both contributed to, and was compounded by, a shift in the nature of activism. As the ANC's reaction to student campaigns during this period makes clear, mass action was no longer widely supported as focus fell on negotiations. Mass action had been both one of the easiest ways in which people could involve themselves in political struggle. It had also been one of the most empowering. As the nature of activism shifted, therefore, the social base of activism also transformed.

The UDF produced a damning summary of the decline that had hit their organisation that captures the key themes of this shift. Organisations no longer did anything as political change was being negotiated elsewhere. It was therefore impossible to maintain involvement amongst people who were drawn to activism because of a desire for action:

The absence of mass action left many structures inactive and activists redundant. It became meaningless for them to attend meetings which did not produce definite programmes of mass action. Consequently many activists stopped to attend meetings.<sup>79</sup>

This shift hit less educated activists particularly badly. The growing focus on building branches and expanding organisation provided opportunities for people with education and skills, but was less accessible to youth activists who had been drawn to activism by the appeal of mass action. A dynamic which continued after the democratic elections:

[M]any people, some who were involved in the Youth League, sacrificed their lives, even education... When we start, government of the ANC.... [those] people were not necessarily absorbed in the power houses now and then the whole issues of

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<sup>78</sup> ANCYL PNYS, 'Memorandum to ANC National Executive Committee', 5p., typed, ss, A4, 26/2/1991, SAHA, AL2425, H1, p.2

<sup>79</sup> 'The Secretarial Report to the National General Conference of the United Democratic Front Held on 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1991 at Kwandebele', 19p., typed, ss, A4, SAHA, AL3052, A1.18, p.4

education became an issue of point here. So it was quite challenging. And many people I must say felt betrayed in the process.<sup>80</sup>

The overall impact of this shift in political involvement from local to national issues and the declining opportunities for personal involvement was well captured in an interview with a former activist from Bonteheuwel who had been involved in BISCO and CAYCO. He recalled how he had personally experienced a great sense of loss with the unbanning of the ANC in 1990. He recounted how through the struggle he had been able to define an identity for himself as an independent person and had achieved power and status within his community. However, with the unbanning, decisions were no longer taken locally and this power disappeared. At the same time the regional and local support networks which had existed for activists began to disintegrate as political structures were formalised.<sup>81</sup>

### **6.3.2. Coloured Disengagement**

It was not only the out of school youth who saw limited involvement in progressive activism after 1990. More generally this period saw an alienation of many coloureds from progressive politics. This occurred on two levels. Firstly tensions between African and coloured activists increased, leading to a weakening of progressive political leadership within the coloured communities. More broadly many ordinary coloureds chose not to support progressive political movements or their positions. Some of the dynamics behind this disengagement reflect the youth experience. Specifically the growing nationalisation of politics led to an 'Africanisation' of political struggle within the province and reduced the space for activists to construct locally a form of progressive politics with meaning for coloureds. However, it also reflected the broader disengagement of coloureds as a result of shifting economic trends within the province and the collapse of the CLPP. Within the context of rising unemployment and growing competition from Africans the

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Student activist ,28/2/2006, Cape Town

<sup>81</sup> Interview with BISCO and SRC executive member and activist, 21/5/2006, Cape Town

opening of legal space to organise did little to invigorate progressive organisation as coloured people looked increasingly to protect what they had, rather than transform society.

From the early 1980s onwards the African population of the Western Cape increased rapidly and by 1990 Africans made up a significant minority of the city's population. Simultaneously, as opposition escalated the focus of progressive organisations ceased to be local and became national. The result of these changes was a growing focus upon the relationship between coloured communities and activists and the broader (African dominated) Congress movement. This focus closed the space for a unique coloured politics and thereby saw many coloureds drift away from progressive organisation.

The growing importance of African communities within the province led to debates and conflict over the role of the ANC and its relationship to coloured people. This conflict emerged as African activists increasingly asserted the SACP/ANC position on African leadership of the struggle. This doctrine argued that as the African working class was the most oppressed, political transformation could only occur if the African working class assumed leadership of the struggle. In the Western Cape this was interpreted by many as meaning that Africans should assume key leadership roles within progressive organisations. This led to considerable debate and disagreement, not to mention the fracturing of organisations such as WECSCO along racial lines. It also led to a broader sidelining of coloured activists which overall led to many coloured activists abandoning active involvement in progressive politics.<sup>82</sup>

This decline of activist involvement was compounded by the fact that socio-economic and political changes over the preceding decade had shifted relationships between many coloured people, Africans and the state. As discussed in chapter four, tricameral MPs increasingly used resources such as grants and food parcels to

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<sup>82</sup> Ozinsky, M & Rasool, E, 'Developing a Strategic Perspective for the Coloured Areas in the Western Cape', *African Communist*, Second Quarter 1993, pp.45-6

build support within their communities.<sup>83</sup> At the same time as local patronage networks were being consolidated the impact of the deracialisation of the province as a result of the erosion of influx control was being increasingly felt.

Whilst in 1983 the Colour Labour Preference Policy was still operating and African immigration was relatively low, by the late 1980s coloured workers were both suffering the consequences of economic stagnation, and experiencing increased competition from African workers as colour bar legislation was removed. As shown in chapter two the growing deracialisation of Cape Town's economy led to growing impoverishment for those coloureds with limited skills, whilst at the same time opportunities for educated and middle class coloureds expanded.

That the removal of coloured preference policies was having a notable impact on the lives of coloured voters was noted by key figures in the progressive movement. In 1993 Max Ozinsky and Ebrahim Rasool produced an article focusing upon engaging the coloured community. This noted that coloured unemployment had risen since the repeal of coloured preference policies and that many working class coloured depended on state welfare.<sup>84</sup>

Whilst it is difficult to prove beyond doubt that these changes led to a decline in coloured support for progressive organisation, evidence from the 1994 general election provides considerable support for this argument. It shows how those coloureds which chapter two showed were particularly vulnerable to the economic deracialisation formed the bedrock of support for the National Party after 1994. As Eldridge and Seekings' study of the 1994 elections argues:

The NP's support base comprised predominantly lower class coloured voters on the one hand, and predominantly higher class white voters on the other. The ANC's support base comprised predominantly lower-class African voters and higher class coloured and white voters... Many working-class coloured citizens assessed that change would affect them adversely, and so voted conservatively.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Church activist, 7/7/2006, Bonteheuwel

<sup>84</sup> Ozinsky, M, & Rasool, E, 'Developing a Strategic ...', p.40

<sup>85</sup> Eldridge, M & Seekings, J, 'Mandela's Lost Province: The African National Congress and the Western Cape Electorate in the 1994 South African Elections', *Journal of Southern African Studies*,

It is worth noting here that whilst Eldridge and Seekings argue that coloured voters felt change would affect them negatively in the future, the evidence from chapter two suggests that many coloureds had already begun to feel the impact of change. Indeed if we consider the relationship between class and voting in more detail it would appear that those groups most restricted by apartheid (specifically middle class and more educated coloureds) were most likely to vote for the ANC and a non-racial future, whilst those coloureds most protected by apartheid (the unskilled and semi-skilled working class) were most likely to support the national party.

Overall, the coloured experience of transition draws analysis back to the tension between local and national organisation. During the early 1980s it was possible for coloured activists to build a form of activism that was exclusive to the coloured communities. Whilst not overly successful the organising tradition allowed coloured activists to construct progressive organisation that sought to link into the coloured life experience. However, as political struggle became increasingly national focus shifted from local, 'coloured', issues to broader questions of political transformation and the role that coloureds would play within this transformation. Asking these questions was often problematic as it brought into sharp focus the limited interaction that had taken place between different communities over the preceding decade. Writing about these tensions in 1989 Dullah Omar noted:

There is a problem at local levels because of the Group Areas Act and the location system. Because people are forced to live in group areas and locations, grassroots structures will in most instances have a membership drawn from one so-called racial group. It is at local levels that one takes into account the prejudices inherited by people. The point of entry into the Mass Democratic Movement is more often than not (except in the case of trade unions) through Group Area based organisations.<sup>86</sup>

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22/4, 1996, p.532 & p.536. See also Lodge, T, 'The South African General Election, April 1994: Results, Analysis and Implications', *African Affairs*, 94/377, 1995, pp.471-500

<sup>86</sup> Omar, D, 'Political and Organisational Tasks as we Move into the 1990's', 12p., typed, ss, A4, 1/12/1989, MA, MCH78-2, p11. See also, Handwritten notes, 'last CAYCO GC', Hardback notebook, A5, 15/7/90, MA, MCH85, Box3

However, whilst politically problematic these 'Group Area based organisations' allowed for the construction of locally specific political positions. With the move to national organisation came the need for national campaigns. Yet the nature of apartheid discrimination prevented national issues from uniting coloured and African communities. Coloureds had privileges they did not want to lose, whilst Africans had their own concerns for transformation and common ground was not easy to find. The tensions that had lain beneath politics in the province for the past decade could no longer be easily buried. Very few coloured civics joined SANCO and the WCCA and CAHAC continued to exist separately and campaign on different issues.

### **6.3.3. Political Opportunities: The Civic Movement, from Weakness to Strength**

Whilst coloureds in general became disengaged from progressive politics there was a growth in civic activism during the transition in both Bonteheuwel and Guguletu, despite the fact that during apartheid adults had been generally quiescent. This did not, however, represent a mass transformation in the attitudes and concerns of adults. Rather, the opening of political space reduced the costs of involvement in civil society, whilst national political change led local government to search for partners in the delivery of services (in Guguletu) and to be more receptive to civic protest (in Bonteheuwel).

In Guguletu quiescence before 1990 was rooted in the fact that there was little pressure within the township and its administration pushing people into conflict. The state distributed little and expected little in return. Consequently residential civil society had purpose and the local political economy was depoliticised. However, with the unbanning of the African political movements this changed as resources began to be channelled through civil society. This led to increased benefits of participation and consequently a growth in activism.

The unbanning of the African political movements at the national level led to a change in political practice at the local government level as the local state in Cape Town sought mechanisms with which to engage with its African citizens and national developments, such as the launching of SANCO, encouraged local authorities to engage with civics. The need for engagement was further heightened by the fact that local township administration was collapsing and the black community councillors had lost legitimacy and were unable to represent the residents of the township. Opportunities therefore opened for civics to represent the township population.

Interviews with administrators from the Guguletu housing office reveal how these opportunities developed in practice. As will be seen, the channels and procedures strongly resemble the processes that had developed in the 1960s and 1970s. From around 1990 the street committees began to assume the central role in making decisions around housing allocation. This occurred as effective administration and record keeping collapsed and state administrators had to find ways of legitimating people's claims to housing.<sup>87</sup> This process became so entrenched that moving into the democratic period it was impossible for the council to allocate a house without consulting with members of the relevant street committee or civic association.<sup>88</sup> Simultaneously, civic associations began to represent residents in negotiations with the local authorities around housing upgrades and by 1993 local authority records reveal that funds could not be released for upgrading of squatter areas in and around Guguletu without a letter signed by SANCO's regional office.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Guguletu housing official, Guguletu, 9/11/2005

<sup>88</sup> Chipkin, I, "'Functional' & 'Dysfunctional' Communities: The making of Ethical Citizens", in (ed.) Robins, S, Limits to Liberation after Apartheid: Citizenship, Governance & Culture, (Oxford, 2005), pp.152-3. This situation also occurred in Crossroads. See: Zweig, P, 'The Lagunya Lacuna: Contestations of Legitimacy and Agency in Housing Allocation in a Black Local Authority', MA Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2005, pp.92-3

<sup>89</sup> Letter from H J Smith of the Legal Resource Centre to SANCO Regional Office and SANCO Nyanga Branch, 'Mkhonto, Mpinga and Mpetha Squares Committees: IKAPA Municipality Provision of Rudimentary Service', 1p., typed, ss, A4, 30/3/1993, SAHA, AG3199, 7.11.1/2



At the same time as local pressures were creating links between the state and civil society, national political change was encouraging cooperation. Unlike many other areas in South Africa where civics came into conflict with local ANC branches, in the LAGUNYA Townships the previous weakness of the civic movement allowed ANC activists to influence its development. Rose Sonto, who was to become the leader of SANCO in the Western Cape, recounted how when he had been in prison in 1988 at Victor Verster he had discussions with Walter Sisulu, who instructed him to build the civic movement in the Western Cape.<sup>90</sup> The fact that the ANC instructed activists to involve themselves in civic issues and unite civic structures in a single body was reported by several activists in Cape Town.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the building of SANCO in Guguletu was greatly facilitated by the links between its activists and the ANC. For example, agreement was reached between the ANC and the city council demanding that all development plans in the formal townships had to be agreed with SANCO.

The growing flow of local government resources through the civic organisations combined with the fact that involvement with state development plans also provided direct access to funding which civil society organisations could use to build their organisation and employ people. In Nyanga, for example, one of the stated goals of a proposed development programme was 'empowerment of the SANCO Nyanga branch.' Consequently the proposal asked for training and funds to be allocated to SANCO so that it could perform its role. This included providing furniture, offices and meeting rooms, training, employing people to administer the project. It also suggested a 10% administration charge for the project accrue to SANCO.<sup>92</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the growth of opportunities for civil society to influence the allocation of resources and the existence of funding to sustain these organisations

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Rose Sonto, Cape Town, 7/11/2005

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 17/4/2007; Interview with Wilson Sidina, Guguletu, 19/10/2005

<sup>92</sup> SANCO, 'Nyanga Development Programme – 1993', 4p., typed, ss, A4, n.d. (late 1993), CTAR, PACG, vol.1, 17/17/1/1

led to increased support and involvement. Seekings in his research into civics under apartheid noted how their key weakness was a lack of consistent benefits to offer to those who participated.<sup>93</sup> In Guguletu at this time this weakness was removed and participation increased.

The key role that local resource allocation played in the growth of civic organisations was clearly revealed by the mushrooming of organisations and individuals during the transition who sought to present themselves to the local authorities as representatives of the community (and as SANCO officials). This included SANCO, the WCCA and various other organisations. The proliferation of organisations became so complex that in May 1993 the regional director of the Community Services Department of the Cape Provincial Administration wrote to SANCO to request that meeting requests be channelled through SANCO's provincial office so that they office would be able to tell if they were genuine. This was in part a response to growing concerns amongst the administration about:

- a) A proliferation of committees who style themselves as "civics" and profess to speak on behalf of, or being part of SANCO;
- b) persons professing to be members of local SANCO branches, while not having been identified as such.<sup>94</sup>

In Guguletu the growth in civic activism, therefore, relied less on grassroots pressure for change than the changing opportunities that the transition provided for involvement in resource allocation and distribution. The state and the ANC both sought local partners that could articulate the views of the community to the administration and were willing to allow such partners a degree of say in local decision making. Civic organisations expanded to fill this role.

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<sup>93</sup> Seekings, J, 'Civic Organisations in South African Townships', in (eds.) Moss, G & Obery I, From 'Red Friday' to Codesa: South African Review 6, (Johannesburg, 1992), p.233

<sup>94</sup> Letter from the Regional Director of Community Services Western Cape to The General Secretary, SANCO, Cape Western Region, 'Practical Working Relationship: SANCO Western Cape Region and Office (sic) of the regional director, Community Services Western Cape, Cape Provincial Administration', 3p., typed, A4, ss, CTAR, PACG 341, 3/7/7/1, vol.1, p.1

In Bonteheuwel the reason for the growth of the civic is more difficult to fully explain, in part because archival records of the functioning of the local authority are not available. However, it appears that like in Guguletu there was increased legal space for activists to operate within and the state was willing to make concessions to some civic demands. The fact that activists were able to stage a week long sit-in clearly shows that repression was no longer employed against progressive activists within the community. Similarly, the fact the council made concessions to the civic's demands shows that benefits could be delivered through civic activism in a way that had not been possible in the mid-1980s. However, it also has to be recognised that part of the reason activists involved themselves in the civic may have been linked to the broader splits within the activist community and the need for an organisational base from which to challenge the existing leadership of the progressive movement in the township which are discussed in more detail below.

#### **6.3.4. Bonteheuwel: Transition and the Growth of Factionalism**

The fourth transition discussed here is interesting because it stands in contrast to the general disengagement of coloureds from progressive politics discussed above. This transition took place amongst activists within Bonteheuwel and saw increasing factionalism as people fought for positions within progressive structures, particularly the ANC branch, in the community. The dynamics driving this transition were a mixture of those affecting the civic movement – most notably the increased relationship between organisational involvement and resources – and those represented within the decline of youth structures, specifically the impact that the shift in repertoires of action as a result of the nationalisation of politics had on individuals involving themselves within progressive politics.

The actual cause of the factionalism is hard to identify. Interviews revealed diverse beliefs over why such deep fissures emerged within a community that had earlier been hailed as a prime example of coloured resistance. These explanations fall roughly into the following 3 areas: 1) a belief that those (often militant) activists who had been most active in the 1980s had abused their positions to enrich themselves financially; 2) a belief animosity represented conflict over positions as the progressive movement restructured itself post-apartheid<sup>95</sup>; 3) a belief that broader factionalism within the Western Cape was playing itself out within Bonteheuwel.<sup>96</sup>

Assessing the validity of these accusations is not only beyond the scope of this thesis but would be ultimately futile. Indeed, their accuracy is less significant than the fact that they assumed salience at the time they did. Similarly, although the factions in Bonteheuwel were closely identified with those within the broader Congress movement, such factions had long existed without leading to a breakdown in relations on the scale experienced during this time. The growth of factionalism, therefore, needs to be located beyond the simplistic accusations and counter accusations of this period in the reasons why divisions became insurmountable and conflict, rather than co-operation, emerged at the time it did.

Conflict in Bonteheuwel was based around disagreements over who should assume key positions within the recently unbanned ANC and other progressive structures. In this way it was clearly linked into a changed political context which increased the rewards for activism, whilst simultaneously reducing the risks of participation. One activist, in a statement which also reveals the continuing depth of animosity in the community, clearly outlined the centrality that political positions assumed at that time:

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with BISCO activist (1), 13/6/2006, Claremont; Interview with Youth activist and BYM founding member, 10/5/2006, Mitchells Plain; Focus group of Bonteheuwel Civic Activists, 10/11/2005, Bonteheuwel

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Student youth and UDF activist, 13/11/2006, Johannesburg; Interview with Civic and Trade Union Activist, 7/8/2006, Goodwood

[T]he rats came out of the woodwork. Suddenly there was power to be had. I'm talking about real power... other people came out of the woodwork and wanted to assume power... and that created a lot of problems.<sup>97</sup>

However it was not only the possibility of power that encouraged participation, it was also that the risks of participation had reduced, which led to an increased willingness amongst people to involve themselves in progressive organisation. As one activist, who had been a central figure during the mid 1980s, argued:

Now it was something else. We weren't opposing apartheid... [T]here were no imminent risks and dangers to being ANC leadership.<sup>98</sup>

However, whilst these changing opportunities made the cost benefit calculation for activism more attractive, they did not necessarily have to lead to factionalism and conflict as people could have co-operated in distributing positions or could have followed non-confrontational mechanisms for allocating such positions, like elections. What is significant, therefore, are the reasons why such immiscible views on activism emerged.

Underlying the development of a zero sum conflict over positions in the city was the fact that under apartheid very different organising traditions and interests had been brought under a broad opposition to the state. However, with the unbanning progressive politics needed to be homogenised. This led to people from these different traditions, with very different organisational styles, and from very different socio-economic backgrounds being brought within the same organisations for the first time since before the unrest. These activists brought with them very different discourses of entitlement and very different organisational cultures, rooted within their experiences of struggle, which could not be reconciled. The two key discourses that assumed salience during this period were: 1) a belief that participation in the struggle and struggle organisations during the unrest period in

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with BISCO activist (1) , 13/6/2006, Claremont

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Student youth and UDF activist, 13/11/2006, Johannesburg

the mid-1980s was a necessary and valid criteria for the assumption of positions post apartheid; 2) a belief that the actions of many of the people who had assumed critical positions during the mid-1980s were unacceptable and that there was a need to democratise struggle organisations.

One activist, who assumed leadership of the youth movement in 1990, argued that when he returned to Bonteheuwel in 1989 the youth in Bonteheuwel was 'falling apart'. He saw this as a result of the refusal by leadership to share power and a lack of political awareness and organisational skills amongst activists from the mid-1980s who were 'simply militant'. Therefore, after being tasked by the ANC to rebuild the youth, he started to devolve responsibilities and develop more democratic ways of working. However, he felt this led to people who had previously held positions coming into conflict because they were in danger of losing their positions.<sup>99</sup> Similar dynamics were reflected in the action of the civic organisation when it marched to 'take back' the advice office. The rhetoric behind this move was that the advice office was a community project and should be owned and run by the community, rather than by a distant group of activists who were using its resources for their own personal gain, rather than that of the community.

Another activist, from the other political faction, gave an alternate take on this situation which reveals how those people who had become more involved in underground working during the mid -1980s placed more premium on political involvement (including underground involvement) than on democratic decision making, which was being discounted by the faction associated with the organising tradition of the early 1980s. It was these conflicts that he saw as lying at the root cause of the conflict:

[T]he state also responded [through the state of emergency] so those in leadership had to change their way of decision making, but you would find that the aspirant leadership that was at that stage in Bonteheuwel, they didn't understand that, you see. For them is it that we still need to work according to the basics [i.e. democratic

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Youth activist and BYM founding member, 10/5/2006, Mitchells Plain

decision making] you see. The basic rules, that's what brought us, brought us into conflict.'<sup>100</sup>

Whilst these divisions in part represented different cohorts of activists, this was not simply a consequence of involvement in different periods of political activity. The different cohorts also had differing personal characteristics which influenced their preferred forms of protest. Those activists who had been prominent in the mid-1980s had tended to assume their positions because of their willingness to engage with the dynamics thrown up by the township unrest. As seen in the previous chapter, many of these activists played a key role in encouraging and supporting the more militant youth in the community. Furthermore, they became subsumed within the broader UDF/ANC structures within the province during this period as the state of emergency closed down the possibility for above ground activity. In contrast, many other activists became sidelined during the mid-1980s, particularly those who either lacked the status or links into the broader progressive movement, or those for whom the nature of activism during the unrest was seen as unsavoury or inappropriate.

However, with the unbanning, all activists could re-engage with progressive politics. Yet certain activists were better placed to take advantage of these opportunities than others. People with provincial links and education were able to assume significant roles both within the ANC and other progressive structures. This led to divisions between activists who had built profiles in the mid-1980s in regional structures and those activists who were trying to build profiles after the unbanning. These divisions were compounded by the fact that those activists who had been able to build these links shared a history of militancy which, because of its focus on violence rather than organisation and democracy, was frowned upon by some activists who had not taken a central role in these events. Consequently, divisions solidified around discourses that highlighted the respective virtues of these different activist groups. Those activists from the mid-1980s highlighted the sacrifice

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Civic and UDF activist, 14/6/2006, Cape Town

that they had made and the courage that they had show, seeing those challenging for their positions as usurpers and 'scaredy cats' who only chose to be involved when life was easy.<sup>101</sup> Conversely, those activists who were on the outside of politics focused on the lack of transparency and moral propriety that characterised the lives of those mid 1980s activists and in many ways were the personal characteristics that accounted for their success during the mayhem of 1985-7. As one activist argued:

The basis of that division is that we've got comrades. We've got the sixties. The people from the sixties, the people from the seventies and the eighties... So you've got the people here on the ground who were very loyal to the ANC during those years, through the seventies and eighties and even through the nineties. And the people that were, at the forefront. The intellectuals that you might call them, and the people that hold high positions within the ANC in Bonteheuwel, you know they get promoted when it came to after '94. They get positions within government... And there are certain people that didn't get anything. So that division stems from there.<sup>102</sup>

### **6.3.5. Student Strength**

The final transition considered here is the student struggle in Guguletu. This remained relatively unaffected by the unbanning and centralisation of politics during this period in both its aims and its repertoire of action. As such it shows how, despite a political context that was pushing most activism into conciliation and negotiation, when strong collectively held grievances continued to exist these could sustain protest in the face of a changed political context.

In understanding the different history of the student movement in the province two key factors are significant. Firstly, whilst national political dynamics were pulling the focus of activism away from local communities, in the schools local issues remained salient in spite of national political changes. Secondly, unlike other areas of struggle where the unbanning removed the glue that kept activism together, student activism was underpinned by the existence of a shared physical space and common experiences defined by the apartheid political economy.

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with UDF & Advice Office activist, 7/6/2006, Cape Town

<sup>102</sup> Interview with ANC Youth League activist, 7/7/2006, Bonteheuwel



Combined, these two factors perpetuated a collective student identity which interacted with the political space opened up by the unbanning to create a movement that continued even though it was often opposed by both the authorities, and on occasion the progressive movement.

The strength of the student movement in Cape Town was in large part a result of the ongoing crisis within the African schools and the resentment and conflict this created. Throughout 1988 and 1989 the relationship between the State, the school authorities and students continued to precipitate conflicts that united students in opposition to the schooling authorities. The centrality of immediate material issues to student organising is well demonstrated by the fact that every single campaign organised by the students during this period had a focus on conditions within the schools. The 1989 registration crisis provides an example of the pressures that were driving student activism. In 1989 the school authorities demanded that all African students registering for the new school year would have sign a form declaring they would refrain from involvement in political activities and organisations. However, many refused, leading to a large number of students being denied registration. There were also insufficient spaces in African secondary schools for all students. This created a situation in which a large number of students collectively experienced exclusion from school. In turn this generated hostility towards the state and campaigns were arranged around this issue which claimed considerable support.<sup>103</sup>

The centrality of student issues continued into the 1990s. COSAS's early campaigns in 1990/1 were again almost wholly educational. These focused upon the opening of all schools to reduce overcrowding, exam fees, upgrading of buildings, employment of more teachers, access to school books and stationary, ending violence and disbanding the DET.<sup>104</sup> Similarly Operation Barcelona was organised in

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<sup>103</sup> 'Education Report: Background Report to the Education Crisis', 8p., typed, ss, A4, n.d., MA, MCH78-2, folder 'other orgs', p.8

<sup>104</sup> 'An Urgent Open Letter to State President Frederick Willem De Klerk from the National Executive Committee of COSAS, 2p., typed, ss, A4, 19/8/1991, MA, MCH 24-9

order to demand the abolition of exam fees for matriculants which affected all black students and had been a focus of campaigns throughout the 1980s.<sup>105</sup>

The transformation of immediate grievances that could be clearly linked to the actions of the state and schools authority into coherent and organised responses by students was greatly facilitated by the physical context within which the students operated. Many other grassroots organisations organised themselves within the physical space of the township. Consequently people had to make explicit decisions to participate. However, because the students were brought together within the school they were able to organise within a space that repressive state action could not close down. Furthermore, students were all exposed to action simply through attending school. The very real importance of the school yard for the continuing success of the student movement was made clear in the actions of the student leadership during the state of emergency. The banning of all meetings in the Western Cape that were discussing the school crisis in 1988 led to considerable disorganisation as the students and parents were unable to meet to discuss issues. A spokesman for the African SRCs reported to the community newspaper *Learning Roots* that the banning had led to 'confusion and misunderstanding' amongst the students, who were boycotting school at the time. As a result of this breakdown the school leadership decided to return to school, citing the need 'to meet, organise and take decisions democratically.'<sup>106</sup> After the schools had returned student activism once again turned upwards.

Overall, the student movement provides particularly strong evidence of the close relationship between the political economy, civil society organisation and activism. As outlined earlier, there were considerable ideological divisions within the student movement in 1989/90. However, despite these, student organisation during the transition was able to undertake increasing militant and widely supported campaigns even in the face of almost universal condemnation from the

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with Student/TOSCO activist, 30/6/2006, Cape Town

<sup>106</sup> 'Crisis in DET Schools', *Learning Roots*, vol.4, no.1, February 1988, p.1

state and other progressive organisations. The continued existence of local, strongly felt, grievances alongside an arena of action in which students could continue to challenge and organise, allowed activism to be sustained as it collapsed elsewhere.

## 6.4. Conclusions

All five transitions discussed in this chapter were affected by the same changes in the political context. However these changes interacted with local organisational traditions and socio-economic dynamics to create very different results. The decline of apartheid as a focus of protest removed much of the glue that had held the progressive movement together and the new political opportunities that unfolded in its wake were not universally experienced. Race and class mediated people's experiences of the transition, leading to very different transitions across the progressive movement.

The shift in political struggle from the local to national level contributed to the demobilisation of youth politics as local opportunities for action closed down. Involvement in the struggle came to be dependent upon education and linked into national political networks, whilst local militant activism lost favour. This shift saw many of the driving forces behind the youth activism of the mid 1980s evaporate, along with many of the activists.

Like youth politics, coloured activism in general saw a marked decline by 1994. Whilst this represented a disengagement from progressive politics amongst coloured people that had characterised the whole of the 1980s, it was also a consequence of the move from local to national politics that had caused youth disengagement. As politics became focused on national transformation and organisation it became increasingly difficult to sustain forms of activism and organisation that were exclusively coloured. Coloured activists had to compete with

Africans for positions within the ANC and could no longer construct campaigns within the Congress tradition that focused exclusively on the material concerns of the coloured population. The broad church of anti-apartheid activism that had been possible when the focus had been on challenging state power could not be sustained now the goal was defining the new state.

Both the African civic movement and political involvement within Bonteheuwel were affected by the opening of legal space for activism and the opportunities that this provided. In the civic movement the fact that the civics were increasingly integrated into the distribution of resources and were able to access funds to construct their organisations led to an expansion of organisation where there had been non-previously; quiescence gave way to participation as risks of activism reduced, whilst rewards expanded. In contrast the expansion of political opportunities in Bonteheuwel interacted with underlying fissures amongst activists to create conflict as people from differing organisational traditions used different justifications to lay claim to these positions. Without apartheid to challenge the very real cleavages between different forms of activism and different activists solidified.

In stark contrast to the other forms of activism considered here the African student movement continued in strength, despite national opposition to its campaigns. The explanation for this lay in the fact that student activism in the African townships was always underpinned by very clear material demands and the ongoing crisis within apartheid education. Student numbers continued to increase whilst educational standards continued to fall. This bottom up pressure sustained organisation, which maintained a strong grassroots presence and clear demands, in spite of the shifting focus within progressive politics on national political transformation.



## **Chapter Seven**

# **An Apartheid Inheritance: Continuity, Change and Moral Economy in Civil Society since 1994**

## **7.1. Introduction: Democratisation and Civil Society Transformation**

The victory of the ANC in South Africa's first democratic elections marked a major step in the transformation and deracialisation of the country's political system. Consolidated by local government elections and the institution of a written constitution in 1996 these changes represented the end of struggle against white political supremacy. Unsurprisingly, they were also accompanied by considerable transformations in both political and civil society. In the space of just over four years the ANC moved from preaching violent revolution to heading government departments and holding the presidency; civil society organisations moved from opposing local government to involving themselves in negotiations and partnerships in the delivery of services; and many organisations, such as the women's movements and youth congresses, simply collapsed themselves into wings of the newly legal political parties. However, democratic elections were not the end point of transformations in the South African state and civil society; indeed, in many ways they were just the beginning. As activists moved from civil society and opposition into government the nature of the state, its policies, and civil society were all transformed.

This thesis focuses on the changing nature of local progressive organisation and activism and this chapter will therefore concern itself with examining the ways in which, and reasons why, civil society at the local level has transformed post-apartheid. Specifically, it will examine how local civil society organisations that

emerged under apartheid transformed with democratisation, and what new forms of organisation and protest emerged. Because of the decline of most progressive organisation during and immediately after the transition, this chapter restricts itself to considering the fortunes of residential civil society, specifically the civic organisations and new social movements that have emerged post-apartheid to protest around service delivery.

In doing this it will demonstrate a considerable decline in civic activism in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel. However, rather than arguing that this represents a discontinuity with apartheid, it will show how activism in the two townships continues to be heavily patterned by the apartheid past. In Guguletu it will show how present day quiescence within civil society continues to reflect residents' struggles to access scarce resources within the urban environment in much the same way as it did under apartheid. Just as people involved themselves in co-dependent relationships with apartheid administrators, so after apartheid similar relationships emerged between local councillors, civic activists and residents. People acquiesce because to not do so runs the risk of exclusion from the township's distributive networks, networks which have been swelled post-apartheid as resources have flowed into previously disadvantaged communities.

Similarly, in Bonteheuwel, the decline of activism owes much to the apartheid past. The dominance of activism by a relatively small group created a situation where the continuity of such activism relied heavily upon this elite's continued engagement. In 1994, as coloured people rejected progressive political positions, this elite became alienated from the communities it had previously tried to mobilise. This combined with the deracialisation of the labour market and urban space which provided opportunities for personal advancement and residential mobility. Activists could move out of Bonteheuwel and they could get on in life. With this many of the reasons for mobilising their community dissipated, just as the community itself rejected the non-racial vision which had driven activism.

Combined this saw activists disengage and, in the absence of deeper roots within the community, progressive organisation and activism decline.

Finally, alongside this decline, this chapter will also examine the situations in which collective action has occurred (this will only be done for Guguletu because such activism was marked by its absence in Bonteheuwel). Again, rather than representing discontinuity, and/or a radical departure in the relationships between residents and the state, it will show that instances of post-apartheid protest actually reaffirm the importance of the apartheid experience for post-apartheid activism. Specifically, it will show that as increasing amounts of resources have flowed into Guguletu contestation has arisen over how those resources are distributed. Generally this has been managed through the relationships between local councillors, civil society and residents. However, inscribed within these distributive networks is a clear moral economy of distribution, governing the criteria by which resources should be allocated. When councillors step outside the boundaries set by this moral economy they precipitate protest. Yet this moral economy is not simply a post-apartheid construction. It draws not only on opposition to corruption, but at times on insider/outsider identities inscribed within the city through processes of class formation under apartheid. Capetonians have protested when incomers from the Eastern Cape are given access to resources despite the fact that such identities have had no basis in law for over 20 years.

This chapter then concludes by considering the relevance of apartheid governance structures and identities in the post-apartheid period, the implications of this analysis for the role of civil society within the state, and the rationality of participants in organisation and activism.



## 7.2. From Protest to Passivity: The Decline of Anti-apartheid Organisation

There is relatively little contestation of the broad contours of post-apartheid transformation in South African civil society. Dealing first with the fate of apartheid era civil society organisations the general discourse has been one of decline. As shown in chapter six civil society organisations simply disbanded themselves or transformed into wings of the political movements after the liberation movements were unbanned. Furthermore the UDF, which had acted as a meeting place and coordinating structure for civil society activists, was itself wound up in 1991. Even those organisations which sought to maintain a strong and independent presence in civil society are seen to have failed in their task. Most significant here is the fate of the civic movement which, after gaining considerable prominence and publicly adopting a role for itself as a watchdog ensuring that the government delivered on its promises, suffered a collapse in both strength and influence.<sup>1</sup>

Three broad dynamics are usually seen to account for this decline. Firstly, changes in the broader political opportunity structure, particularly the unbanning of the African liberation movements and the subsequent creation of non-racial, democratic, governance. It has been argued that whilst many organisations, particularly the civics, benefited from the transition period, after democratisation the political context decreasingly favoured apartheid era forms of activism as political society was imbued with a newfound legitimacy and citizens acquired an expanded range of channels through which to pursue their demands. A consequence of legitimate government and legitimate political channels for making

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<sup>1</sup> Cherry, J, Jones, K & Seekings, J, 'Democratisation and Politics in South African Townships' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24/4, 2000, p.889

It is worth noting, however, that whilst most authors agree that the civic movement is less strong than it once was the extent and pervasiveness of the decline is not universally accepted. For example Heller and Ntlokonkulu argue that at the local level many civic organisations are still quite active, in spite of a collapse in national civic structures. See: Heller, P & Ntlokonkulu, L, 'A Civic Movement or a Movement of Civics?: The South African National Civic Organisation in the Post-Apartheid Period', *Centre for Policy Studies, Johannesburg, Social Policy Series Research*, 84, 2001

claims is that people are now willing to wait for results and, where they are not forthcoming, to work within political structures:

The appearance of quiescence [within the civic movement] reflects primarily the confidence in which residents hold political society, i.e. confidence that it will deliver the goods over which some people had taken direct action over prior to the political transition.<sup>2</sup>

In South Africa, as elsewhere, the decline in mass direct action within civil society appears to be linked to public confidence in political society, i.e. in the political parties and elected councillors who provide mechanisms for local representation in a representative democracy.<sup>3</sup>

The second cause of decline is the impact of democratisation upon the resources of civil society organisations. Specifically, a decline in resources within civil society is seen to have reduced their capacity to act. The ending of apartheid removed much of the financial support which had allowed civics to operate. As apartheid ended, funding shifted to support the state and reconstruction, rather than opposition within civil society.<sup>4</sup> As seen in chapter six transition also reduced the human resources available to civil society as many of its most talented organisers and activists moved to assume jobs in the unbanned liberation movements, the state or both.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, activists and their strategies have also been placed at the centre of analysis. Zuern has argued that the success of the civics, their nature and their prominence, depends in large part upon the ability of individual activists:

How well it [SANCO] plays this role [as intermediary between government, the ANC and local communities] and whether or not in doing so it represents the

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<sup>2</sup> Cherry, J, Jones, K & Seekings, J, 'Democratisation and Politics...', p.903

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.891

<sup>4</sup> Ballard, R, Habib, A & Valodia, I, 'Conclusion: Making Sense of Post-Apartheid South Africa's Voices of Protest', in (eds.) Ballard, R, Habib, A, & Valodia, I, Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa, (Scottsville, 2006)

<sup>5</sup> Heller, P & Ntlokonkulu, L, 'A Civic Movement ...', p.21

interests of the majority of local residents, *completely depends upon the actions of local Sanco leaders.*<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Seekings has attributed part of the responsibility for decline to a failure by civic activists to develop strategies to tackle transformations in the political context:

[Civic] activists give the impression of being demoralised, bewildered by the complexity and inherent pluralism of the new political context, and paralysed by uncertainty over how to respond to elected councillors who ignore them. *Much of this is due to a lack of vision.*<sup>7</sup>

Whilst apartheid era organisations are seen to have declined there has been a simultaneous recognition of the emergence of new forms of organisation and struggle, many of which have opposed elements of ANC policy. This has included the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee which reconnects peoples' electricity supplies after disconnection for non-payment; the Anti-Eviction Campaign which was formed to coordinate opposition to evictions from council housing for non-payment of rent in Cape Town, but which has grown to embrace housing issues from a range of communities; and at a national level the Treatment Action Campaign which fights for the rights of HIV+ South Africans.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, a growth in public protests against policy decisions has also been noted.

In accounting for the emergence and form of these 'new social movements' (NSMs), explanation usually focuses upon growing inequality and a belief that the ANC has failed to improve the quality of life for many of the poorest South

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<sup>6</sup> Zuern, E, Continuity in Contradiction? The Prospects for a National Civic Movement in a Democratic State: SANCO and the ANC in Post-Apartheid South Africa, *A case study for the UKZN project entitled: Globalisation, Marginalisation and New Social Movements in post-Apartheid South Africa*, (Durban, 2004), p.23, Italics mine

<sup>7</sup> Seekings, J, 'SANCO: Strategic Dilemmas in a New South Africa', *Transformation*, 34, 1997, p.27, Italics mine

<sup>8</sup> Desai, A, We are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post Apartheid South Africa, (New York, 2002)

Oldfield, S & Stokke, K, Building Unity in Diversity: Social Movement Activism in the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, *A case study for the UKZN project entitled: Globalisation, Marginalisation and New Social Movements in post-Apartheid South Africa*, (Durban, 2004)

Robins, S, "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live'": AIDS Activism, Science and Citizenship after Apartheid', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30/3, 2004, pp.651-672

Africans. Patrick Bond, one of the most vocal scholars writing on NSMs, articulated this relationship in stark terms when he argued in a 2006 newspaper article that: 'lack of delivery is turning poor settlements into hotbeds of activism.'<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, this 'lack of delivery' is almost always linked by radical scholars to the adoption by the ANC government in 1996 of the Growth Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR). By leading to the removal of services from those unable to pay, such as electricity disconnections and evictions, it is argued that GEAR's neo-liberal policies have led to growing opposition within civil society to both government policy and the ANC and this discontent lies behind the growth of the NSMs.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in its most brutal form this argument posits an almost mechanistic correlation between the adoption of GEAR and the emergence of NSMs:

Ultimately, the major cause of tension between the government, labour, and people in organisations like the CCF [an NSM in Durban], is linked to GEAR and the consequences of GEAR policies on the life of CCF participants.<sup>11</sup>

A consequence of this interlinking of protest with post-apartheid policy is that the NSMs tend to be seen as distinct from earlier forms of activism and are consequently considered 'new':

[B]ecause of their simultaneous political break from the ANC, the most substantial community groups that formed the APF [an umbrella body of NSMs in Johannesburg] were mainly unconnected to the organisational forms of the prior decade, even if many of their leaders had been forged in the earlier round of urban struggles.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bond, P, 'Lack of Delivery is Turning Poor Settlements into Hotbeds of Activism', *Sunday Independent*, 29/1/2006, p.8

<sup>10</sup> Desai, A, We are the Poors: ... p.91; Gibson, N C, 'Calling Everything into Question: Broken Promises, Social Movements and Emergent Intellectual Currents in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in (ed.) Gibson, N C, Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-Apartheid South Africa, (Trenton & Asmara, 2006), p.4

<sup>11</sup> Dwyer, P, 'The Contentious Politics of the Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF)', UKZN, *Centre for Civil Society*, Research Report 27, 2004, p.9

<sup>12</sup> Bond, P, 'Johannesburg's Resurgent Social Movements', in (ed.) Gibson, N C, Challenging Hegemony: ..., p.116. See also Ballard, R, Habib, A & Valodia, I 'Conclusion: Making Sense of Post-Apartheid South Africa's Voices of Protest', in (eds.) Ballard, R, Habib A & Valodia, I, Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa, (Scottsville, 2006), p.398

Furthermore, their development in opposition to 'neo-liberalism' is also believed to represent a political challenge to the ANC and its capital friendly policies, as well as the possible basis for an alternative politics in South Africa. Such transformationary interpretations vary between authors who believe the NSMs represent a clear, coherent and openly political challenge to the ANC and capital<sup>13</sup> and those which recognise that whilst such movements tend to be small, localised and mainly defensive, still argue that simply by existing they represent a challenge to globalisation and capitalism. Gibson, for example, argues that because these movements concern themselves with basic human needs such as land, food and housing their very existence challenges the belief there is no alternative to capitalist globalisation.<sup>14</sup>

There is no doubt that many of the explanations of civil society evolution since 1994 have relevance to the cases studies considered here. A decline in funding, a loss of skilled personnel, changes in political society and the development of new channels for addressing grievances have all affected apartheid era civil society organisations. Furthermore, NSMs and post-apartheid protest have generally coalesced around the (non) delivery or removal of access to public services. However, evidence from Guguletu and Bonteheuwel suggests that these interpretations are incomplete.

Firstly, current studies are found to overemphasise the impact of democratisation and transformations in state policy. The vast majority of academics treat democratisation as a decisive break in the history of civil society within South Africa.<sup>15</sup> The centrality of GEAR in explaining the rise of NSMs is perhaps the

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who argue that whilst the new social movements may draw on earlier struggles that they are essentially a result of the post-apartheid 'moment'.

<sup>13</sup> Bond, P, 'Johannesburg's Resurgent Social Movements...', p.104

<sup>14</sup> Gibson, N C, 'Calling Everything into Question ...', pp.40-41.

See also; Desai, A & Pithouse, R, "'But We Were Thousands'" Dispossession: Resistance, Repossession and Repression in Mandela Park', UKZN, *Centre for Civil Society*, Research Report 9, 2003, p.23,

<sup>15</sup> A rare exception here is the work by Mbali on the Treatment Action Campaign. See; Mbali, M, 'TAC in the History of Patient-Driven AIDS Activism: The Case for Historicizing South Africa's New Social Movement', in (ed.) Gibson, N C, *Challenging Hegemony ...*, p.129

clearest example of this tendency to overstate discontinuity; yet, it is implicit in the central role that political transformation assumes in explaining the decline of apartheid era civil society. However, the cases examined here suggest that whilst there has undoubtedly been change since 1994, the nature of this change has been heavily conditioned by inheritances from apartheid. Apartheid created governance structures, political practices and collective identities which have interacted with, shaped, and sometimes pulled against post-apartheid transformation.

Secondly, existing studies have incompletely investigated the rationality of actors within civil society. Several studies have made either direct or indirect reference to the importance of changes in the political opportunity structure in shaping activism.<sup>16</sup> However, these have usually focused upon national transformations, neglecting the political practices which construct the political opportunities and risks for civil society at the local level. Consequently variation in local activism is often explained in terms of activist choices and abilities, rather than differing local contexts that influence choices and encourage ordinary South Africans into, or away from, civil society organisations. However, this study reveals how in the two case studies rational decisions are made by individuals influenced by local social, political, economic and historical dynamics.

Thirdly, in accounting for local developments the continuing significance of the interaction of race and class are highlighted. There is a general trend to see the post-apartheid period as one of widening inequality, poverty and a lack of service provision in which 'the end of apartheid has seen the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.'<sup>17</sup> Whilst containing some truth this misses the complex nature of the restructuring of the apartheid economy and state distribution. As shown in chapter two, democratisation has impacted differentially upon different groups. Furthermore, whilst GEAR has seen an increased adoption of free market policies it

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<sup>16</sup> Cherry, J, Jones, K & Seekings, J, 'Democratisation and Politics ...' Zuern, E, 'Elusive Boundaries: SANCO, the ANC and the Post-Apartheid South African State', in (eds.) Ballard, R, Habib A & Valodia, I, *Voices of Protest...*, pp.179-202

<sup>17</sup> Gibson, N C, 'Calling Everything into Question...', p.2

is far from representing the end of spending on social and welfare projects by the government:

GEAR's macroeconomic policies have not reduced the state's transformation project to economic matters alone directly at the expense of poverty alleviation programmes as many analysts argue. Nor, for that matter, has the state withdrawn from the development arena. The budget for social services... accounts for just under half of the national budget.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, in post-apartheid South Africa, the 'poor' do not have uniform experiences of poverty, nor uniform expectations. In both the communities studied here deracialisation has had positive and negative economic results, results which are not necessarily evenly distributed. Within this context the significance of apartheid categories and identities and continuity in their articulation is one of the most notable features of political and civil society action in the two communities and much post-apartheid protest has emerged from changing patterns of resource redistribution amongst the poor, rather than in conflict between 'the poors' and the neo-liberal state.<sup>19</sup>

## **7.3. Political and Civil Society in Post-Apartheid Cape Town**

### **7.3.1. Political and Institutional Transformation**

Changes since 1994 have sought to redefine both the nature and purpose of political practice in South Africa. At the most basic level local, national and provincial governments are now democratically elected on the basis of one-person one-vote. Governance structures have also been transformed. Provincial governments with their own legislatures have been created. In local government racially segregated

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<sup>18</sup> Oldfield, S., 'State Restructuring and Urban Transformation in South Africa: A negotiation of Race, Place and Poverty', PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2000, p.19

<sup>19</sup> Desai, A, We are the Poors ...

administrations have been abolished and replaced with unified governance structures. In Cape Town this has included the abolition of the racially defined Black (African) Local Authorities, the coloured Management Committees, the white City and Divisional Councils and the creation of a unified council administration or 'unicity' for the whole Cape Town metropolitan area, the unicity administration being elected by a mixture of first past the post elections across 99 wards supplemented by councillors from a proportional representation list.

These administrative transformations have been accompanied by considerable shifts in the purpose of politics. Whereas under apartheid financial resources remained overwhelmingly targeted at providing for the needs of whites, and to some extent coloureds and Indians, post-apartheid government in general, and local government in particular, has been assigned a central role in development. Resources have been targeted at providing for the needs of the most disadvantaged and the provision of services such as electricity and water to previously neglected townships have been central to government policy.

Transformation of political practice has also been central to government rhetoric with South Africa making the participation of communities and civil society in governance part of its project for development. Tying with shifts in academic and development discourse which see public participation as a method for enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of government, and for empowering citizens and thereby deepening democracy,<sup>20</sup> post-apartheid policy making has established a range of mechanisms to seek public input into local and national policy and development decisions.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, a range of institutional mechanisms and procedures have been established by the City of Cape Town with which civil society

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<sup>20</sup> Barber, B, Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age, (Berkeley & London, 1984); Dahl, R A, Democracy and its Critics, (New Haven, London, 1989); Chambers, R, Whose Reality Counts?: Putting the First Last, (London, 1997); World Bank, World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People, (Washington, 2003)

<sup>21</sup> RSA, Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, (Pretoria, 1996); RSA, Municipal Structures Act, (Pretoria, 1998); RSA, The White Paper on Local Government, (Pretoria, 1998); RSA, Local Government Municipal Systems Bill, (Pretoria, 2002)



organisations and individuals can interact. At the city level public input is sought into the overall strategic direction of policy and spending priorities. Input was requested through public meetings and submissions on the city's Integrated Development Plan, a statutorily required plan which outlines development priorities and how they will be achieved. Similarly, the city's budget is published before adoption and the public is invited to submit comment and recommendations.

At the local level input is sought on issues affecting individual communities and their own development. Every ward councillor is expected to hold at least four public meetings in their constituency every year, at which they present ongoing developments and seek feedback. In 2005 the city also adopted the ward committee system, although it was subsequently discontinued after the change of administration in 2006. Here residents of each ward elected ten community representatives at an open community meeting. The representatives were forbidden to stand as members of political parties and were usually involved in civil society organisations within the ward. In Cape Town each committee member was chosen to represent a sectoral interest such as women, youth or business. These committees met monthly to discuss local government proposals affecting the ward and provide advice and feedback to the councillor.<sup>22</sup> Alongside these channels of participation there are also Community Development Workers (employed by the provincial government) and Community Liaison Officers (employed by the municipality) part of whose job it is to work with the local communities in identifying their needs and ensuring that they are brought to the attention of the elected politicians. Simultaneously, when development projects are established in an area local community development forums are created and alongside representatives of the businesses involved in the projects and the local councillors civil society representatives are also involved. These run alongside permanent structures such as

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<sup>22</sup> Whilst ward committee were introduced by, and functioned under, the previous ANC administration, the Democratic Alliance decided not to reinstate them after their election victory in March 2006. Instead they have preferred the sub-council system, which under the ANC operated alongside the ward committees, where ward and proportional representation councillors from adjacent areas are grouped into sub-council areas and meet to discuss and make joint recommendations regarding their sub-council area to the full council.

the community policing forums, where the police, councillors and civil society representatives sit to discuss policing priorities and strategies. A range of channels therefore exist through which local residents and civil society organisations can bring issues and concerns to the attention of both their elected representatives and local government administration.

At first glance the period since 1994 has seen a widening of political opportunities for many civil society organisations. Civil society organisations are no longer illegal; the state now deliberately seeks input on policy issues and provides forums through which to gain this; support is even directly extended to empower organisations.<sup>23</sup> These opportunities have been further enhanced by the possibility of civil society using institutions such as the constitutional courts to pursue goals. At the same time, as outlined in chapter two, poverty and inequality have not been eradicated. There appears, therefore, to be both opportunity for civil society organisations to mobilise as well as the persistence of the issues with which they claim to be concerned. Interestingly, however, since 1994 civil society activism in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel has declined.

### **7.3.2. Guguletu: Quiescence and Occasional Complaint**

Overall, civil society in Guguletu resembles the picture of decline of traditional organisations and the emergence of new forms of protest sketched earlier. As discussed in chapter six the women and youth congresses disbanded in the early 1990s; furthermore the political youth and women leagues that replaced them have operated as adjuncts to the political parties, rather than as groups within civil society. COSAS has also declined in membership and vociferousness and the only apartheid era organisations maintaining a notable presence are the street committees and civic organisations.

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of some the opportunities which opened up in Cape Town see: Pieterse, E, 'Political Inventions and Interventions: A Critical review of the Proposed City Development Strategy Partnership in Cape Town', in (ed.) Robins, S, Limits to Liberation after Apartheid: Citizenship, Governance & Culture, (Oxford, 2005), p.116

The one area where little appears to have changed within the community is in the role of the street committees. In Guguletu these continue to act as arbiters of local disputes, seeking to maintain peace within the street, calling criminals to meetings to explain their actions and, where more serious crimes are committed, reporting culprits to the police. They also continue to mediate between individual residents and local government. Street committees conduct negotiations with the local housing officials on behalf of residents threatened by eviction. Similarly, in a direct replication of apartheid practice local officials and councillors still approach the street committees when seeking beneficiaries for local government resources, whether this is in the form of helping identify recipients of public works jobs, or deciding who has rights to rented housing when it become vacant.<sup>24</sup>

Although the street committees have seen little change, civic organisation in Guguletu has collapsed since the transition. The movement of many WCCA activists into SANCO by the mid-1990s led to its consolidation as the main civic organisation in the community. Defining SANCO's current role is difficult as officials often exaggerate its strength. However, it appears that SANCO continues to be based in both mass meetings open to all at which issues affecting individuals as residents of the township are discussed, and around interactions between street committee members and civic officials. Within post-apartheid Guguletu SANCO has become geographically organised around defined territories, which link together in a hierarchical fashion. At the lowest level are the area committees, which are comprised of the street committees and residents of approximately 5 streets. These area committees send representatives to their SANCO branch, of which there are four in Guguletu. These branches also on occasion call public meetings. These then link into and report to regional and then national SANCO structures. Each of

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<sup>24</sup> These functions were attested to by most of the street committee executive members I interviewed, as well as by civic officials, local councillors and local government officials.

these structures has an executive committee which is theoretically elected at regular intervals.<sup>25</sup>

SANCO operates as an umbrella body for the street committees, to which disputes and complaints are referred if they cannot be resolved at the local level. Here the hierarchical structure comes into play, as issues that cannot be dealt with at the level of the street are referred to the area, and if still unsolved to the branch and beyond. SANCO also calls meetings at which local issues such as crime and development are discussed and these meetings sometimes operate as forums where local councillors come to discuss proposals and seek feedback. This feeds into the oft-claimed role of SANCO as a watchdog for the community, ensuring that local government provides appropriate services and attends to the community's needs (although SANCO's willingness to challenge unpopular decisions and policies is questionable, as will be seen later). SANCO also provides representatives for local participatory structures such as the community development forums and ward committees set up by local government, as well as directly taking residents' issues to local officials and councillors. Here SANCO ties into the distributive functions performed by the street committees, as in some areas SANCO is responsible for working with and overseeing the street committees' distribution of resources, or on occasions identifying beneficiaries itself.

However, despite its continued presence within the community the level of support enjoyed by SANCO has decline recently and key figures within both the branch and provincial structures talk of falling attendances at meetings and involvement in the organisation. Equally, SANCO's influence with both local government officials and councillors has waned and many members express the feeling that local councillors are listening less and less to SANCO's concerns.<sup>26</sup> This

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<sup>25</sup> Although this is the theoretical structure of SANCO it is worth noting that many of the SANCO structures, particularly above the level of the branch, are moribund and the extent to which this works in practice is questionable.

<sup>26</sup> This was attested to in interviews with senior members of the SANCO branch executive committees from three of the four branches in Guguletu, an interview with a member of the SANCO regional

decline has coincided with an adoption by SANCO of a generally quiescent stance with regards to local government policies and defending its members' interests, in spite its claim to be acting as a watchdog. One senior official noted that in recent years 'SANCO has been so silent it seems as if it is non-existent.'<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, on occasions when public discontent has developed SANCO officials have tended to avoid the issue or side with political figures. With regard to housing, a highly contentious issue in both the township and the city at large, one resident who regularly attended SANCO meetings revealed that in her area SANCO did not even discuss the issue: '[W]hen I was in... meeting[s] with SANCO we didn't talk about the houses, just talking about the violence and crime and whatever.'<sup>28</sup> In the public domain members of SANCO in the township have even condemned participants in protests, and rather than taking up their grievances have characterised the discontent as the work of shady *agent provocateurs*. Talking in a local newspaper one senior branch official in Guguletu said with regard to housing riots in the community, 'what started this whole mess is that people are playing on emotions to discredit the current councillors.'<sup>29</sup>

In fact not only is SANCO failing to represent peoples' interests to local government, it is in many ways doing the inverse – defending the councillors and government to a discontented populace. The above condemnation is perhaps understandable, given the violent nature of the protest, but this even appears to be happening in community meetings. As another resident who regularly attended SANCO meetings in his area says:

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executive committee and was a common theme in many other interviews with street committee and SANCO members.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with SANCO regional executive committee member and resident of Guguletu, 31/7/06, Guguletu.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with a Guguletu resident who attended a march for housing, 22/4/06, Guguletu.

It is worth noting here that one of the reasons that this study contradicts other investigations which have found general contentment with civic activism within communities is that it specifically focuses upon the role of SANCO and the street committees as mechanisms for pushing claims to government. However, as is seen, SANCO often does not perform this role effectively, and increasingly many people no longer expect it to do so. It is therefore often judged simply on its role in dispute resolution, which it still performs in many places.

<sup>29</sup> 'Housing Riots the Work of Renegade Thugs', *Cape Argus*, 26/5/2005, p.1

When we calling the ward council[lor], ward council[lor] come address the people about what going on with that development [a housing upgrade project in Guguletu’s hostels]. He didn’t know nothing. Then those people, structure of SANCO in this area, they protected the ward councillor.<sup>30</sup>

This quiescence even affects participatory forums such as the ward committees where civil society is invited to give feedback. Here community representatives rarely highlight contentious issues, such as housing, and instead discussion is driven almost completely by the councillor. Equally, whilst committee members should regularly liaise publicly with their communities this appears to be the exception rather than the rule.<sup>31</sup>

Quiescence in itself is not necessarily unusual or negative. Indeed, it could represent general contentment amongst Guguletu’s population with delivery and/or a willingness to wait for services. Such a view is certainly supported by the support that the ANC continues to receive at the ballot box, which suggests that people are content with its performance in power (see table 7.1).

	2000	2004
Ward 40	96.11	95.84
Ward 41	94.77	94.47

Crucially, however, there is much evidence to suggest that this quiescence is not a result of satisfaction. Chapter two revealed that not all Africans have benefited since 1994 and this appears to be reflected at the local level. Housing riots in

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Kiki hostel dweller and former SANCO member involved in challenging the existing leadership on the hostel allocations committee, 22/02/06, Guguletu.

<sup>31</sup> Participant observation at ward committee meetings, Guguletu, Oct – Dec 2005.

<sup>32</sup> PR votes from wards 40 and 41 both of which lie wholly within the boundaries of Guguletu (in spite of minor boundary changes in 2004). Data from <http://www.elections.org.za/>

Guguletu in May 2005 led to 30 arrests and revealed considerable anger about the pace and nature of service delivery. This anger was also almost universally expressed in discussions with street committee members within the community.<sup>33</sup> As one ANC and SANCO member put it, 'we are always crying to our councillors [about the lack of delivery] and our councillors they don't work hand in hand with us.'<sup>34</sup> Furthermore faith in political society is markedly absent. Rioting in protest at policy decisions suggests a far from patient populace. Survey data contradicts the idea that communities hold faith in their local politicians to deliver. In a 2003 survey of political attitudes in Cape Town only about 15% of respondents trusted their ward councillors to 'do the right thing' 'always' or 'most of the time' whilst over 30% felt they would do so either 'never' or 'only some of the time'. These results did not vary noticeably on racial grounds.<sup>35</sup>

With SANCO quiescent and the ANC politically omnipotent opposition to unpopular policies in Guguletu has instead been articulated through contentious political action and outside of the civic movement. Whilst it would be incorrect to argue that Guguletu has seen NSM activism on a large scale – indeed a notable feature of Guguletu is a lack of sustained contentious mobilisation – some NSMs have emerged and some contentious political action has occurred. Three specific examples emerged during this research. The first involved the upgrading of hostels into family homes in an area of Guguletu called Kiki. During 2005/6 there had been considerable conflict between two separate groupings over executive positions within the local SANCO area committee, and the composition of the development forum established to oversee the allocation of the upgraded hostel units. The conflict started after members of the SANCO area committee, who also comprise the bulk of community representatives on the allocations committee, were accused of allocating finished units to their friends and relatives, as well as to people from outside the

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<sup>33</sup> Housing, jobs and crime were the three main problems mentioned by street committee members, with housing singled out due to the strength of popular feeling.

<sup>34</sup> ANC & SANCO member who attended several meetings of a Backyard Dweller's Association, 3/8/2006, Cape Town.

<sup>35</sup> Seekings, J, Alexander, K, Jooste, T & Matzneret, I, The 2003 Cape Area Study (CAS) a User's Guide, CSSR Working Paper No. 61, (Cape Town, 2004), pp.15-16

hostels in return for bribes. This led to demands for the election of new area and allocations committees; a request backed up by the fact that both these committees had overrun their mandated terms. However, the existing committees refused to disband and a range of strategies, such as closing meetings early, were employed in order to ensure that they continued in power.<sup>36</sup> This conflict eventually led to a breakaway civic group being formed, which approached council officials with their concerns and demanded a new allocations committee be elected. Violence has occurred intermittently and whilst attempts are being made to create a compromise, in late 2006 no new committees had been elected and the conflict was still ongoing.

The second example is housing protests in May 2005. During March 2005 backyard dwellers (residents who live in shacks in the back yards of formal houses) from Guguletu came together to form a committee dealing with housing issues and in May 2005 allocations for a new housing project being constructed alongside the N2 highway were announced. Under the allocation system 70% of the units are to go to residents of the Joe Slovo informal settlement, whilst 30% are to go to backyard dwellers. Of this 30% only a third was allocated to Guguletu, with other formal townships taking the rest. This led to a series of meetings where backyard dwellers expressed their discontent with the allocations and a series of activities were planned including a march to the city centre and the handing in of a memorandum of demands to the provincial minister for housing. Following this more meetings were held and after one of these a riot broke out which lasted several days. Subsequent to these riots meetings continued to be held by some of the participants and a backyard dweller's association was formed and some follow up action, such as the handing in of memorandums and marches to the local housing office, have continued. Attendance at the organisation's meetings has varied from around 20 to 100 people.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This was reported by several members of the breakaway civic group and was also observed by the author.

<sup>37</sup> Participant observation at BDA meetings 2005-2006, Guguletu



The final example is a conflict surrounding employment allocation. In 2004 an extended public works programme was announced in Guguletu and the tender was granted to a company called BTH. A series of project committees were elected in community meetings to oversee the development process and it was decided that 60 people would be employed from each ward and would be chosen by the street committees. However in two wards controversy erupted. In ward 42 this started when the councillor was accused of selecting 20 employees from her friends and family and in ward 44 the councillor was accused of hiring people from other wards. This conflict spilled over into the streets and a series of meetings, toyi-toyis and protests were held. Residents even dumped their rubbish on the street, blocking Guguletu's main road. Concerns were also raised surrounding the tendering and employment practices of BTH. This led to negotiations between representatives of the residents, the local councillors and officials, which whilst not satisfying all their demands did lead to some changes. Following this a group have continued to meet and have formed themselves into the Young Jobless People's Coalition (YJPC), although participation has generally ranged between five and twenty people.<sup>38</sup>

### **7.3.3. Bonteheuwel: Public Discontent and the Collapse of Residential Civil Society**

In comparison to Guguletu the picture in Bonteheuwel is simpler and appears to represent a general collapse in grassroots civil society structures. Whilst a range of residents' organisations claim to be operating within the community, including a branch of SANCO, in real terms activity is non-existent. In 2005 activists did organise a meeting under the name of SANCO with the then mayor to protest against plans to introduce meters to regulate water bills. SANCO was also

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Senior YJPC activist, 9/5/06, Guguletu.

represented on the community's ward committee. However regular meetings are not held and the civic structure itself is seen as weak by activists involved.<sup>39</sup>

This is not to argue that there is no civil society organising in Bonteheuwel. There is considerable involvement in religious and sports organisations throughout the community. However, civil society organisations which specifically organise on issues of socio-economic transformation are less in evidence, and such activism is dominated by the emergence of ad hoc groups dealing with specific issues and temporary problems, or organisations tied to local governance initiatives, rather than formal, longstanding structures. In late 2006 an organisation of residents liaised with the local council about problems relating to a block of stables in their street and the organisation they used to do this was established specifically to perform this role.<sup>40</sup> A Friends of the Library committee was also established to oversee the upgrading of the local library by the City Council after the project was announced. Regarding governance initiatives, the main vehicle used by youth activists – from both political parties and NGOs – is the Local Youth Development Forum which was established by the council. Similarly, the main forum for dealing with crime and policing issues is not mass participation in neighbourhood watches or civic organisations but the local community policing forum in which activists sit alongside councillors and local police officials.<sup>41</sup>

The lack of civil society organising in Bonteheuwel does not, however, represent a lack of discontent within the community. During interviews with activists, residents, councillors and ex-activists constant discontent was expressed with the nature of the post-apartheid order and delivery. A common view was that coloureds had missed out as a result of state policies which overwhelmingly favoured Africans in the provision of services and in the distribution of opportunities. One of the Bonteheuwel councillors specifically linked the racism expressed by many coloureds to the unequal provision of services:

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<sup>39</sup> Personal communication, Judith Kennedy, January 2008

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Theresa Thompson (DA ward councillor), 11/8/2006, Goodwood

<sup>41</sup> Interview with ANC Youth league activist, 7/7/2006, Bonteheuwel

[I]f a house opposite in the [African] squatter camp burns down, ok. In no time at all people are there to give food, to give blankets, to give this, to give that. Whatever. People are given five hundred Rands, people are given starter packs and whatever. Yet if a wendy house [shack] in the Bonteheuwel area burns down... we aren't given the liberty. Our people aren't given 500 Rands, they aren't given starter packs, you know what I'm saying... That is where the us and the them comes from.<sup>42</sup>

This discontent is even expressed by many local activists who supported the ANC. One former activist who had applied for a bursary to attend a training course argued that, 'You have to make an application for a bursary and... if your surname doesn't begin with X or a Q or a Z or [is] Xhosa related, you can see your chance is nil.'<sup>43</sup>

Coloured discontent with ANC politics is also reflected at the ballot box. Unlike most of South Africa, where the ANC is the dominant political party, in the Western Cape it has experienced a sustained challenge from first the National Party and lately the Democratic Alliance.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, the Western Cape Province was governed between 1994 and 1999 by the National Party and the City of Cape Town, discounting the period between 2003-5 when defections to the ANC gave them a majority, was again governed by a Democratic Alliance – National Party coalition and since 2006 by a Democratic Alliance led coalition. Moreover, whilst the extent to which voting patterns in South Africa are defined by race is a contested issue, in Cape Town the Democratic Alliance gains the majority of its support from white and coloured voters whilst the ANC gains its support from Africans.

Even in Bonteheuwel, with its history of Congress dominance within civil society during the 1980s, ANC political success has been paltry. Unfortunately election results are not easily available for the 1994 and 1996 elections, although it is

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Theresa Thompson, 11/8/2006 (DA ward councillor), Goodwood

<sup>43</sup> Focus group with three Bonteheuwel activists, 7/12/2005, Bonteheuwel

<sup>44</sup> The Democratic Alliance was formed by the merger of the remaining members of the New National Party and the (traditionally white/liberal) Democratic Party after many members of the NP defected to the ANC.

clear that the majority of coloured people voted for the National Party.<sup>45</sup> However election results from local and national elections (table 7.2 & 7.3) between 1999 and 2004 clearly show that the ANC has consistently attracted only around 20% of the vote in Bonteheuwel.

	2000	2004
Democratic Alliance	68.17	50.35
ANC	19.96	19.06

	1999	2004
Modderdam High	24.8	24.3
Arcadia Primary	21.7	19.5
Cedar Primary	23	19.6
Mimosa Primary	18.6	20
Boundary Primary	22.2	22
Nerina Primary School	22.7	20
Bramble Way Primary School	19.6	19.6

<sup>45</sup> Eldridge, M & Seekings, J, 'Mandela's Lost Province: The African National Congress and the Western Cape Electorate in the 1994 South African Elections', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22/4, 1996, pp.517-40, p.532 & p.536;  
Lodge, T, 'The South African General Election, April 1994: Results, Analysis and Implications', *African Affairs*, 94/377, 1995, pp.471-500

<sup>46</sup> PR votes from ward 50 which lies wholly within the boundaries of Bonteheuwel. Data from <http://www.elections.org.za/>

<sup>47</sup> Votes cast in national elections. Data from <http://www.elections.org.za/>

## 7.4. From Mass Action to Mass Inaction: Explaining the Decline of Apartheid Civil Society

Post-apartheid civil society appears riddled with contradictions. Many of the hardships which formed the fulcrums around which anti-apartheid activists mobilised continue to persist; in many cases they have even got worse. Furthermore, the post-apartheid state has (at least rhetorically) committed itself to empowering civil society and involving communities in decision making. In such a context it could be expected that individuals and civil society organisations would seek to organise and use the political space available to them to represent their interests and seek alleviation of their hardships. This, however, has not occurred. Civil society has demobilised and where people have sought to protest this has occurred through the emergence of new forms of activism. Furthermore, even these new forms of activism have been sporadic and not well supported. In Bonteheuwel activism has dissipated whilst in Guguletu contentious political action has been characterised by either sudden outbursts of discontent which rapidly subside leaving small organisations with limited participation (employment and housing protests) or in attempts to replace existing civil society structures rather than form alternative mechanisms of representation (hostel protests).<sup>48</sup> A range of questions exist, therefore, surrounding why established civil society has become demobilised and quiescent, despite discontent and, in the case of SANCO, a rhetorical commitment to represent community interests and to act as a watchdog over government policy and delivery? Furthermore, there also exist questions surrounding the circumstances in which, however momentarily, this quiescence collapses.

Before moving to a more detailed consideration of the specifics of the case studies, it is first worth noting that many of the explanations for the decline of

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<sup>48</sup> For example, the number of participants in Guguletu backyard dwellers association meetings declined considerably between November 2005 and May 2006 from around 100 to around 20.

apartheid organisations highlighted in existing studies of decline have salience in Guguletu and Bonteheuwel. As already covered in chapter six, with political transformation activists from both communities were rapidly assimilated into the unbanned political parties and the state administration. In Guguletu most key figures from the progressive organisations of the 1980s have assumed some role within the state. To give just a few examples key CAYCO/SAYCO activists Mcebisi Skwatsha and Whitey Jacobs are now leaders of the Western Cape ANC and the provincial Minister for Sports and Recreation respectively. Wilson Sidina and Mildred Lesiea who were instrumental in the formation of the WCCA are now a ward councillor and an MP. Zoliswa Kota and Nomaindia Mfeketo who came to prominence in the women's movement are now an MP and a councillor/ex-mayor of the city. Similar trends are also apparent in Bonteheuwel. Quentin Michels, original founder of the BCA has joined the army, as has Andrew November, a founding member of the BMW. Bennet 'boycott' Bailey who was a representative on the Committee of 81 now works in the provincial government, as does Civic Activist Colin Lawrence.

The loss of key leadership figures from civil society has been further compounded by political loyalty amongst remaining activists to the ruling ANC, as people with strong political allegiances formed during the anti-apartheid struggle have moved into political structures and baulked at openly challenging their own political party. In Bonteheuwel, for example, SANCO was relatively quiet during the period that the ANC was controlling the city. However, after the Democratic Alliance won the 2006 election there was talk amongst activists, one of whom was an ANC Councillor, of it taking a more proactive role.<sup>49</sup> Similar sentiments were also clear in Guguletu. Whilst SANCO claims to be a non-partisan organisation the overlap between ANC and SANCO membership is considerable and SANCO helped the ANC campaign in recent local government elections. These close relations were confirmed by an executive member of SANCO Guguletu's section 2

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<sup>49</sup> Personal communication with Youth and civic activist

branch, who despite arguing that SANCO was a home for people from all political organisations also admitted: ‘Yeah, we are a political organisation... we will sell the ideas of the ANC at our meetings, but you don’t necessarily have to buy them.’<sup>50</sup>

A decline in organisational capacity due to changing leadership dynamics has been compounded by the loss of funding since the early 1990s. The removal of funding from civil society after 1994 and its targeting on development and governance programmes has been well documented elsewhere <sup>51</sup> and in both cases here its impact was far from insignificant. In Guguletu, for example, SANCO had to close its office in the local shopping centre due to a lack of funds and whilst paid organisers were commonplace before the first democratic elections there is no longer the money to pay them. Indeed, it is usually down to the local leadership to provide funds themselves for even basic resources such as stationary.

However, these explanations are incomplete. Not all activists have assumed roles in government or the post-apartheid state. This is particularly the case in Bonteheuwel, where many old activists are employed outside the state or are unemployed, yet few are actively involved in grassroots community structures. Furthermore, those people with key positions within civil society are not incapable and SANCO leaders in both communities do have organising skills. In Bonteheuwel the core of SANCO consists of people who were active in the youth, civic and trade union movements in the 1980s and one activist even works providing outside leadership training to social movements in other communities. In Guguletu organisational skills are also far from absent. The executive of SANCO’s section 2 branch includes a veteran of the Hostel Dwellers’ Association and the Section 3 branch includes a veteran trade unionist from Port Elizabeth. Furthermore, these explanations also provide little to account for the timidity of civil society organisations in forums specifically created to allow them to express their concerns.

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with SANCO executive committee member, Guguletu section 2 Branch, 22/3/06, Guguletu

<sup>51</sup> Ballard, R, Habib, A & Valodia, I, ‘Introduction: From Anti-Apartheid to Post-Apartheid Social Movements’, in (eds.) Ballard, R, Habib A & Valodia, I, Voices of Protest..., p.15

A lack of resources may hinder effective organisation building but it does not explain why in communities in which the sense of disappointment with delivery is palpable community representatives do not articulate this to government. Nor does it explain why SANCO officials in Guguletu have actively moved to diffuse protest and discontent.

Secondly, these explanations cannot account for why, in the face of the inactivity of older civil society organisations, residents rarely seek or engage with alternative forms of organisation and action through which to articulate their demands. It is undoubtedly true that organisations play a major role in shaping, articulating and providing a vehicle for collective interests. However, as events in 1976 showed, collective action is not simply a question of organisation; collective grievances can precipitate collective action without strong organisation. Furthermore, whilst organisation has all but collapsed within Bonteheuwel the same is not true in Guguletu. There are activists, such as those from the YJPC and Backyard Dweller's Association, who gained organising experience in the 1980s and who are proactively seeking to mobilise people around their day-to-day experiences. Yet in spite of this success has been generally muted.

#### **7.4.1. Civic Silence: Guguletu and the Benefits of Quiescence**

In Guguletu civil society quiescence can be explained primarily as a result of the predominance of political society within decision making and distributional processes and the use of this to court political loyalty through a form of patronage politics. This thesis has already shown how civic activism was weak when its control of resources was limited, and grew as the civics became vehicles through which local government resources were distributed during transition. From 1994 the strengthening of local administration has transferred much of this power from civic activists to the state, and the decline of the civic movement has closely echoed the strengthening of local government structures and the growing powers of councillors *vis a vis* the civics. In the mid-1990s political society was only just establishing itself



and consequently civil society structures were able to exercise a degree of control over local development, especially through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) forums which were established to decide on development projects and included civil society representatives. However, as the power of elected councillors has been consolidated, civil society influence has waned and with this strength within the community. As one senior SANCO member said:

You see there was a time when there were the RDPs. And most of the members of the RDP's were from SANCO. And the RDPs were responsible for the development. Any development in the township. But they seem to have died a natural death, the RDPs. And because of that now things have gone back to the ANC and the ANC is calling the tune in almost everything that is taking place in the townships.<sup>52</sup>

Yet, as has been seen, this decline in civil society activism does not reflect contentment with, or faith in political society. Instead, it represents the use by local councillors of their growing power – a power derived from both formal policies and informal traditions of governance – to draw civil society organisations and residents into dependent relationships which ensure their loyalty.

Four factors are central in explaining the development of these dependent relationships. Firstly, whilst the government has introduced policies in an attempt to increase the role of civil society in governance, ward councillors have assumed a pivotal and predominant position within local government decision-making. Secondly, the relationships between local government, civil society and communities are only loosely regulated. Thirdly, within this loose framework certain powers have been devolved to civil society, yet because these powers are not legally guaranteed civil society has to court favour with the ward councillors to guarantee their continuance and effective operation. Fourthly, the power of ward councillors over scarce resources allows them to exclude people on the basis of political loyalty.

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with WCCA executive member, 31/9/2006, Guguletu

Whilst the City of Cape Town has introduced several citywide policies on participation, overall there is a lack of formal procedures for regularising and monitoring the interaction between civil society and the state. Some initiatives, such as the ward committee system, are prescribed centrally. However, beyond this there is no set procedure for the conducting of participation, merely a shopping list of possible options from which councillors can choose. Participatory practices are therefore highly localised and vary considerably between different suburbs and wards.<sup>53</sup> Local councillors can, in many cases, select the forms of participation and the level of civil society involvement in these forums. In one ward in Guguletu, for example, the previous councillor held regular meetings with the chairs of all the street committees, as well as SANCO officials, where local development issues were discussed. However, the councillor elected in 2000 stopped these meetings, as he did not see them as necessary.<sup>54</sup> Local councillors also exercise discretion in pursuing concerns raised by the civics, street committees and civil society in general. There is no legislative demand that councillors must act on feedback gathered during ward committee meetings, despite their centrality in Cape Town's participatory project before 2006. Equally, each councillor can decide whether to take up issues brought to them by the civics and street committees, as revealed by the fact that in the same wards different street chairs report varying satisfaction with their councillors. In one street, for example, the chair was very pleased because he had approached the councillor about housing and the councillor had managed to find houses for two residents of the street, whilst in another street in the same ward the chair felt that the councillor ignored any requests he made.<sup>55</sup>

Alongside this lack of formalised procedures local government also has very limited capacity through which it can monitor and administer services to the local

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<sup>53</sup> It is worth noting here that the council is aware of this and is developing a plan to regularise participatory practices across the city. See: City of Cape Town, Draft City of Cape Town Policy for Public Participation, (Cape Town, 2006)

<sup>54</sup> Interview with street committee chairperson and SANCO executive member, Guguletu Section 1, 20/3/2006, Guguletu

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 9/11/05, Guguletu; Interview with retired street committee chairperson, Guguletu Section 1, 22/5/06, Guguletu

population and this has led to a continuity of the apartheid period reliance by both local councillors and local government upon civil society to perform quasi-administrative functions, although the amount of resources local government has to distribute has expanded rapidly. Here three examples will suffice. Firstly, a large scale upgrading programme has been introduced in Guguletu's hostels, in an area of the township known as Kiki. This project aims to transform the hostels from dilapidated buildings, often containing upwards of three families in a single room, to two and three bedroom flats, which current hostel dwellers are reallocated into upon completion. However, due to the lack of records regarding current residents of the hostels the council owns no clear list of beneficiaries. Therefore residents were asked to register before the development commenced, and the local street committees played a role in verifying their claims. Similarly, as the units have been completed local street chairs, liaising with members of the hostel development forum, which includes both SANCO representatives and the local councillor, play a role in identifying those most in need of accommodation as it becomes available.<sup>56</sup>

A similar process is at work in the distribution of food parcels for the most impoverished township residents, provided by the council's social development unit, and temporary employment, involving the department of public works. Again there is no clear list of residents or their incomes available through which to decide who is most deserving of these opportunities. Therefore it is often the case that the local councillors, who at times compile the lists of names which are used to allocate these opportunities, will seek either the help of SANCO, and through it the street committees, or simply approach the street committees directly and request a list of worthy residents.<sup>57</sup> These practices are not illegal, but nor are they effectively regulated. Often they flow directly from formal legislation. In the case of the allocation of hostel units, for example, City of Cape Town policy states that

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Senior housing official in charge of rental housing in Guguletu, 9/11/2005; Interview with three residents involved in civic organisation in Kiki hostel area, 11/8/2006, Cape Town

<sup>57</sup> These procedures were confirmed by most of the street executive committee members and councillors I interviewed, as well as by SANCO officials and local councillors and were widely known of and reported upon within Guguletu.

beneficiaries of state provided housing must not have 'evidence of anti-social behaviour' and people can be refused a new house or moved down the waiting list if this is reported.<sup>58</sup> However, it is the local street committee, and sometimes SANCO, which attests to whether neighbours have been anti-social and officials rarely investigate the veracity of such claims. Therefore whilst they have no formal rights to allocate housing, the street committees and SANCO become de facto gatekeepers of some housing opportunities.<sup>59</sup>

Alongside the powers which come from involvement with local government, civic officials as individuals also accrue personal benefits through their involvement. Local councillors control access to many jobs and training opportunities which individuals in civil society hope to access. Involvement in the development forums and local community initiatives often brings with it small material benefits, such as the free meals handed out to participants in neighbourhood watch schemes, or the food gathered from gardening projects. Similarly, training is made available to civil society members and job opportunities, such as the community liaison officer positions, are at times given to SANCO members. A member of the Guguletu Section 3 SANCO executive committee, who was sitting on the ward committee in her area and had been previously employed by the Integrated Serviced Land Project made this close linkage between involvement in SANCO and access to opportunities clear:

I say to you if you are a member of SANCO... [you should] get jobs, seminars whatever, courses to be clear.<sup>60</sup>

However, many of these opportunities rely upon maintaining good relations and working closely with the local councillor, as it is the councillor that plays a key role

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<sup>58</sup> City of Cape Town, Policy Framework for Unlawful Occupation of Council Owned Stock (Rental Housing), (Cape Town, 2001)

<sup>59</sup> Interview with a senior housing official in charge of rental housing in Guguletu, 9/11/05, Guguletu

<sup>60</sup> Interview with executive committee member, Guguletu SANCO section 3 Branch and ward committee representative, 8/11/05, Guguletu

in selecting people for employment, and often passes on names of people to be given training.<sup>61</sup>

Overall, therefore, local members of civil society are given certain powers, which they can exercise to a large degree at their own discretion, and gain benefits by working with their councillor. The local street committee is able to choose who in its street is worthy of a job, a food parcel, and who can move into some vacated properties, whilst civic officials often oversee this process and can veto decisions made by the street committees, and through their role in certain development committees exercise similar powers. However, because these powers are delegated, usually by the local councillor, they can be removed or circumvented at any time. Equally, selection for involvement in participatory forums brings with it some personal rewards, yet access to many of these rewards is again dependent upon local ward councillors. The danger for street chairs, SANCO officials and members of participatory structures is, therefore, that if they fail to maintain good terms with their councillors these powers and the resources which accompany them will be removed from them and distributed elsewhere. One ward committee member in Guguletu made this abundantly clear. When asked what would happen if she did not have a good relationship with the councillor she said that the consequences would be that 'The work [of the committee] will stuck'. As a result of this she argued that as a member of the ward committee, 'you must protect he or she. If they [the community] criticise her or she or him, you must stop it.'<sup>62</sup> Thus, the participation of civil society in the distributive regime in Guguletu has drawn civil society into a dependent relationship with the local council and its councillors. The fact that SANCO derives most of its benefits, both as an organisation and as a collection of individuals, through its relationship with local government and ward councillors has created a situation in which it is more important for civil society

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Guguletu councillor, 3/11/05, Guguletu; Interview with Senior Official City of Cape Town Social Development Department, 25/1/06, Cape Town; Interview with Senior Official City of Cape Town Housing Department, 29/11/05, Cape Town

<sup>62</sup> Interview with women's representative sitting on ward committee, 7/9/06, Guguletu

organisations to please their councillors, than it is to represent broader community concerns.<sup>63</sup>

Similar factors also underlie the reason why despite their discontent little effort has been made by residents to either turn to alternative channels for representation, or to force the existing civil society organisations to be more proactive. Just as the civil society organisations are tied into dependent relationships with local councillors, residents are in turn drawn into a dependent relationship with both civil society and their councillors. Often it is through their interactions with the street committees and SANCO that residents' entitlements to government resources are negotiated. It is therefore crucial for residents to remain on good terms with their street committees and SANCO if they are to be given access to these resources. In one street, for example, attendees at street committee meetings are noted every week and if people fail to attend these meetings they are considered 'not known' and therefore do not get considered when resources become available.<sup>64</sup> This leads to people avoiding contentious issues or challenging the status quo because if they are identified as troublesome they are likely to be excluded from the existing distributional networks. One activist involved in a housing social movement in Guguletu says how his involvement in an organisation with a fractious relationship with SANCO in the area impacts upon him and other movement activists:

So SANCO is playing one of dirty tricks. It is a sister organisation of the ANC, and it is also working hand-in-hand with the councillor. So there is some sort of nepotism run by SANCO. I'm sure you know the word that they employ their families etc...

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<sup>63</sup> Similar dynamics were observed by Seekings in Cape Town in 1998 but he argued that the power of councillors led to tension between the civics and the ANC, rather than quiescence. See: Seekings, J, 'No Home for Revolutionaries: The Structures and Activities of the South African National Civic Organisation in Metropolitan Cape Town, 1996-97', *Urban Forum*, 9/1, 1998, pp.1- 35. However, he was writing shortly after the first local government elections when the relationships between civics and local government were still in considerable flux and it would appear that as the power of councillors has become entrenched so SANCO in Guguletu has become less vocal.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with retired street committee chairperson, Guguletu Section 1, 22/05/06, Guguletu. This is also supported by evidence from other townships in Cape Town. In Langa, another African township, residents temporarily housed in the hostels there were driven out by the other residents after arguments over the running of shebeens in the area. However, one of the reasons given for this action was 'they also don't attend meetings. They just carry on with their nonsense', 'Langa Residents Evict Families' *Cape Times*, 4/9/2006, p.4

Okay, they know me [because of my involvement in the social movement]. I will not get any job.<sup>65</sup>

The rewarding of loyalty is even reported to occur within SANCO structures, where members seen as troublesome by the leadership are excluded from job opportunities.<sup>66</sup>

This filters down to ordinary residents, who are aware of the dangers of becoming involved in oppositional or contentious political activity. One resident of Guguletu reveals in stark terms the risks inherent in opposition. Asked whether she would consider voting against the ANC or abstaining from local government elections due to the council's failure to provide her with a house, despite having been on the waiting list since 1994, she said that she would not as she doesn't want to fight with the councillor because, 'our councillor say if you don't vote, you don't get a house. If you vote you get a house.'<sup>67</sup> Such findings correspond to, and perhaps in part help explain, survey data which has found that in Cape Town, 'many people, especially African people, say that you need to watch what you say with regards to politics.'<sup>68</sup>

The quiescence of both civil society and township residents cannot, therefore, simply be explained through the weaknesses of the organisations themselves, through a growing faith in politicians to get things done, or a failure to adjust to the changed political context. Instead, the opportunities which the local political and administrative context has presented for civil society organisations have played a major role in shaping their behaviour. A range of opportunities are available for civic activists and street committee members within Guguletu. However, in taking advantage of these opportunities they have had to moderate their role as advocates of community demands and instead have become closely integrated into post-apartheid governance and distributional networks. In many

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Senior Member of Backyard Dwellers Association, 6/3/06, Cape Town

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Cape Town United Democratic Movement leadership, 23/01/06, Cape Town

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Guguletu resident, 3/8/06, Guguletu

<sup>68</sup> Seekings, J, Alexander, K, Jooste, T & Matzneret, I, The 2003 Cape Area Study... p.14

ways this shows a highly astute reading of the post-apartheid political dispensation, and not a failure to adjust as has been suggested. One criticism of the civics is that they have been unwilling to accept the superiority of political society over civil society and have sought to maintain a role for themselves as organisations to which political society must come to access the will of the people.<sup>69</sup> The fact that in Guguletu SANCO has come to accept that benefits flow from political society and have therefore assumed a subordinate role in order to access these benefits, whilst not necessarily palatable, does not in itself suggest a misreading of the opportunities of the new political context.

#### **7.4.2. Bonteheuwel and the End of Aspirational Activism**

Unlike Guguletu, in Bonteheuwel grassroots civil society has not simply become quiescent, but has almost disappeared. In accounting for this several factors have to be considered. Firstly, historical traditions of governance and activism were significant. Unlike in Guguletu where apartheid governance encouraged the organic formation of residential civil society structures and gave them day-to-day significance in the lives of African residents, in Bonteheuwel civil society was not well embedded in people's life experiences and was generally unsuccessful in delivering material benefits. Under apartheid coloureds received state services such as policing, and the administration of coloured communities was far more developed than in African areas, even if democratic accountability was denied. Consequently, there were not the impulses towards self-organisation which led to the creation of strong structures within communities separate from the state. Secondly, and tying closely into this, was the fact that whilst anti-apartheid activists claimed to be acting and mobilising the community their social base was narrow and they tended to be dominated by younger, more educated and better off members of the community. Consequently, much anti-apartheid activism was done on behalf of, rather than with the full participation of, the community. Consequently

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<sup>69</sup> Cherry, J, Jones, K & Seekings, J, 'Democratisation and Politics...', p.900



grassroots civil society in Bonteheuwel was particularly vulnerable to the withdrawal of an activist elite. Finally, both socio-economic and political transformations post-apartheid led to growing fissures between this activist elite and the wider community and consequently many activists withdrew from grassroots organising, precipitating its collapse.

The centrality of an activist elite in sustaining grassroots organising and the considerable impact of their withdrawal was made clear by a former civic activist, reflecting on his involvement in community organising and the impact of democratisation upon civil society in the community. Describing the impact of democratisation on grassroots structures as 'disastrous' he went on to explain this as a result of the limited penetration of grassroots mobilisation beyond the schools and more educated residents:

[S]o called coloureds have not been involved [in community organising] with the intensity and the sophistication for a long time in their life. There might have been individual so called coloureds in the past... but not in terms of mass community organisation. And we were just kind of tasting the power of that and then came the unbanning... I always make a joke and say freedom came too early for the coloured, man... So we didn't have all the elders with that kind of continuation of experience and learning... Whilst in African townships, at this level of community organisations. They had kind of a history. ... [in Bonteheuwel] we just talking the '80s period. It was too quick in a generation of a community. To kind of embed a particular consciousness. About oneself and who you are and what you are... It came a bit too quick.<sup>70</sup>

The importance of this elite and the limited commitment to grassroots structures more broadly within the community was backed up by work done in the Tygerberg region of the City of Cape Town's Department of Community Development and Liaison in 2003 as part of a provincial government programme known as the Cape Flats Renewal Strategy. One of this programme's explicit goals was the strengthening of relationships between civil society, the local state and the local community.<sup>71</sup> In order to achieve this the programme sought to support

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Suleiman Isaacs, 7/8/2006, Goodwood

<sup>71</sup> Interview with local government official, 7/3/2006, Bonteheuwel

community structures and leadership.<sup>72</sup> Small scale projects such as soup kitchens and community gardens were decided upon. Leaders were identified and sent on leadership courses sponsored by the City Council. A further condition of leadership was that the leaders had to report back every month to a community gathering in a move designed to encourage accountability and prevent gate keeping.<sup>73</sup> What is interesting is that the strategy employed was based upon the need for the council to develop effective civil society structures, rather than engaging with strong existing structures. Leadership was not to be consulted, but built. The very fact that leadership had to be 'built' in a community with strong traditions of civil society organising reveals the extent to which apartheid organisations had failed to reproduce themselves in the post-apartheid context. The key factor in accounting for the collapse of grassroots organising in Bonteheuwel, therefore, is accounting for why so many activists withdrew from civil society after 1994.

This withdrawal was primarily a result of contradictions, which had existed in coloured activism throughout the 1970s and 1980s, tearing apart the alliance which an educated activist elite had sought to build between themselves and their broader communities. This withdrawal had both structural and cognitive dimensions, though both reflected a divergence of the views of activists from the communities they had previously mobilised; a divergence which was intimately tied to the impact of apartheid discrimination, and its demise, on different sections of the coloured community.

The rejection of the ANC by the coloured electorate during the first non-racial elections in April 1994 had a major impact upon the relationship between anti-apartheid activists and broader coloured communities. During the 1980s, grassroots organising had often revolved around a romanticised vision of the role of the working class in transformation. However, as discussed earlier, the strategy of community organising was actually based upon recognition of the limited support

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<sup>72</sup> City of Cape Town, *Bonteheuwel: Beyond 2010*, (Cape Town, 2005), p.2

<sup>73</sup> Interview with local government official, 7/3/2006, Bonteheuwel

for political goals amongst coloureds. Furthermore, as activists tended to circulate in social networks which were defined by political commitment, exposure to broader sentiments within the coloured communities was limited. Consequently, the widespread support that the National Party gained in the 1994 elections was both unexpected and, for many activists, devastating. The coloured working class rapidly transformed in the minds of many activists from being the bearer of revolution to a racist and parochial obstacle to political and social revolution. The impact was drastic as people who had made considerable sacrifices during the apartheid struggle, and had even had friends killed, were rejected by the communities in whose names they had claimed to be acting. As one activist from Bonteheuwel noted, after 1994 many people withdrew from grassroots civil society, 'because after 1994 we didn't want to have anything to do with them.'<sup>74</sup> Another talked of the feeling of betrayal she felt after all the sacrifices that she and her friends had made in both lives and in helping people with rent, housing and community issues.<sup>75</sup>

However, disjuncture at the political level represented more than just conflicting political choices; it was in many ways a manifestation of deep structural divisions amongst coloureds created by the ongoing reconfiguration of the apartheid political economy. As discussed in chapter two the coloured community has experienced growing internal differentiation, with the working classes suffering most and the better educated gaining most. The more educated activist elite have been amongst those that have benefited most. Many have moved into politics and government administration. Furthermore, the fact that they were amongst the most educated people within the community meant that as apartheid deracialised and opportunities opened up for people with skills, many activists were able to take advantage. This has led to considerable social and economic advancement in the post-apartheid period and many activists have moved out of the community. A brief life history, which is broadly representative of many of the activists I interviewed, reveals the benefits that many coloureds have experienced after 1994.

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with 3 SANCO activists, 10/11/2005, Bonteheuwel

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Youth activist and ANC member (1), 8/3/2006, Bonteheuwel

This activist lived in Bonteheuwel during the 1980s, became involved in the civic and was recruited by the SACP where he helped to organise trade unions. After 1994 he started working for an NGO and has subsequently moved into the state. He is no longer involved in community organising and sees himself as 'middle class now.' Although he does claim to get gratification from delivering for the community through his job:

[M]aybe I'm trying to fool myself, but I get gratification that what I do I do aggressively... as a progressive civic servant... So Bonteheuwel never had a police station, so they have [one now]... There's [CCTV] cameras... They will have whatever I can get for them from the state as my local area, would be the way I'm working. Or there's something wrong with the gangsters I would kind of... kind of go and make peace. But very superficial type of, not an imbedded grain. Day-to-day community issues... No I'm a sell out in that way.<sup>76</sup>

Other occupations undertaken by activists include editing a major newspaper, managing in an engineering firm and working for the South African Revenue Service.

Coloured activists, therefore, have become increasingly distanced from the communities within which they used to mobilise. Under apartheid young, educated, coloureds sought transformation, in part because of the limits apartheid placed upon their life chances. To achieve this they attempted to mobilise the communities within which they lived. However, post-apartheid, opportunities have expanded, many activists no longer live within their old communities, and furthermore those communities have lost their ideological virtue. Consequently community activism has lost its appeal and urgency for those who in the past drove it.

The withdrawal of activists from community based structures has been compounded by post-apartheid transformation in local governance and broader deracialisation which has made possible civil society activism without demanding consistent grassroots involvement. As discussed with reference to Guguletu, a range of mechanisms for public participation have been established and activists are able

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Suleiman Isaacs, 7/8/2006, Goodwood

to involve themselves in structures such as the community policing forums, youth development forums and development committees. However, the way in which these committees are elected in Bonteheuwel – through a vote at a mass meeting – means that activists can become involved in development in the community without having to consistently work with community members. In Bonteheuwel there is very little public involvement in participatory forums – again a legacy of apartheid governance – and consequently they are dominated by people with links to political parties. Being able to gain support at a mass meeting is possible by mobilising people through ANC branch structures and thus there is little need for activists to gain support through involvement in the broader community; indeed, unlike Guguletu, very few residents who are not party political members attend community meetings at all. This means that activists are able to make a contribution to development within their communities, but in doing so they can limit involvement to structures dominated by like minded people.<sup>77</sup>

Involvement in government supported structures also provides opportunities for personal advancement, just as it does in Guguletu. One member of the local branch of the ANCYL who was active in student politics in the 1980s talked of how he was involved in local development primarily as a way of expanding his opportunities:

Our focus has shifted mainly to youth development. Basically employment is our main concern, as well as HIV – Aids. So we do run... awareness workshops on HIV – Aids and we try to engage government... on how... to employ unemployed young people. In our community and especially from the ANC youth league. Our main motivation basically is to get education and employment... [B]asically we look at ourselves – straight talking to you now. We need to empower ourselves before we can empower other people.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Community development forums in Bonteheuwel tend to be dominated by ANC members, in spite of the political dominance of the DA. In large part this is a result of the fact that the ANC has a larger number of politically committed activists and is therefore able to dominate community meetings, but has far less general support within the community.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with ANC Youth league activist, 7/7/2006, Bonteheuwel

However, just like in Guguletu, participation in these structures is dependent on party political support and relationships with government officials, rather than support within the broader community; as already noted support mobilised through local ANC branches is more significant than support within the broader community. Consequently, whilst activists do engage with local communities they do so in a very different way than was promoted during the 1980s. Activists no longer derive their legitimacy from public support, but from their location within state and NGO sponsored structures.

## **7.5. The Moral Economy of Collective Action and Political Practice in Guguletu and Bonteheuwel: The Continuing Salience of Differential Discrimination and Post-Apartheid Reconfiguration**

Whilst civic society has become quiescent in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel, it would be incorrect to claim that contentious or oppositional action has been wholly absent. In Bonteheuwel opposition has been primarily expressed through the ballot box. In Guguletu, whilst limited in scope, opposition has tended to emerge within civil society, either in street protests, or through civil society organising. As outlined earlier, in accounting for this opposition much focus is placed upon the policy choices of the ANC in government and their perceived failure in tackling hardship. However, the evidence here suggests that such interpretations are highly problematic.

E.P. Thompson, in his work on unrest in the eighteenth century argued that amongst historians there was a tendency simply to argue that distress and hardship, as reflected by factors such as high food prices, leads people to riot. However, he dismissed such a view as 'crass economic reductionism', which ignored the

complexity of people's social and cultural norms and organisation. In opposition to this he argued that:

It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community. On occasion this popular consensus was endorsed by some measure of licence afforded by the authorities. More commonly, the consensus was so strong it overrode motives of fear or deference.<sup>79</sup>

In his work on peasant protest in South-East Asia Scott makes a similar point, outlining the fact that protest had a moral dimension which meant that communities in different localities bore different levels of hardship before reacting violently. Moving on from this he traces the linkages between the material conditions in which different communities lived and developed to the different moral codes that governed social relations:

I have argued that by starting with the peasants' existential dilemma – his need for crisis subsistence insurance – we can deduce much of his conception of the decent landlord and the decent state, on the one hand, and his vision of the exploitative landlord or state on the other.<sup>80</sup>

Scott progresses to argue that such moral codes set reciprocal responsibilities between patrons (landlords/state) and their clients (peasants). Protest occurs, therefore, when the historical balance of these relationships is transformed: i.e. when the balance between the demands of the patron and the rewards of the client are altered to the client's detriment.<sup>81</sup>

Such 'moral economies' are apparent in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel. In both communities a series of moral codes have developed surrounding legitimate forms and conditions for distribution: what it is 'fair' for the state and local

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<sup>79</sup> Thompson, E P, 'The Moral Economy of the Crowd in eighteenth century England', *Past and Present*, 50, (Feb 1971), pp. 76-136, p.78

<sup>80</sup> Scott, J C, The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South East Asia, (New Haven & London, 1976), p.157

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.167-70

gatekeepers to take and what they should give in return. In large part these codes are embedded in the processes of class formation under early apartheid; though they have been modified by post-apartheid transformation. It is these complex notions of what is and is not legitimate that lay behind post-apartheid oppositional and contentious political action in the two communities, not hardship itself.

### **7.5.1. Guguletu: Insiders, Outsiders and the Distribution of Resources**

Returning to the incidents of contentious political action in Guguletu sketched earlier, it can be seen that such action has emerged not in response to hardship, but principally in response to the nature of delivery. That protest was always not driven by a lack of delivery is clearly illustrated by the fact that in the case of the hostel development protests in Kiki the consequences of protest was to completely halt development in the area. Similarly, it is by addressing discrepancies in the distribution of resources that protest has more often than not been dampened, not by the allocation of more resources. For example in the case of the employment protests once the councillor in ward 42 had met with the community and agreed a compromise attendance at meetings declined to a few core activists, despite the continued existence of large scale unemployment and the activists' attempt to re-brand themselves as a social movement fighting for the right to work.<sup>82</sup>

If protest is not simply about delivery then what defines the limits of consent within Guguletu? This can be explained in two dimensions. Firstly, fairness is defined horizontally, through expectations that all people within a given geographical or administrative unit will be treated similarly, providing they fulfil basic standards for entitlement. In both Kiki and the employment protests

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with YJPC activist, 9/5/06, Guguletu



discontent emerged when fair practice appeared to be being unfairly tampered with and people were using personal ties to promote their own interest.<sup>83</sup>

The form of fairness that is expressed within Guguletu reflects a belief that in return for abiding by the expectations of local gatekeepers everyone should have similar access to the resources they control. People accept that their loyalty is expected and that opposition may well be punished: hence the quiescence of civil society and the enduring support for councillors that are often held in low esteem within the community. Equally they accept that they may not be the first to get a house or a job. What they do not accept is that they have no chance of accessing or are unfairly disadvantaged in claiming these resources.

Secondly, alongside expectations of equal distribution within communities protest has also been linked to vertical contestation in which individual communities claim a moral right to resources over other communities.

Whilst the employment protests emerged in part as a response to corrupt practices of allocation within wards, they also coalesced around contestation over the allocation of resources between wards: specifically the view that jobs meant for one ward had been given to the other. Similar inter-community rivalry is apparent in the backyard housing protests. Here it was the fact that people from the Eastern Cape, who were felt to be less deserving than people from Cape Town's longstanding townships, were being allocated housing that caused much of the outrage behind the protest and people from shack communities were physically attacked during the protest. As one woman involved in the protests said:

A lot of people get houses without the red card [a card given to people on the housing waiting lists in the late 1980s and early 1990s]. Our Cape Borner, our Cape Borner, owns a red card. Our Cape Borner [should get a house].<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> This closely resembles the notion of relative deprivation in which people judge hardship not in terms of an absolute standard but in relation to how others in similar positions are performing. If people are benefiting but feel others are benefiting more they may well feel more deprived than if everyone's circumstances remain unchanged. See: Gurr, T R, Why Men Rebel. (Princeton, 1970); Klandermans, B, The Social Psychology ..., p.18

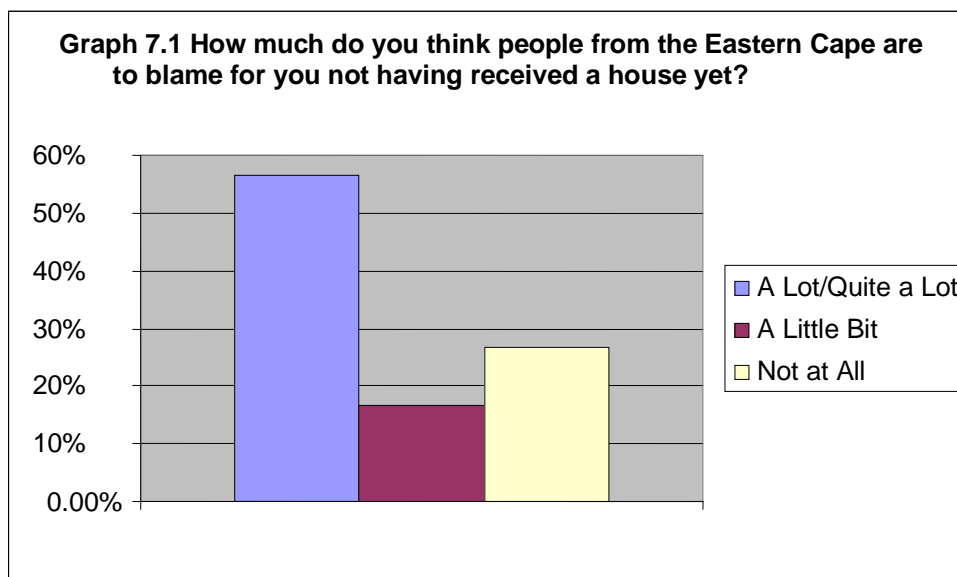
<sup>84</sup> Interview with Housing Protest Participant, 3/8/2006, Guguletu

This was backed up by a leader of one of the backyard dwellers associations in Guguletu who argued that there was bias in favour of newcomers from the Eastern Cape in resource allocation, due to attempts by the ANC to shore up its electoral base in the province. Specifically he argued that newcomers were getting access to land whilst people who were born in Cape Town were given nothing.<sup>85</sup>

Interestingly, this animosity also extended beyond housing to the belief that 'outsiders' were being given unfair access to jobs in the region:

[I]t's now [my] thirteenth year staying without a job... but what I don't believe, people who are coming from the Transkei and the Ciskei, they do get jobs here, I don't know whether maybe they are families here are trying the jobs to be found by them. Because I've been struggling all these years and now, I'm getting old now, sitting without getting a job, and yet I wanted to work that time, very very bad.<sup>86</sup>

The fact that such attitudes are widespread was revealed in a survey conducted during a meeting of a backyard dwellers organisation meeting in Guguletu (graph 7.1).



<sup>85</sup> Interview with three Intshugumo activists, 15/2/06, Guguletu

<sup>86</sup> Interview with participant in backyard housing movement, 19/4/2006, Guguletu

Overall, less than 30% of people at the meeting attributed no blame to people from the Eastern Cape for their failure to secure housing, whilst over 50% held them responsible either a lot or quite a lot.<sup>87</sup>

The vertical dimension of Guguletu's moral economy is complex. It draws heavily upon distinctions inscribed during apartheid. Capetonian and 'Cape Borner' identities are a direct inheritance from apartheid and their articulation recalls a period in which possessing section 10 rights was one of the few ways in which Africans could seek to secure their urban residence. The fact that such identities have survived, almost unchanged, despite democratisation and in the face of deracialisation and the universalising discourses of the liberation struggle shows the powerful impact apartheid played in structuring urban African's life experiences.

However, it is not simply apartheid's moral economy which has driven vertical discrimination between communities. There has also been conflict within broader communities, but based around ward boundaries. This suggests that post-apartheid transformations are beginning to change peoples' claim making repertoires and identities; although it does not appear that they are becoming more universal, simply that insider-outsider boundaries are shifting.

Overall, the vertical dimensions of the moral economy in Guguletu reflect the nature of the participatory and distributional regime in both Guguletu and Cape Town over the last fifty years. In the context of limited resources controlled by state agents – whether they are apartheid administrators, local civic officials or ANC councillors – individuals have sought the most fruitful means of accessing these resources. Under apartheid, proving a claim as a Capetonian provided clear advantages. Post-apartheid ensuring your local ward or community secures maximum resources also increases the likelihood of accessing such resources. However, in the context of limited resources benefits for one group necessarily

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<sup>87</sup> Questionnaire was distributed to all residents attending a backyard dwellers association meeting, n=39.

reduces the resources available for others and the identities so formed have been highly exclusionary.

The importance of state largesse is further heightened by the fact that since 1948 ways most Africans have relied upon the state for ensuring their wellbeing in one way or another. Under apartheid repressive state policies meant that securing the right to live and work in the cities conferred considerable benefits. Post-apartheid high levels of unemployment and low wages have created a situation in which many Africans rely upon the state to provide basic necessities such as welfare grants and subsidised housing. Consequently, for many, it is only through accessing state resources that many basic needs can be met. With no other way to realise their socio-economic needs, many Africans in Cape Town have developed collective identities and a moral economy in which gains for outsiders are seen as losses for insiders. It has been this, alongside corrupt practices, not a lack of delivery, which has driven protest in the community.

### **7.5.2. Bonteheuwel: Holding on to Coloured Preference**

In Bonteheuwel, and amongst coloured communities more generally, oppositional political action has tended to focus around the ballot box and support for the party of apartheid, the National Party. Interestingly, the rationality of coloured voters has rarely been tackled in great detail. Evidence from chapter two clearly reveals that the deracialisation of the South African economy and welfare state has had a considerable impact upon many coloureds, whilst chapter six argued that coloured rejection of progressive politics mirrored the reconfiguration of the apartheid political economy and political system during the late 1980s. Moving into the post-apartheid period this has continued. Coloureds in unskilled occupations, alongside those in skilled trades who benefited from the artificial skills shortages which apartheid created, have both seen falling wages and rising unemployment. Large numbers of jobs have been lost in manufacturing industries and housing provision has seen little improvement. Simultaneously welfare grants have been slashed, particularly to single mothers. Correspondingly, whilst the opening of opportunities

and deracialisation of society has benefited many more educated coloureds, such impacts have been limited in working class communities such as Bonteheuwel. As Adhikari writes:

Having the right to live where you want, marry whom you want and send your children to the school of your choice is of little consequence to the labouring poor of the Coloured townships.<sup>88</sup>

Consequently, there is considerable validity to the view, expressed by many coloureds, that deracialisation has seen their quality of life deteriorate; or in the words of a Democratic Alliance activist: 'this place was better when the European rulers were here.'<sup>89</sup>

Within this context the continuing identification amongst the coloured working class with the party of apartheid is far from surprising. Interestingly it reflects many of the same dynamics that are in play in Guguletu; albeit with different outcomes. Coloureds, like urban Africans, internalised and mobilised around apartheid classifications in order to access resources. Post-apartheid these opportunities have diminished in interaction with processes tied into the deracialisation of the apartheid political economy and coloureds have therefore looked to a time when they were privileged within state policy.

That most coloureds, faced with these challenges, have continued to articulate an identity which ties them to the past provides further evidence for the significance of apartheid class structures in conditioning people's responses to post-apartheid transformations. However, it may also be the case that because far less resources have been distributed to existing urban coloured communities there has been little to change the nature of claim making identities. In Guguletu resources have flowed through local councillors and consequently new identities based around ward boundaries have emerged. In Bonteheuwel such mechanisms of

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<sup>88</sup> Adhikari, M, Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community, (Athens, 2005), p.179

<sup>89</sup> Interview with DA civic activist, 28/8/2006, Bonteheuwel

distribution are absent as development within the formal coloured townships, with their superior infrastructure and housing compared to Africans, has been more limited. Consequently, new political identities have not emerged

## **7.6. Conclusions**

Three broad sets of conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion of post-apartheid transformations in civil society in the communities of Bonteheuwel and Guguletu.

The first set of conclusions relates to the fact that whilst a range of scholars have seen democratisation and 'neo-liberalism' as representing decisive breaks in the history of South African civil society, at the local level such interpretations demand reconsideration. Instead, dynamics inherited from apartheid – specifically structures of governance and racial and class cleavages – have continued to influence post-apartheid civil society.

Apartheid governance structures continue to cast a long shadow within the post-apartheid state. It is difficult not to see a close resemblance between the relationships between the street committees and administration boards in Guguletu during apartheid and the post-apartheid relations between local councillors, street committees and civics. For apartheid governance to function limited administrative capacity demanded intermediaries within civil as well as political society, creating a situation in which cooperation with local authorities could bring rewards, whilst opposition held considerable risks. Indeed, it has been argued earlier that this helps explain the quiescence of Guguletu's adult population under apartheid. Similar dynamics are at work now. Rewards are available for those that cooperate with the authorities whilst the fear of sanctions helps to stifle dissent. In Guguletu the survival of unofficial governance mechanisms from apartheid and the failure, or

unwillingness, of the state to develop effective administrative oversight has led to similar forms of political practice post-apartheid; the main difference being not the way in which people are governed at the local level – through patronage and resource distribution and manipulation – but the fact that increased levels of resources are available and the people distributing them have a degree of legitimacy.

In Bonteheuwel continuity within civil society is less marked. Yet in explaining this disjuncture apartheid governance practices still play a role. In Bonteheuwel the fact that civil society remained relatively underdeveloped during apartheid – a result of patterns of governance which placed the state as the central figure in providing welfare and the limited ability of progressive organisations to deliver benefits for residents – meant that collective organising was not embedded within coloured political culture, instead remaining the preserve of anti-apartheid activists. Consequently, the nature of civil society was defined by the actions of a relatively thin layer of politically motivated activists.

Like governance structures, the socio-economic cleavages created by apartheid also continue to play a major role driving the nature of activism post-apartheid. Whilst democratisation and neo-liberalism have been held aloft as key to explaining post-apartheid civil society, it is in fact continuities and changes within South Africa's political economy which are crucial. In Bonteheuwel democratisation and deracialisation has created a considerable disjuncture between the coloured activists which were the driving force of activism during the 1980s and the coloured working class they claimed to be representing. However, this disjuncture is less a consequence of political transformation than the differential reactions of coloureds, heavily conditioned by their educational and class positions, to the post-apartheid political economy. Working class coloureds that have seen deracialisation accompanied by a collapse in state provision and employment have retreated into political allegiances in opposition to the party which championed these changes: the ANC. In contrast educated and middle class coloureds have tended to support more

progressive political positions: unsurprisingly as many of them have benefited considerably from deracialisation.<sup>90</sup>

Apartheid differentiation also continues to be significant in Guguletu. Cleavages still exist between 'Capetonians' and more recent immigrants, in spite of the abandonment the legal basis of such categories over twenty years ago. In Guguletu post-apartheid protests around service delivery have been not so much a progressive rejection of the scourge of neo-liberalism as a reaction to state policies which have equalised provision between urban Africans and recent immigrants from the homelands. Capetonian Africans continue to define their interests in contrast to those of other Africans; something which does in part mirror the fact that growing immigration has led to rising unemployment, especially amongst the least skilled Africans in the city.

The above ties into the significance of apartheid's system of differential discrimination in inscribing a distributional network that continues to play a major role in defining political and claim making identities in post-apartheid South Africa. It also shows how the removal of elements of this distributional framework has been resisted. The 'moral economy' which underlies this resistance in both communities stands in marked contrast to the vision of the rainbow nation so common in discussions of South Africa. It is, however, worth noting that transformations have started to have an impact; for example, ward boundaries have begun to gain significance in Guguletu.

The second set of conclusions emerge around the relationship between civil society, the state and the role of civil society within the state. Public participation by civil society within the state and within state decision making processes has often been valorised as presenting a way in which communities can be empowered, the use of power by government can be regulated and effective governance can be

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<sup>90</sup> Eldridge, M & Seekings, J, 'Mandela's Lost Province...', p.532 & p.536; Lodge, T, 'The South African General Election...', pp.471-500



promoted through better linkages between citizens and the state. However, in Cape Town, such valorisation of civil society needs revision.

Talking about the use of civic organisations as a mechanism through which to represent a unified, singular, community voice Steinberg argued that:

The “will of the community” which emerges... surely masks the relations of power entailed in producing a single voice across a complex array of social relations... The civic’s institutional complex will surely surreptitiously silence as much as it voices.<sup>91</sup>

In Cape Town such an interpretation appears to bear considerable weight.

The fact that government policy seeks to promote linkages between civil society and local government but at the same time has provided considerable scope for local interpretation, has not established an effective system of oversight, and allows the devolution of power to civil society to exist at the discretion of local politicians has in many ways enhanced the opportunities for political society to dominate civil society, and for people to use civil society as a vehicle for individual rather than community ends. This is most apparent in Guguletu where the centrality of the ward councillors within the township’s distributional networks and the integration of civil society into these networks have created scope for the use of civil society as a means of disciplining and regulating local communities, rather than empowering them. People are unwilling to bring demands to their councillor, even within formal participatory structures, unless they are likely to receive a good reception. They are also wary about building new civil society organisations, for involvement in, and identification with, contentious politics makes one less likely to get access to resources than simply keeping quiet. Overall, therefore, the idea of public and civil society participation in governance as a universal good appears questionable, as does its ability to create increased sensitivity to popular demands. It is a truism that to represent the interests of its constituents to the state, civil

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<sup>91</sup>Steinberg, J, ‘A Place for Civics in a Liberal Democratic Polity? The Fate of Local Institutions of Resistance after Apartheid’, in (eds.) Adler G & Steinberg, J, From Comrades to Citizens: The South African Civics Movement and the Transition to Democracy, (Basingstoke, 2000), p.198

society must be able to maintain a degree of independence from the state. However, incorporation within participatory networks has constrained civil society organisations and linked their fortunes not to the public which they claim to represent, but to the councillors to whom they should be taking public demands. Similarly, the networks of distribution, and their implementation at the local level, discourage dissent and expression amongst residents and severely limit their willingness to seek alternative modes of representation.

If existing civil society and government's participatory programmes provide little scope for the empowering of local communities do the much vaunted 'New Social Movements' provide a more realistic alternative? Unfortunately not: the view, so often articulated amongst radical scholars, that New Social Movements and post-apartheid protest represent a 'new' challenge to neo-liberalism and the makings of an alternative political project seem highly flawed. In the examples investigated here protest and political behaviour has been overwhelmingly driven by exclusionary identities. It has been in equalising provision, as well as deconstructing apartheid principles of distribution, that much of the protest in Cape Town has occurred. Furthermore, the localised nature of collective identities and the uneven nature of administrative practice across the city have meant that similar hardships have created fragmented responses. The fact that where protest has emerged it tends to be highly fragmented, driven by scrambles over limited resources and against other South Africans makes it difficult to see how civil society can combine to push wide ranging and visionary plans for social transformation, either within state sponsored participatory forums, or autonomously within civil society. This conclusion is backed up by the reality of NSM mobilising within Cape Town; after the housing riots in 2005 members of Cape Town's Anti-Privatisation Forum sought to bring different community leaders and residents together in a city wide programme of action for housing, yet this ultimately failed due to the diverse demands and circumstances that the different townships were facing.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Informal discussion with a member of the Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum, 8/8/06, Cape Town

Furthermore, the cases examined here have a particular significance because, unlike most post-apartheid protest which has been defensive, these protests have been pro-active. In communities where NSMs such as the Anti-Eviction Campaign have been successful this has generally occurred through defensive responses to moves by the state or other actors to remove existing services. For example, the first branch of the Anti-Eviction Campaign was formed after the city attempted to evict people from their houses in Tafelsig on the Cape Flats for non payment of rent. In these circumstances differences within communities have been collapsed by the imposition of common grievances from outside as people have unified to defend what they already have. In contrast, in Guguletu, protests have demanded services not currently available. As such their parochial nature suggests that whilst NSMs may be effective in resisting the removal of services; their ability to create a coherent vision for the expansion of services and a more egalitarian future appears limited.

Finally, the two cases suggest that South Africans within civil society act with considerable rationality. Political and collective behaviour amongst Africans is not simply a result of loyalty to the party of liberation, just as amongst coloureds electoral support for the National Party and Democratic Alliance do not reflect an unqualified racism or 'slave mentality.'<sup>93</sup> In both communities political and collective behaviour has been heavily influenced by material conditions and their ongoing transformation. For Africans in Guguletu contentious political action contains considerable risks, whilst quiescence can bring rewards; consequently people generally avoid such action. In Bonteheuwel many coloureds define their interests in stark opposition to those of Africans; yet rather than reflecting a simple racism this reflects the fact that deracialisation has, for many coloured families, had considerable negative effects. Similar dynamics are at work in the ongoing conflicts, reminiscent of those under apartheid, between urban outsiders and migrants from the rural areas.

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<sup>93</sup> Legassick cited in: Erasmus, Z, 'Re-imagining coloured identities in post-Apartheid South Africa', in (eds.) Erasmus, Z, Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town, (Cape Town, 2001)

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusion: A Tale of Two Townships**

#### **8.1. Introduction: How, Why and What Changed?**

This thesis started with the question 'how and why did people involve themselves in progressive organisation and action at the local level in Cape Town and how did this change between 1976 and 2006?' It did so with the intention of not only charting and explaining the evolution of activism in the two case studies it focused upon, but also to draw broader conclusions about the nature of collective organisation and action. The adoption of a chronological approach has allowed the documentation of the how, why and what at particular points in time. This chapter aims to conclude the thesis by drawing together the broad themes that run throughout these separate periods.

In the introduction four general dynamics were identified that have dominated explanations of social movements and collective action. These were the impact of the broader political system (or political opportunities); the resources available to assist people to mobilise; the ideas and ideologies that provide the explanations that drive action; and the structural cleavages that provide the impetus which drives people to want to act. The importance of these dynamics over the thirty years of this thesis will be considered here.

All four of these factors will be seen to have played a role in the shifting nature of progressive organisation and activism. The presence (or absence) of political space, organisational and material resources, and ideas that framed hardship all contributed to the emergence and development of activism in the case studies. However, whilst playing a role, the impact of these dynamics was mediated by the underlying social field upon which they acted. Resources and ideas could help spread activism. However the appeal of an organisation or idea remained

linked to their relevance for the lives of black South Africans and this relevance was intimately intertwined with the differential functioning of apartheid's political economy. Similarly, people's reactions to the political opportunities within and between the two cases were mediated by their personal characteristics.

This conclusion therefore places the apartheid political economy (defined in terms not only of the labour market but also the functioning of state distribution) at the heart of its explanations. It does this in three ways. Firstly, it demonstrates how those people who formed the bedrock of activism under apartheid were not the poorest South Africans, but those who had the most to gain by apartheid's abolition. For most of the apartheid period this saw activism dominated by an educated elite who felt particularly intensely the limits apartheid placed on personal advancement. However, as recession intensified, unemployment grew and state distributive networks were reconfigured, the ties that had bound poorer blacks into quiescence began to unravel and the social base of protest expanded to include militant youth activists.

Secondly, it argues that people's class positions within the broader social field played a key role in defining their responses to the shifting organisations, political opportunities and ideas. What for one person was an opportunity encouraging activism could be for another a restriction shutting off involvement. Similarly, the effectiveness of ideologies of liberation and protest varied within and between communities depending on their salience to people's lived experiences.

Thirdly, it argues that whilst people's class positions played a significant role in the present, alone this cannot fully explain activism. The processes of discrimination, class formation and resource distribution that took place under apartheid came to pattern expectations as people made claims through the articulation and internalisation of apartheid identities. 'Cape Borner' and 'coloured' developed into group identities which, whilst originating in the apartheid political economy have continued to define collective behaviour over ten years after their

abolition. Indeed, as chapter seven showed, these identities are one of the key drivers of post-apartheid activism.

## **8.2. Political Opportunities, Resources and Rationality Revisited**

In the introduction to this thesis four broad dynamics were sketched out which are seen to play a role in shaping the collective action and activism. Three of these were broadly grouped together as dynamics which ‘pull’ people into action by increasing the appeal of activism. Below the relevance of these dynamics to the two case studies will be considered, before the following section considers the underlying structural factors that ‘push’ people to act.

### **8.2.1. Resources**

The weakest explanation for action in the two case studies was the importance of resources in creating activism and allowing people to act. It is certainly true that the existence of activist networks, access to equipment to print pamphlets, and the development of leaders with the ability to organise and articulate visions for transformation played a role in the unfolding and emergence of activism.

Organisation and networks played a central role in drawing people into activism, and shaping the nature of that activism. The 1979/80 boycotts in both communities drew on a burgeoning of activist networks in the independent trade union movement, the non-racial sports movement and the churches to both organise many of the boycotts and to sustain themselves. Similarly, the unrest of the mid-1980s and its consolidation within the schools relied upon the pre-existence of activist networks in both Bonteheuwel and Guguletu that quickly capitalised on the unrest

and spread explanations for inequality, whilst militant youth politics was sustained by its integration into underground MK networks.

Equally, a declining access to resources in the post-apartheid period has accompanied a decline in activism. In Guguletu the civic movement can no longer pay activists and relies on volunteers, whilst the movement of leadership from political into civil society has reduced the ability to organise within the civic movement; in Bonteheuwel a decline in involvement by the activist elite of the 1980s in civil society has seen local activism wither in the community.

However, there is no clear correlation between the presence of resources and the strength and breadth of activism over the 30 years studied. Unrest exploded in 1976 in both Bonteheuwel and Guguletu, despite an almost complete absence of resources to mobilise and sustain action. This was particularly the case in Guguletu, where students developed their own form of organisation through mass meeting without any outside assistance (indeed they explicitly rejected help from people who may have helped better structure their response). Similarly chapter four, with its study of the organising tradition within the coloured communities, shows how a large amount of organisational resource and effort does not necessarily deliver results. In 1980 there was relatively wide support for a range of protests across the city. Over the next three years coloured activists expended a huge amount of time and effort trying to build activism. They provided leadership to poor communities, used the media to spread their messages, provided buses and church halls for meetings and created regional and city wide linkages, all of which are seen as central drivers of movement success in social movement theory.<sup>1</sup> However, they failed to replicate the level of popular protest in 1980, even when they protested around the same issues. This limited success of resources alone is well demonstrated by a comparison between the 1980 bus boycott, which was widely

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<sup>1</sup> Zirakzadeh, C E, Social Movements in Politics: a Comparative Study, (London, 1997), p.12; Scott, A, 'Political Culture and Social Movements' in (eds.) Allen, J, Braham, P & Lewis, P, Political and Economic Forms of Modernity, (Cambridge, 1992), p.148; Della Porta, D & Diani, M, Social Movements: an Introduction, (Oxford, 1998), p.8

supported despite being supported by little formal organisation, and the two day bus boycott in 1984, which saw limited support despite the distribution of over 185,000 pamphlets and papers by around 2000 activists citywide.<sup>2</sup>

### **8.2.2. Ideas and Ideologies**

Like resources, ideas and ideologies were significant and played a role in allowing people to understand and explain their situation and to sustain and structure protest. As shown in chapter five, the militant rhetoric of the ANC provided a vision of transformation and made acceptable actions that helped draw the militant youth within the umbrella of the broader anti-apartheid struggle. Similarly, the linking of gutter education to the apartheid system that took place during the schooling struggles of 1980 helped convince people, particularly young coloureds, that the key to the transformation in personal circumstances was national political change. Furthermore, it was the spreading of this idea across black society that lay behind the constant and sustained challenge to apartheid as people began to link their grievances into the overall functioning of the apartheid system.

However, like resource mobilisation theories, ideological framing alone cannot be seen as a consistent driver of collective action for action could occur in the absence of strong narratives of change. In 1976 the students in Guguletu acted and then organised without any coherent frame for their activism except for a rejection of Afrikaans, revulsion at the actions of the police, and a desire for a better society. To recall the words of a student already quoted in chapter three:

You know when you are student who didn't have any ideology, you know for us it was just we don't want Afrikaans, 'we want to be free'... I remember my own perception, it really meant, you know, we threw stones, we burn everything, and the whites are going to get scared and I'm going to have a house in Constantia.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter four, p.52

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mampe Ramotsamai, 29/8/2006, Cape Town



Yet in spite of this students not only sustained their boycott well into 1977, but did so through the development of post-hoc ideologies that drew on their daily lives, but which lacked a coherent underlying narrative of change.

A slightly different picture emerges in the mid-1980s African student movement, which reveals how ideological coherence was not necessary for successful action providing that there was agreement on the need for change (i.e. there did not need to be a coherent vision of the future, providing everybody agreed that what was happening in the present needed to change). As discussed in chapter five, the African student movement was one of the strongest in the country, yet it was also one of the most ideologically diverse. There was consistent disagreement between activists over whether the target of the struggle was apartheid, or the whole capitalist system (the two or one stage approaches to revolution). However, broader agreement on the fact that apartheid needed to be overthrown and an organisational form that allowed debate and disagreement before decision making allowed the Joint SRCs to maintain support and strength whilst other organisations failed.

Finally, as recognised by people working within this field, the salience of frames ultimately depends upon their relevance to people's lives.<sup>4</sup> As shown in chapter four, coloured people were not consistently drawn into the civic movement in the early 1980s in part because it did not (and could not) articulate a coherent narrative of change. The limits of ideas were therefore set outside of the intellectuals who generated and spread those ideas by the underlying interests of the people activists were trying to mobilise.

Overall, therefore, whilst the development of new ideas and ideologies helped activism in the two cases spread, ideas only achieved power when they intersected with people's lived experiences. Furthermore, even in the absence of ideas activism could emerge, indeed the lived experience of activism could generate its own

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<sup>4</sup> Benford, I & Snow, D, 'Framing processes and social movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 2000, pp. 611–39

explanations. To fully understand the impact and significance of ideas and ideologies, therefore, it is also necessary to understand the interests and coalitions that lay behind them.

### **8.2.3. Political Opportunities**

The importance of changing political opportunities is easy to locate within the two case studies across the whole time period. As noted in the introduction, a range of different political opportunities have been identified by authors as playing a significant role in the emergence and sustaining of collective action. Of these three in particular can be seen to have played a consistent and significant role in the history of activism in the case studies: repression; the openness of the political system; cycles of contention.

Repression has often been seen as playing a key role in collective action, either by increasing the costs of action and thereby discouraging it, or, if ineffective, encouraging it by making the state appear vulnerable and enhancing feelings of injustice.<sup>5</sup> Both of these dynamics were important in the history of activism in the two case studies. State repression was the starting point of the two major incidents of unrest studied within this thesis: 1976 and 1985-7. As seen in chapters 3 and 5, unrest began as a response to the state's attempt to close off protest by force. This repression then created a sense of injustice and anger which delegitimised state power and forced people to react. However, perhaps most significantly, it also transformed collective identities by creating a shared (and negative) experience of the state which expanded the potential social basis for activism as whole communities were exposed to state violence, not only activists. This was particularly significant in 1976 when, as chapter three shows, repression pushed people with very limited initial demands and little ideological or organisational resource into sustained opposition to the state.

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<sup>5</sup> Goldstone, J, 'More Social Movements or Fewer? Beyond Political Opportunity Structures to Relational Fields', *Theory and Society* 33, 2004, pp.346-7

However, the functioning of repression was not uniform across time and place. Repression played a role in closing off protest in 1987/8, when the second state of emergency was accompanied by a more severe crackdown that had occurred previously. Similarly, the events of 1980 relied on a lack of repression as the spread of the boycotts relied on mass meetings, publicity and organising in the schools which depended on tolerance from the authorities. It is therefore difficult to locate a consistent impact of repression, beyond saying it mattered, within the two cases.

The second significant political opportunity is the openness/closedness of the political system. This has been a consistent theme in studies of political opportunities and is based on the argument that, if the political system is either very open, or very closed, to direct influence by its citizens then social movement activism is unlikely to occur. This is because in a closed political system there is little return on activism as the state fails to respond, whilst in a very open political system there is little need for activism because people's views can be represented through formal political structures. Activism, therefore, is seen to emerge when the political system does not necessarily act, but can be made to do so through action.<sup>6</sup>

The openness of the state to the demands of the residents of the two communities has played a key role in defining the nature of activism throughout this period. In the African areas the quiescence of the civil society organisation that developed in the 1960s and 1970s was linked to a lack of representative mechanisms for Africans to be directly represented in the political process, alongside a willingness by local officials to engage with local civil society groups. The nature of civil society was therefore shaped by the opportunities that the political structure provided for activism. A similar pattern emerges both in the early 1980s in the coloured communities (chapter four) and amongst the African civic associations

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<sup>6</sup> Diani, M & Eyerman, R, 'The Study of Collective Action: Introductory Remarks', in (eds.) Diani, M, & Eyerman, R, Studying Collective Action, (London, 1992), p.6;  
Eisinger, P, 'The Conditions of Protest Behaviour in American Cities', *The American Political Science Review*, 67/1, 1973, pp.11-28

during the transition (chapter six). At both these moments there was a willingness by the state to engage with the civics which saw an opening of political space that allowed them to deliver benefits to their participants and consequently their strength grew. However, as their ability to deliver declined (in the coloured communities from 1982 as the state moved towards tricameralism and in the African communities after democratisation as direct political representation meant that the collective will no longer needed to be solely represented within civil society (chapter seven)) so has participation. Similarly, as shown in chapter seven, post-apartheid new social movement activism is related to the shifting contours of local political opportunities. Specifically, the emergence of contentious protest, such as the conflicts over jobs and housing allocation, can be seen to have emerged when a group felt that they were being shut out of decision making processes (i.e. the political system was closing) and organised themselves in order to reopen that access.

Finally, the concept of cycles of contention is of significance, both in each individual escalation of protest studied, and over the whole period of this thesis. Cycles of contention are seen to emerge when groups emerge which challenge the state and press claims that resonate beyond their immediate group. They therefore force open political space and temporarily reduce the costs of action, drawing more and more people into contention.<sup>7</sup> There can be little doubt that the growth of protest regularly followed a pattern similar to this in both case studies. The events of 1979/80 built through a series of protests each of which convinced people that action was possible and had the potential to succeed. The Fattis and Monis boycott convinced activists who were looking for ways to challenge apartheid that the state could be challenged. The schools boycott further widened people's horizons and expanded the social base of protest, as did the bus boycott. By the time that the boycotts tailed off people, particularly in the coloured communities, had been convinced that they could challenge apartheid.

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<sup>7</sup> Tarrow, S, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, (Cambridge, 1998), pp.142-7

After 1980 people flowed into the political space created by the boycotts and began organising and theorising. Ideas were developed and activists increasingly became embedded within the two communities. In the coloured communities civic and youth activism emerged, followed later by the formation of the UDF and a growth in school yard politics. Similarly, in Guguletu, most notably from 1983 onwards, youth and student politics began to develop. The activists working in these organisations blazed a trail for the unrest that was to be unleashed in 1985. The city wide profile of the UDF and the actions of activists within the two communities meant that when unrest started elsewhere in South Africa in 1984, and then spread to the Western Cape in 1985, people had examples to follow and ideas to explain their experiences. The intensity and sustained nature of 1985-7 must in part be seen as a consequence of the work done by the activists of the early 1980s in setting the scene. The repression after 1986, by closing down the political space for protest, brought the cycle to an end. However, the groundwork that had been done throughout the majority of the 1980s provided the framework and activists which made the re-emergence of activism in 1989, and the consolidation of democracy after 1990, possible.

However, whilst accepting that political opportunities played a clear role in the changing nature of organisation and activism, they have their explanatory limits. Firstly, they provide little explanation for the reasons why different groups respond in different ways to the same opportunities. Chapter six provided clear evidence of the fact that the same broad citywide changes caused very different responses both across and within the two communities. African adults were drawn into civic organisations, coloured adults in general were alienated from such organisations, as were the radical youth, whilst African students remained relatively unaffected by national and regional changes. Whilst clearest in chapter six the same dynamics are also present throughout this thesis. Africans were far more consistent supporters of anti-apartheid activism than coloureds. In 1980 the African schools and bus boycotts both lasted longer than their counterparts in the coloured areas. Throughout the late 1980s coloureds were consistently less supportive of stayaways

than Africans. Finally, activism in both communities was almost exclusively dominated by young people.

Two things lay behind these differential reactions, both of which are problematic for political opportunity theory's ability to provide universal explanations. Firstly, political opportunities were not consistent across geographical space. Bonteheuwel was integrated into relationships with local government and political officials in a very different way to Guguletu. However, this was not simply a result of the different functioning of apartheid between coloured and African communities; it was also the result of local compromise and contestation. As shown in chapter three, civics and street committees in Guguletu emerged within a local and particular historical juncture in which township administrators needed to communicate with their residents as a result of a lack of local administrative capacity. This increased the rewards for cooperation with the authorities and generated quiescent activism. Similarly, the decline of post-apartheid civil society organisation has been intimately linked to the distributional networks and local political opportunities in the township; however these networks are locally constructed and can easily shift, such as when a local councillor is replaced. In both cases, therefore, the political opportunities that define collective action can be neither deduced from state policy, nor can they be presumed to exist in other townships. They are also open to constant change. This does not remove the validity of political opportunity theory in providing explanations, indeed it confirms the important role it plays. However, it does suggest that broad reaching conclusions about the impact of state systems cannot always provide effective explanations when considering local level case studies.

The second, more significant, problem for political opportunity theories, is that their lack of concern with the factors that push people into protest means they cannot effectively account for differential reactions to the same opportunities. Throughout this thesis adults were less involved in activism than their children and coloureds were less involved in activism than Africans. Furthermore, as seen in

chapter five, the same political context (in this case repression) could draw some people into protest (a militant youth) and therefore be seen as an expansion of opportunity, whilst pushing other people away from protest (older residents). Political opportunities, therefore, were mediated by the local and personal context within which they were operating.

Therefore, like with theories of ideas and resources, political opportunities provide only part of the explanation for the nature of activism. To fully understand what drove people to act in the two case studies since 1976 it is necessary to understand not only how they were pulled into action by resources, ideas and opportunities, but also what pushed people to want to act in the first place.

### **8.3. Race, Class and Collective Action**

The above discussion has not sought to argue that resources, ideas and opportunities were irrelevant for activism in the two case studies. Indeed, they played a crucial role in progressive organisation and activism throughout this period. However, what it has shown is that in the two cases clear limits were set on the impact of these dynamics by the nature of the communities within which they were operating. Sydney Tarrow has argued that contention is more linked to perceived opportunities and threats than it is to persistent social and economic factors.<sup>8</sup> As will be shown below, the evidence in this thesis suggests the inverse.

Class, as defined by education, consumption and labour market position, played a central role in defining people's responses to collective action. It helps explain the how, as people involved themselves in action in ways that were accessible to them and forged repertoires of action bound to social position and class cleavages. It helps explain the why, as people's underlying material interests and

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<sup>8</sup> Tarrow, S, Power in Movement..., p.71

conceptions of the right society were intimately bound with their position in the social field. It also helps explain the 'what changed', as the reconfiguration of South Africa's political economy between 1976 and 2006 played a significant part in driving people in and out of activism and in doing so also transforming the form of organisation and activism

### **8.3.1. The Apartheid Class Ceiling**

The first impact of class on collective action was its role in defining who was and was not drawn towards progressive organisation and action. Throughout the apartheid period it was those South Africans with the most to gain, least to lose, and who were experiencing the restrictions of apartheid discrimination most severely that were drawn into activism. In contrast, those people who relied most upon state resources and protection within the labour market were least likely to become involved. This had little to do with wealth and poverty, but was linked instead to the functioning of apartheid discrimination. Similarly, moving into the post-apartheid period, the differential impact of deracialisation led to those most able to benefit from the expansion of opportunities moving out of civil society. As it was this educated elite that had driven progressive organisation and activism before 1990, this accounts for much of the decline in activism after 1994.

In Bonteheuwel, and the coloured communities more generally, the loci of progressive activism was primarily within the schools and universities. Expanding levels of schooling and university enrolment gave growing numbers of young coloureds access to education, whilst, as chapter two showed, apartheid continued to deny them the opportunities to make full use of this education. Similarly, the protection that apartheid offered from competition in the labour market and the expanding opportunities in the skilled and unskilled trades had little meaning for this group. Within this context a desire to challenge the race ceiling of apartheid grew. This was clear in the demands issued by students in 1980 for an end to gutter education which only prepared coloureds for the cheap labour market. It was also



clear in the interviews with school activists in chapter five and their vision of a society without racial boundaries.

Before 1985 consistent anti-apartheid activism in the coloured communities remained limited to a relatively small activist elite, composed mainly of former university students and a small number of school pupils. However this elite was on occasion supplemented by the broader schooling population when opportunities for protest expanded, as they did in 1976, 1980 and most notably in 1985. Interestingly, the demands in Bonteheuwel that underlay these broader protests evolved throughout the period as experiences of discrimination shifted. In 1980 demands for better education were intertwined with anti-apartheid protest. By 1985 the focus was primarily political, not educational, change. Whilst difficult to conclusively link this shift to the broader apartheid economy, it did mirror the changing nature of educational provision and opportunity. In 1980 the economy was expanding and there were still opportunities beyond the schoolyard for people who achieved educational success (albeit these were limited for those achieving the highest level of education), part of protest therefore focused on widening access to quality education. By 1985 recession and unemployment had become widespread and opportunity was declining, whilst the quality of education had improved. People therefore focused on political change as it was beyond the schoolyard that their opportunities were being limited.

In Guguletu a similar picture emerges. School pupils and university students were the backbone of the anti-apartheid movement in the township. As in Bonteheuwel this was related to the rising levels of education and limited chances for advancement. However, unlike Bonteheuwel, there was little improvement in the quality of education in Guguletu during the 1980s. Therefore although protest in Bonteheuwel shifted to primarily political issues after 1980, in Guguletu there remained a strong focus on schooling provision.

The importance of the apartheid race ceiling is also clear in the trajectory of progressive organisation after apartheid. If it had been poverty or inequality that

had been driving activism then it would be difficult to explain the decline of protest post-apartheid. However, accepting that progressive activism in the two cases was predominantly an aspirational revolt helps to account for the broad decline in activism after 1994. As chapter two showed, the removal of apartheid has increasingly seen South African society structured along the lines of class rather than race. In post-apartheid Cape Town the race ceiling that drove progressive activism under apartheid has now been removed and therefore engagement with activism has declined.

In contrast, the groups least likely to be involved in anti-apartheid activism in both Guguletu and Bonteheuwel were older residents. Civic activism before the transition was limited in its strength in both communities and when it did succeed (in Bonteheuwel during the early 1980s) it did so as a result of its pragmatic focus on day-to-day issues, not political transformation. Similarly, the revolutionary fervour of the youth never transferred to their parents. Within this, however, it is important to acknowledge that there were clear differences within progressive politics between the two communities. Whilst there was little adult involvement in activism and organisation in Guguletu, there was considerable sympathy for the broader aims of political liberation in the community; in 1976 and the mid-1980s there was strong African support for political stayaways and in 1986 for the student rent boycott. In Bonteheuwel, despite its status as the most radical coloured township, there was not.

As discussed in chapter four, the dynamics underlying adult quiescence varied between the two communities, although both were linked to people's positions within the apartheid labour market and its distributional networks. In the coloured communities state welfare transfers and protection from labour market competition were valued by those residents who relied upon them most. Coloureds, particularly working class coloureds, came to have an ambiguous relationship with the apartheid state; whilst there were many elements of apartheid that they opposed, this did not translate to support for a non-racial future. Interestingly, the

period between 1980 and 1994 appears to represent an overall decline in coloured support for the progressive political movements. As discussed in chapter five, there was less support for sympathy actions such as stayaways and boycotts in 1986 than there had been in 1976 and 1980. Whilst this cannot be attributed solely the shifting pattern of apartheid discrimination, it is certainly the case that as competition from Africans grew, unemployment rose, and the nationalisation of political positions made the articulation of a specifically coloured politics more problematic, general coloured support for political organisations which anchored themselves in discourses of deracialisation declined. As chapter two showed, this growing rejection of equality did was necessarily a misreading of the likely impact of deracialisation.

Quiescence amongst African adults in Guguletu was less a result of support for apartheid, than a lack of immediate grievances pushing people to protest; Africans in Guguletu were poor, but they had access to work, housing and low rentals. However, apartheid did cause considerable hardship and therefore there was a willingness to express sympathy with more general anti-apartheid protest; although in the absence of persistent material grievances there were limits to the level of consistent protest.

Finally, a focus on the relationship between the political economy and activism also helps explain the transformation in activism during the unrest of 1985, as the educated elite became joined by a more revolutionary youth. Similarly, it helps explain the disengagement of this group with transition. As argued in chapter five, during the mid-1980s recession the distributional and labour market ties that contributed to the maintenance of quiescence began to break down. In the coloured communities unemployment rose rapidly as deracialisation led to increasing coloured unemployment and the closing off of opportunities for people without skills who had previously been absorbed into the labour market. In the African areas there was also rising unemployment, whilst the costs of action for this group were reduced compared to their parents as the benefits of quiescence, such as

housing provision, were no longer available. In this context a group of young black South Africans with little to lose and much to gain were drawn under the broad banner of an anti-apartheid movement which was being transformed by the shift from legal protest to unrest.

Conversely, as the focus of politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s shifted away from revolutionary transformation, this group became increasingly demobilised in both communities. The sense of status, hope and belonging they achieved by being at the heart of a movement for radical transformation fell away as the focus of progressive activism shifted and the deracialisation of the political economy undermined the basis on which the cross class alliance of the mid-1980s had been built. This decline in radicalism was then compounded, particularly in Guguletu, as the post-apartheid reconfiguration of distributional networks served to draw people back into cooperation with the state. As noted in chapter seven, the fact that people can now access resources, but that such access depends of political loyalty, has led to a decline in contentious political action, even when people are clearly unhappy with the level of delivery.

### **8.3.2. (Im)moral Economies?**

The second significant role of the South African social field is that not only did it create the immediate interests that drove people to protest, it also created deeper underlying identities that helped set the limits of activism by mediating the impact of the progressive discourses. Indeed, whilst people's positions within the apartheid social field played an important role in their responses to progressive activism, they did not determine them absolutely. Claim making identities, themselves rooted in processes of distribution and class formation, also played a significant role in responses to activism.

As chapter four showed, the importance of classification as a Section 10 African or as a coloured in the accessing of resources led not only to the use of these

identities, but also their internalisation. Section 10 Africans came to believe that they were more deserving than recent immigrants from the Eastern Cape. Coloureds came to believe they were more deserving than Africans. Furthermore, these identities were conceptualised in zero sum terms. Coloureds saw gains for Africans as losses for them, whilst section 10 Africans saw gains for migrants in similar terms. In many ways this was a correct reading of the apartheid labour market and distributive system as it functioned. Many coloureds were protected by the denial of rights to Africans, whilst section 10 Africans were protected from competition from immigrant labour. In this way the apartheid political economy set not only the material, but also the cognitive bounds of activism.

The importance of these moral economies is ever-present throughout this thesis. In Guguletu in 1976 conflict between migrant workers, students and township dwellers coalesced not only around the immediate demands of the unrest, but also longstanding divisions between the two communities. Chapter four showed how conflict over resources was often conceptualised in terms of Capetonians and squatters and how this undermined the formation of a unified progressive movement in the city. Chapter seven also showed how post-apartheid these identities have continued to have salience, even though their legal basis has eroded. Furthermore, although only mentioned in passing in chapter five due to space, the squatter conflicts of 1986-8 saw similar insider/outsider discourses being articulated as conflicts over resources intersected with claim making identities rooted in the apartheid political economy:

They (the committee formed by the squatters) entered on their own strength here. We don't recognize (sic) them. They've all got homes in the Transkei – We are Cape born. They are making a business here.<sup>9</sup>

Similar moral economies were apparent in Bonteheuwel. Coloureds saw and conceptualised their interests in opposition to those of Africans. Discourses of liberation that sought to break down these barriers struggled for salience and in

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<sup>9</sup> 'Upsurge of Violence as Government Drags Heels on KTC Upgrade', *Cape Times*, 12/2/1988

1994 were conclusively rejected by the townships' citizens. Post-apartheid, the citizens of Bonteheuwel continue to articulate collective identities rooted in apartheid's racial classifications.

The apartheid social field therefore not only defined the limits of action in material terms, but also produced identities which patterned action and mediated reactions to the broader discourses being spread by progressive activists. These (im)moral economies have also continued to inform collective action post-apartheid.

### **8.3.3. The Mediating role of Race and Class**

The final role of the South African political economy in influencing progressive activism in the two cases has already been touched upon, but will be briefly recapped here. This was its role in mediating the impact of the broader opportunities and resources operating within the country.

As noted above, the political opportunities, ideas and resources available to activists did not simply define the forms that activism took, but were also defined by the social base of the activism that emerged. As shown throughout this thesis, particularly in chapter six, the impact of political opportunities was mediated by their intersection with the broader social field. For example, the repression of the mid-1980s was experienced differentially by a disenfranchised and economically marginalised youth which saw within violence the possibility of self fulfilment and older residents who disengaged as a result of the rising costs of engagement. Furthermore, the shifting base of activism itself shaped the very form of activism undertaken. For example within the coloured communities the forms of action adopted during the early 1980s were tied to the responses of the broader coloured population. Activists wanted to create revolution, but social conservatism required a focus on bread-and-butter issues. In contrast, the expansion of radical youth involvement in the mid-1980s made possible new, more militant, political repertoires. It is impossible, therefore, to fully understand the changing dynamics of

activism in the two case studies by focusing on the ideas, resources and opportunities alone. Similarly, the underlying social structure cannot be understood outside its interaction with these ideas opportunities and resources.

## **8.4. Conclusion**

The above discussion has provided a basis on which to begin to answer the question at the heart of this thesis. As seen ideas, resources and political opportunities all created and shaped the space within which activism emerged. However, their impact was mediated by the social field upon which they acted. Socio-economic factors influenced who did and did not get drawn into activism in the two case studies. In turn there was feedback between the social base of activism and the forms progressive activism adopted.

In chapter one three broad approaches to the study of activism South Africa in the apartheid and post-apartheid periods were outlined. Firstly that activism was a reaction to the clear injustice and inequality in apartheid and post-apartheid society. Secondly, that activism emerged when the political opportunities arose that allowed people to articulate their interests. Finally, that activism was and is at heart a broad coalition of local struggles, grounded in local conditions, but brought together on occasion by their common grounding in underlying structural contradictions. This thesis has argued that in both the case studies progressive activism emerged out of a combination of the second and third explanations. Specifically, that people involved themselves in forms of activism that they could understand and that allowed them to articulate their interests within the limits and opportunities set by the broader political system. They chose to involve themselves in progressive activism because of a belief that it offered a better future and that the costs of doing so did not outweigh the benefits. Both the forms of activism and its social base changed as the underlying social and distributional field, and the

broader opportunity context in South Africa, was configured and reconfigured in ways that changed the opportunities for action, the costs and benefits of acting and people's beliefs about what they rightly deserved.

## **8.5. Last Thoughts**

This thesis has covered a large period of time and its coverage of each individual time period has been necessarily brief. As such it only begins to scratch at the surface of the complex dynamics that lay behind each of the individual events and organisations that have been investigated and whilst undertaking this research many areas of further research suggested themselves.

Many of the individual organisations covered here would be worthy of further investigation. The Joint SRCs and student politics more generally in the province stand out as a unique case in South Africa during the 1980s. A deeper understanding of how the Joint SRCs functioned, how the complex ideological traditions were transmitted into the African communities, and the collective identities that drove the students would be particularly interesting.

The functioning of the ANC underground in the province is also ripe for study. During the research for this thesis I located a large amount of information which could be used as the starting point for a deep study of how MK functioned as an underground movement. I hope to have made a small start in this respect in my discussion, in chapter five, of the role the underground played in militant youth politics. However there is much more to be uncovered as it was clear that beneath the grassroots organisations sat underground networks and caucuses, particularly moving into the late 1980s.

Finally, a more systematic approach to test some of the central hypotheses put forward in this thesis would also be of interest, particularly the use of survey



data to sketch the relationship between race, class, insider/outsider status, life trajectories and political behaviour post-apartheid.

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## Material from Archives

The following abbreviations have been used: ss (single sided), ds (double sided), n.d. (no date), BCN (private archive of Bonteheuwel Community News), CTAR (Cape Town Archives and Records), MA (Mayibuye Archive), NLSA (National Library of South Africa), SAHA (South Africa History Archive, UCTMA (University of Cape Town Manuscripts and Archives), UMAC Collection (private archive of UMAC)

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# Appendix A: Methods and Methodology

## Introduction

The focus of this thesis is to trace and explain changes in grassroots progressive organisation and activism in the African community of Guguletu and the coloured community of Bonteheuwel in Greater Cape Town between 1976 and 2006. To do so it uses a comparative, multi-method, case study approach. Specifically it combines qualitative analysis of two case studies through the use of interviews, archival sources and participant observation with a quantitative examination of the shifting impact of apartheid discrimination, and its removal after 1994, on coloureds and Africans in both South African and the Western Cape. The rationale for a comparative case study approach has already been discussed in the introduction, as has the relationship between this thesis and current academic literature.<sup>1</sup> This appendix discusses in more detail the methodological approach that I have chosen to use, the reasons why, and the strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

To address the strengths and weaknesses of my design I will first outline the research questions I adopted to focus my research. My design's methodology and methods will then be explained and analysed. Then the strengths and weaknesses will be discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the importance of these factors in any research design see: Robson, C, Real World Research, (Oxford, 2002)

## Research Questions

In order to provide focus to my study I followed Blaikie's advice and defined my research using research questions.<sup>2</sup> The key question driving this thesis is:

How and why did people involve themselves in progressive organisation and action at the local level in Cape Town and how did this change between 1976 and 2006?

Sitting beneath this overarching question are a series of sub-questions. By answering these sub-questions it becomes possible to build up an overall picture of collective action and grassroots organisation in the two communities through which to answer the overarching research question posed. These questions are:

What form did progressive organisation and activism take?

Who was involved in progressive organisation and activism (what was the social base of organisation and activism)?

Why were people involved in progressive organisation and activism?

Why did progressive organisation and activism take the form it did?

How and why did organisation change (or not) over time?

This decision to adopt a set of research questions from the outset of my design can be seen to be a considerable strength, as:

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<sup>2</sup> Blaikie, N, Designing Social Research: The Logic of Anticipation, (Malden,2000)

Research questions constitute the most important elements of any research design [as] ... Decisions about all other aspects of the research design are contingent on their contribution to answering the research questions.<sup>3</sup>

By stating my aims clearly my research design allowed me to judge the appropriateness of methods and provided a way to judge the usefulness of data, both whilst it was being collected and at the point of analysis.

## Methodology

### Selecting a Case Study Approach

The first major decision that I had to make was the methods that I would use to answer these questions. Before I entered the field I decided in advance upon an embedded case study approach.<sup>4</sup>

I selected a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis because the retrospective nature of my study made new quantitative data collection highly problematic.<sup>5</sup> Within this broad framework I decided to use a case study approach because case studies provide a recognised framework through which to present and analyse qualitative data. Crucial in the production of qualitative research is the production of “thick descriptions” of the links between variables at the micro-level as the best way of illustrating the validity of one’s inferences.<sup>6</sup> By allowing the flexible use of a range of methods the case study approach maximises the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.23

<sup>4</sup> Yin divides case studies into holistic and embedded types, with an embedded case study involving the analysis of sub units within each case. As I will be studying Cape Town through the investigation of two separate townships and various groups within those township my design can be seen to follow this pattern. Yin, R, Case Study Research: Design and Methods, (London & Thousand Oaks, 1994)

<sup>5</sup> Any new quantitative study would have been impossible as my desire to trace activism retrospectively meant that I could not conduct a survey. However, as discussed later, I did use already existing quantitative data where appropriate.

<sup>6</sup> Schofield, J W, ‘Increasing the Generalizability of Qualitative Research’, in (ed.) Hammersley, M, Social Research: Philosophy, Politics and Practice, (London, 1993)

possibilities for data collection to underlie the thick descriptions that are essential in qualitative studies<sup>7</sup>. The case study also provides a framework through which to analyse this data, as it is a holistic approach to phenomenon, which treats them as a complex combination of variables and therefore provides a framework for compiling thick descriptions from the multiple data sources.<sup>8</sup> Also, by comparing and contrasting different forms of data through triangulation the case study provides a framework through which to judge the validity of the qualitative data that is collected.<sup>9</sup>

The case study also provides a way to integrate the historical aspects of my study with the contemporary situation as its:

...unique strength is the ability to deal with a full variety of evidence- documents, artefacts, interviews and observation- beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study.<sup>10</sup>

The case study is also closely related to the methods favoured in existing academic research in this field.<sup>11</sup> This is a strength, as I did not have to worry about my choice of methodology being inappropriate, as it locates itself within an existing academic tradition.

My choice of a case study approach was also influenced by the epistemological standpoint guiding this research. Epistemology places limits upon what can be known and therefore what kinds of knowledge are 'adequate and legitimate.' It also influences the acceptable research methods and methodologies.<sup>12</sup> Implicit in my methodology is a constructivist approach which accepts that rather than there being

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<sup>7</sup> Strauss, A & Corbin, J, Basics of Qualitative Research Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Research, (Thousand Oaks & London, 1998)

<sup>8</sup> Hopkin, J, 'Comparative Methods', in (eds.) Marsh, D & Stoker, G. Theory and Methods in Political Science, (Basingstoke, 2002)

<sup>9</sup> Yin, R, Case Study Research...

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8

<sup>11</sup> See for example: Van Kessel, I, "Beyond Our Wildest Dreams": The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa, (Charlottesville & London, 2000)

<sup>12</sup> Crotty, M, The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process, (London, 1998), p.8

objective social truths waiting to be discovered social reality is instead a result of the constructed meanings that individuals create through interacting with their surroundings.<sup>13</sup> The fact that my research questions and case studies focus on gaining access to individual experience, and locating these experiences within the broader social structure, rather than searching for objective 'social truths' is consistent with such an approach.

## **Defining the Field of Study**

Having selected a case study approach I needed to select the case studies that I would use as the basis of my comparison. Before I arrived in the field I decided on some broad criteria that would guide my choice of cases, but did not select the individual cases themselves. Specifically I planned to investigate progressive organisation and activism in:

A coloured township

A formal African township

An African squatter community

These criteria were linked to the broader theoretical approach I had adopted and were designed to increase the generalisability of my research. Hopkin sees the use of contrasting cases as a way of seeing if issues that manifest themselves in individual cases are actually general trends.<sup>14</sup> As discussed in chapter one, theories of collective action and social movements focus on four broad dynamics. These are: the resources available to organisations and activists; the impact of the broader

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hopkin, J, 'Comparative Methods...'

political context (the political opportunity structure); the identities that lay behind collective action; and the social basis of collective action. As these three cases differ on all these axes any common responses to similar changes across cases could be seen to represent generalisable trends.

As detailed in chapter two, under apartheid coloureds had access to higher paid jobs than Africans, had privileged access to housing and welfare and were treated as legal citizens of the Republic of South Africa. In contrast Africans in the formal townships had a legal right to remain in the cities, but were not considered citizens, and had access to jobs and housing in front of African migrant workers (but not coloureds). Finally, African squatters were, for most of the apartheid period, living in the cities illegally. They had no legal right to housing or employment, lived in informal accommodation, and were usually employed on low wages. Similarly, post apartheid these groups have all had different experiences. Coloureds have lost privileged access to housing and employment, although they continue to be better paid and more likely to be in better housing than Africans. Africans in the formal townships have seen their privileges relative to migrants and squatters eroded, but have still seen considerable benefits of deracialisation and continue to benefit from their access to housing. African squatters are no longer illegal residents in the cities, but have still been exposed to high levels of unemployment and by their very definition have no access to formal housing. These differences mean that both during and post-apartheid all three groups had very different resources, political opportunities and identities. They were also all embedded within the apartheid political economy in different ways. Consequently the differences between the cases would allow me to identify how each of these dynamics impacted on the sorts of progressive organisation and activism that developed and the reasons people became involved in this activism.

Whilst I decided on the broad criteria by which I would select cases I did not decide before I entered the field on the specific case study areas. Strauss & Corbin suggest adopting 'discriminate sampling' in qualitative research which involves selecting

samples that provide the best opportunities for comparison, but only doing so after having undertaken initial data collection which allows the researcher to identify the most appropriate cases.<sup>15</sup> Adopting this approach had two key benefits for this thesis. Firstly, I wanted to ensure that the cases I selected could be studied practically. Blakie notes that whilst in an ideal world all that would influence research choices would be their appropriateness regarding the research questions, it is important to note that constraints of time, cost, researcher skills and access all influence such decisions and this brings both strengths and weaknesses to any design.<sup>16</sup> South Africa has a high crime rate, particularly in the black communities which means that many areas of study are out of bounds. The archival record for the apartheid period is patchy and most of the archives would only be accessible once I reached the field. I would also need contacts if I was going to identify appropriate interviewees and undertake participant observation. I could not, therefore, tell in advance whether I would be able to access appropriate data for my study. By waiting until I was in the field I was able to ensure that the cases I selected were practically studiable as I was able to make contacts and undertake a preliminary audit of the available archive material.

The second reason for waiting until I was in the field was because a lot of the information required to identify the most appropriate cases was not available in the UK. As my thesis focused on an area that has not previously been studied in any great depth I was unable to identify which communities had histories of organisation and activism and which did not. By waiting until I was in the field I was able to have discussions with activists past and present that allowed me to develop a preliminary view of the nature of activism in the city over the preceding thirty years and through this identify those cases that did indeed differ in terms of resources, political opportunities, identities and social structure.

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<sup>15</sup> Strauss, A & Corbin, J, Basics of Qualitative Research...

<sup>16</sup> Blaikie, N, Designing Social Research: The Logic of Anticipation, (Malden,2000)



After arriving in the field and undertaking preliminary discussions with both academics and some activists I decided to focus on the following case studies: Bonteheuwel (a coloured township); Guguletu, (a formal African township); Brown's Farm (an African squatter community). However, as I started to undertake my fieldwork I came to quickly realise that the amount of work involved in studying three separate cases over a thirty year period would not be achievable within the time limit of the thesis. I therefore decided to drop Brown's Farm and concentrate on the two formal townships, Guguletu and Bonteheuwel.

I made the decision to focus on the two formal townships because after starting my research it became apparent that most squatter communities that had emerged before 1994 had been upgraded into formal housing, and the populations of those that remained were highly fluid. In contrast, the populations of the formal townships had remained relatively static as people were already in formal housing and therefore were not moved as the townships were upgraded. They were also less likely to have moved as access to housing is a major asset in a country with limited housing stock for people on low incomes. It was therefore impossible to trace activism within a single squatter community across the whole period of this thesis, whilst in the two formal housing areas it was relatively easy to locate activists and build up a picture of activism across the time period.

Within the broader framework for comparison I chose cases that would allow me to study the theoretical questions I had set myself, but which could also be practically studied. Guguletu was chosen from a practical perspective because: it was physically easy to access; I had contacts in the township who could introduce me to activists both past and present; some earlier research, including both interviews and some published data, had been undertaken which I was able to utilise. However, the main decision was made on theoretical grounds. Guguletu is a 'typical' African Capetonian formal township. It was built in the 1960s and until the relaxing of influx control its residents were mainly Africans with Section 10 residence rights and some migrants living in separate hostel areas. My initial research after arriving

in the field also allowed me to determine that its history of activism was broadly representative of African activism in the formal African townships. It experienced some anti-apartheid activism and protest and there has been some post-apartheid activism and protest, however it was not a 'hot bed' of activism. Because of this 'typicality' I was able to move beyond studies that have sought only to explain why protest emerged to produce a more rounded picture which includes why activism both did and did not occur.

Some of the reasons for selecting Bonteheuwel were also practical. After some initial discussions with the local councillor I was put in touch with the Community Liaison Officer in the community. He had been involved in progressive politics in the mid-1980s and was able to refer me on to other contacts. Like Guguletu, the township was also physically easy to access. However, the main reason for choosing Bonteheuwel (like Guguletu) was theoretical. Specifically it was chosen because it was atypical, or what Yin calls a 'unique case.'<sup>17</sup> After arriving in the field it quickly became clear that coloured involvement in progressive activism, both apartheid and post-apartheid, had been limited in most areas of the city and for most of the period under consideration. It would therefore be difficult to gain sufficient data from which to construct a thirty year comparative history of activism within most coloured communities. However, within this broader context Bonteheuwel had a history as the most radical coloured community. This meant that comparative data was available throughout the period in question. On one level, therefore, the choice was driven by practical considerations. However, there was also a strong methodological reason for choosing a unique coloured case. By focusing on the most radical coloured community I was able to clearly see the upper limits of coloured activism. Because coloured communities had greater political opportunities for action and greater resources, but suffered less socio-economic and political discrimination than African communities, this approach allowed me to compare activism between a community with conditions less conducive to organising but

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<sup>17</sup> Yin, R, Case Study Research..., p.38

with greater hardships, and a community with conditions more conducive to organising but with less hardships. It therefore allowed for a comparison of the relative significance of structural and organisational factors in activism.

## **Methods**

I initially planned for my thesis to be based solely on qualitative data. Specifically the use of interviews, archives and participant observation to draw together detailed case studies. However, as my research progressed and I began to draw preliminary conclusions I realised that many of my interviewees were expressing views that suggested that the changing socio-economic structure of South Africa was playing a central role in their behaviour. Many coloured people expressed the view that they had been disadvantaged by the ending of apartheid, whilst many Africans blamed the influx of migrants from the Eastern Cape for the fact they could not access housing and employment. I therefore became increasingly interested in how discrimination and the interrelationship between race and class had changed over the period of my thesis. I therefore expanded my thesis to include secondary analysis of a range of pre-existing quantitative data sources, alongside studies by other academics, to draw together a picture of how the apartheid political economy had changed for different groups of black South Africans in Cape Town and the Western Cape.

## Qualitative Data Collection: Sources

I used multiple methods (interviews, documents and observations) to collect qualitative data, through which to construct a narrative of organisation and activism in the two case studies. I also used interviews (and observation for present day activism) to investigate the reasons that individuals themselves give for their involvement in political activity and how they interacted with the organisations they were and are part of.

My interviews were all semi-structured. I considered using unstructured interviews<sup>18</sup> but because I had clear research questions that I wanted to answer I needed relevant data and therefore needed to guide the conversations. However, rather than establishing a set discussion guide at the start of the research to guide all subsequent interviews I adopted a reflexive approach, constantly revisiting my discussion guide as more data became available and my understanding of the situation developed. I also returned to some interviewees when additional information made this appropriate. In this way I was able to react to the data I was collecting and build up a detailed picture in the two case studies.

To adhere to ethical standards I offered confidentiality to interviewees and asked respondents to sign a form stating their preferences. I also made clear the purpose of my research to all participants. Interestingly very few people requested confidentiality and where they did it was more often for 'off the record' comments that they made during interviews that were otherwise 'on the record. However, on writing up the thesis I made a decision to anonymise interviews unless the respondent was a well known figure and naming them would add considerable weight to the conclusions. The reason for this was twofold. Firstly, particularly with regard to more recent activism, people have been involved in illegal activities and on occasions political disloyalty is punished. Therefore, the potential consequences for the interviewees were such that I felt unable to identify them in a published

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<sup>18</sup> See for example: Graham, H, 'Surveying Through Stories', in (eds.) Bell, C & Roberts, H, Social Researching: Politics, Problems, Practice, (London, 1984)

document. Secondly, the past is a contested terrain and, particularly in Bonteheuwel, there is considerable ongoing resentment between activists. I did not want to add to this resentment or place undue public scrutiny on those activists I quoted. I have transcripts and recordings of all interviews, which I am happy to make available on request.

The use of interviews in my design was a particular strength. It allowed me to move beyond the proclamations of organisations to understand the individual motivations behind my subject's actions and therefore provided answers to the research questions focus upon *why* people were and are involved in activism and organisation. Because much organising under apartheid was clandestine, and even when organising was above ground archival records were not always kept or have been destroyed, interviews also allowed me to piece together a fuller picture of the history of activism than would otherwise have been possible.

The use of interviews, however, did have its weaknesses. A constant theme in studies of interviewing is the importance of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Burgess notes that central to a participant's willingness to divulge information in a qualitative interview is the building of a good rapport between the interviewer and the respondent.<sup>19</sup> This assumed significance in this study because there was often considerable social distance between myself and the people I was interviewing. As a white, middle class, English researcher I had little socially or economically in common with many of the people I was interviewing who were almost all black and South African, and many were working class and poor. Interestingly, however, I did not find that social difference played the major role in the building up of rapport and the quality of the interviews I undertook. Many of my best interviews were with people who were least like me and some of the worst were with people who were middle class and educated. Indeed, I found that being associated with a university gave me a certain status with many people that allowed me to ask difficult questions and get what appeared to be honest responses. Within

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<sup>19</sup> Burgess, R, In the Field: An introduction to Field Research, ( London, 1984), p.107

this, however, there were some interviews where I had little rapport with the subjects and this did lead to difficulties in getting reliable data.

More problematic in interviewing people, however, were issues of recall, and deliberate mis-recall. What people are willing to reveal in interviews is constrained by what they remember, as well as a desire to present a favourable impression.<sup>20</sup> As I was investigating contentious political action which at times involved violence and subversion there were likely to be limits to the amount people would confide in me. Equally importantly, many people who were active in the anti-apartheid struggle have assumed positions in post-apartheid South Africa based on the political networks that they built up during apartheid and their contribution to the struggle. Consequently, many interviewees had a personal hagiography to maintain which prevented them from always talking honestly about their involvement. This was most apparent in Bonteheuwel where post-apartheid divisions within the progressive movement have led to endless wrangling over the contribution people have made to the struggle. Claims and counter claims abound regarding the role individual activists played and these seem at times to be more driven by personal animosity than any clear fact. However, it was also apparent in Guguletu. A common theme in my interviews was people overstating their own involvement in organisation and the strength of the organisations they were involved in.

To minimise the problems with the validity of the data collected through interviews I adopted several different approaches. Firstly, I undertook a considerable number of interviews (around 100 overall). By doing this I was able to compare and contrast various different interpretations and historical recollections. Where the same themes or the same events came up consistently I was able to feel surer in the accuracy of the descriptions and could discount interviews which were clearly inaccurate. Interestingly, contestation in Bonteheuwel helped with this on occasion as the level

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.; Milligan, J, 'The Treatment of an Historical Source', *History and Theory*, 18, 1979, pp.177-196

of disagreement was such that when there was broad agreement across activist groups the validity of the data could be more easily assumed.

As well as cross checking validity between interviews my multi-method research design also provided alternative sources that could both shed light on different aspects of organisation and activism, as well as allow for the crosschecking of interview data (and vice versa). To complement these interviews I analysed a range of historical documentary sources. These included the publications and records of various grassroots organisations, both city-wide and in the case studies, newspaper reports, evidence from political trials and records of the Black Local Authorities. Documentary sources were particularly useful for understanding the *what* and *how* of organisation and activism as they documented the physical history of organisations and events. However they did on occasion also provide information on questions of *why* people became involved. Trial records often provided justifications for involvement. Interestingly, local authority records also contained information that allowed me to build descriptions of the relationships between residents and the state that shed considerable light on the patronage networks that were operating and which, in combination with interviews, provided a deeper understanding of the reasons why people acquiesced under apartheid.

Like interviews documentary sources present a range of problems for the researcher. Documents can be biased, both in their content and in the representativeness of what has survived. They are also unlikely to have content that addresses the research questions directly, meaning such research relies on inferences by the researcher.<sup>21</sup> Newspaper reports were heavily affected by censorship; progressive publications often represented the situation as activists would have liked it to be rather than as it was; local authority records were never intended to be used to understand progressive organisation; what people say in

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<sup>21</sup> Dibble, V, 'Four Types of Inferences from Documents to Events', *History and Theory*, 3, 1963, pp.304-221; Goldthorpe, J, 'The Uses of History in Sociology: Reflections on Some Recent Tendencies', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 42/2, 1991, pp.211-230

trials, and what evidence is submitted, is influenced as much by a desire to escape or secure prosecution as it is by a desire to preserve the historical record.

Document survival bias was a particular problem in my research as only limited archival evidence for local activities survived in both case studies. As there was no township in the city that had a strong archival record of its progressive activities this was an unavoidable weakness. To mitigate this I used records of city-wide and regional structures which were better preserved and, although often lacking in detail, did provide evidence on activities in the two townships. More importantly, however, the triangulated methodology I adopted allowed me to combine first hand testimony with documentary sources. I was therefore able to both assess the bias and validity of documentary sources,<sup>22</sup> and assess the accuracy and bias of these personal accounts.<sup>23</sup> I was also able to move beyond the limits of the individual data sources and build up a more rounded picture by combining documentary evidence with interviews. Even when sparse in their coverage documents could point out topics, events and dynamics that I was then able to investigate in more detail through interviewing. The use of documentary sources also allowed me to validate my interviews. For example, claims about organisational strength were often disproved by the minutes of the organisations themselves. This in turn allowed me to challenge interviewees when they presented over simplified pictures of their organisations. This allowed me not only to judge when interviewees were being truthful, but also encouraged interviewees to be more truthful themselves as they were aware I had additional knowledge with which to validate their claims.

The final data source I used was to observe political activity in action by attending activities such as meetings and protests. This was clearly only possible for the contemporary period. However, by involving myself in organisation I was able to gain increased access to the meanings that guided participants' behaviour, beyond

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<sup>22</sup> Platt, J, 'Evidence and Proof in Documentary Research: 1 Some Specific Problems of Documentary Research', *Sociological Review*, 29, 1981, pp.31-56

Robson, C, *Real World Research...*

<sup>23</sup> Bechhofer, F, & Paterson, L, *Principles of Research Design in the Social Sciences*, (London, 2000)



those that they would have been willing or able to reveal to me in a short interview situation.<sup>24</sup> This was particularly important in the case of Guguletu. My understanding of the importance of insider/outsider identities came from attending meetings of the housing new social movement in the community and listening to the rhetoric that was employed. I was then able to both understand this rhetoric within the context of action, as well as incorporate questions about these identities into my more formal interviewing. Spending time with coloured activists also helped me understand the hopes and aspirations that had driven them during apartheid and how these had changed post-apartheid. Interestingly, by helping me to better understand current subjectivities within the two communities I was able to overcome some of the problems that arose from the fact that I initially had limited access to the cultural codes and norms that underlay action in the two communities.<sup>25</sup>

## **Qualitative Data Collection: Limits**

Whilst the use of a triangulated approach to qualitative data collection allowed me to cross reference my sources and has increased my confidence in the conclusions I have drawn there are still limits to this approach.

I had to rely on intermediaries to help identify potential subjects for interviewing. This represents a form of snowball sampling and was a weakness for two reasons. Firstly, choices about who to interview were taken out of my hands as other people made decisions on the most appropriate contacts for me to talk to.<sup>26</sup> I tried to avoid this by taking multiple routes into communities; I did not simply identify one

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<sup>24</sup> Hammersley, M & Atkinson, P, Ethnography: Principles in Practice, (London, 1989)

<sup>25</sup> Vansina talks about the importance of getting to understand the subjectivities of the people that you are studying. See: Vansina, J, 'Fieldwork in History', in (eds.) Adenaike, C K & Vansina, J, In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa, (Oxford, 1996). Through my involvement with contemporary grassroots organisation I was able to both understand the identities that were driving post-apartheid collective action, but also understand the deeper meanings that people attached to their insider status and therefore throw more light on events that had taken place under apartheid.

<sup>26</sup> Atkinson, R & Flint, J, 'Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies', *Social Research Update*, 33, 2001, [<http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU33.html>]

activist and snowball my sample from them, but identified several activists with different backgrounds and used lots of separate snowballs. However I cannot be sure that the activists I contacted were truly representative and I did not miss out key players.

The second problem with this approach is that I had little contact with 'ordinary' citizens; I contacted activists and they passed me on to other activists. The point of entry into grassroots struggles and organisations was the oral testimonies of activists combined with surviving documentary sources. Whilst the wide range of sources I used (particularly the use of local authority records in Guguletu and the broader picture of social change I developed through the quantitative work discussed below) helped prevent an unquestioning acceptance of an 'official line,' I have to acknowledge that a stronger thesis may have emerged if I had had the time and access to conduct more interviews with 'ordinary' township residents. Indeed this would be an interesting approach for a future study of activism.<sup>27</sup>

The snowball sampling approach also created problems when studying particular time periods – most notably the unrest of 1976 and particularly 1985/6. A large number of people became involved in protest at this time but because of the fluid nature of protest many people, including leaders, did not sustain involvement after the unrest had died down. It was therefore difficult to locate people who had been central to these events as their location was not known even to others who had been involved. This was further compounded by the fact that the forms of activism during unrest did not lend themselves to the creation of archival records. In this respect 1976 was less problematic because the commission into the riots gathered a considerable amount of data which I was able to use. However sources for the unrest of 1985/6 were particularly hard to come by, especially as the state has destroyed magistrate court records from this period. There is no real mitigation to

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<sup>27</sup> For the problems of relying upon the testimonies of activists in assessing the nature of civic activities, and one methodological approach towards trying to gain a more grassroots view of the civics see; Janet Cherry, 'Hegemony, Democracy and Civil Society: Political Participation in Kwazakele Township, 1980-93', in (eds.) Adler, G and Steinberg, J, From comrades to citizens: the South African civics movement and the transition to democracy, (Basingstoke, 2000)

this problem as researchers from outside the community are even less likely to be able to trace such people than activists within the community and the lack of archival sources is irreversible. However it did make it more difficult to reconstruct the events and motivations of people at these times and at times limited the conclusions I was able to draw.

## **Quantitative Data Collection**

Alongside a qualitative examination of progressive organisation and activism I also undertook quantitative analysis of existing data to pull together a picture of the changing nature of discrimination and South Africa's political economy. The results of this analysis are presented in chapter two.

The use of quantitative evidence strengthened my overall research design in two main ways. Firstly, it added increased depth and description to the case studies as I was able to not only access the narratives and explanations of organisation and activism provided by participants, but I was also able to chart socio-economic change in the communities. Secondly, by providing an understanding of socio-economic change it also allowed me to better understand the explanations given by activists. A key theoretical question within this thesis is the relationship between structure and agency. Many activists cited the importance of hardship and apartheid discrimination in driving their actions. By understanding the nature of this hardship I was, therefore, better placed to understand and interpret these explanations.

As my study involved a considerable retrospective element I was restricted when undertaking quantitative analysis on socio-economic change by the need to use already existing data. This was a weakness as I was confined in the questions I was able to answer by the quality and focus of the data that already existed. However, this weakness was more than balanced out by the fact that I would have been unable to undertake a nationwide survey on anything like the scale of the censuses

and studies that I relied upon. By undertaking secondary analysis I was, therefore, able to greatly expand the scope of the quantitative research.

## **Quantitative Data Collection: Sources**

Where possible I relied on existing secondary literature to study the changing contours of discrimination. There have been some excellent studies of socio-economic change in South Africa, such as Natrass and Seekings' book on race, class and inequality in South Africa<sup>28</sup> and Crankshaw's study of changing patterns in the division of labour under apartheid<sup>29</sup> and these have been used as appropriate.

However, it was also necessary to move beyond these studies. In part this was because I wanted to explicitly study the differences between Africans with Section 10 rights and those without, which had not been covered previously. It was also because of a desire to study changes within the coloured population, which similarly had not been covered in great detail since the Theron Report, which was produced in 1976. However, I also had to expand my study because I wanted to examine not only the labour market and incomes, but also how access to welfare transfers (housing and welfare grants) had changed.

For the period before 1993 I relied heavily upon the South African Population Censuses of 1970, 1980 and 1991, supplemented where possible by various publications of the South African Statistical Service in the form of its yearly bulletins. For the period after 1993 a wider range of sources became available. Starting in 1993 and running until 1999 the government run Statistics South Africa undertook a yearly Household Survey. Following this, and running twice yearly since 2000, Statistics South Africa has also run a Labour Force Survey. The data from the 1996 and 2001 censuses is also available.

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<sup>28</sup> Seekings, J, & Natrass, N, Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa, (New Haven & London, 2005)

<sup>29</sup> Crankshaw, O, Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour Under Apartheid, (London, Routledge, 1997)

## **Quantitative Data Collection: Sources – Strengths, Weaknesses and Limitations**

The statistical publications could be used relatively unproblematically, as the figures included had already been validated by the South African Statistical Service.

Similarly, the post-apartheid Household Survey, the Labour Force Survey and the 1996 and 2001 census all exhibited considerable consistency between waves which made post-apartheid comparisons relatively straight forward.

Comparisons within the apartheid period and between the apartheid and post-apartheid periods were more problematic. This was for three main reasons. Firstly, there were often inconsistencies in the questions asked between census years. For example, occupational classifications, which would have permitted a detailed study of the division of labour, differed in each census wave between 1970 and 1996. Similarly, income bands were altered between census years, as were geographical boundaries. This meant there were some questions that could simply not be asked. It also prevented precise comparisons of some forms of data between years, which meant that rough approximations had to be used. Whilst this made it possible to draw broad comparisons it was not always possible to demonstrate conclusively changes that were taking place. Where data is not directly comparable this has been noted in the footnotes

Secondly, Africans were counted in different ways throughout this period. In 1970 Africans were only counted in areas with local authorities, which meant the homeland commuter townships were excluded. However those Africans surveyed were surveyed through a complete population survey. In 1980 the sample was expanded to include Africans in all of the formal Republic of South Africa, as well as the homelands, but a clustered sampling approach was adopted. The 1980 methodology was also repeated in 1991, although with a more deliberate

methodology for measuring informal settlements. In 1996 and 2001 a general population survey was again undertaken.

The changing geographical focus of the censuses does not have major consequences for this study because the Coloured Labour Preference Policy meant that before the mid 1980s most Africans lived in formal townships which were within local authority boundaries and were therefore not excluded from the census. Similarly, coloureds tended to live in areas with local authorities and therefore the vast majority of coloureds were enumerated in all surveys. The change in sampling methodology, however, has the potential to have a larger impact, especially as from the surviving documentation it is not possible to estimate the sampling error. I have not, therefore, been able to establish confidence intervals within my comparisons and this weakness needs to be acknowledged.

Finally, it is also important to note that not only do explicit sampling choices affect the data, different response rates are also likely to slant the data collected. This would have been a particular problem under apartheid, when many Africans who were in the area would have been so illegally and therefore would have been unwilling to answer questionnaires, especially when they would have had experiences of constant harassment for pass offences. However, even post apartheid it is inevitable that any survey will under-represent particular groups. I have discussed these particular problems when presenting analysis that may have been impacted, however it has again to be recognised that there are weaknesses in the data that make it difficult to conclude beyond any doubt that there is no margin of error in the conclusions presented.

However, whilst there are difficulties with some of the data sources recognising this allowed me to make the most effective use of the data. Where comparisons have not been possible due to the quality or incomparability of the data they have been avoided. Where exact comparisons have not been possible but broad inferences could be drawn this has been done and the limitations of the approach noted. Where the data has allowed for direct comparisons this has been done. In this way I

have been able to construct a picture of the changing nature of discrimination and distribution that, whilst it has its limits, also has clear value.

## Conclusion

No researcher is capable of coming to the field without preconceptions and weaknesses that impact upon their ability to interact with and understand a situation and no data source is without its weaknesses. Throughout the research process I have accepted that my position as a researcher and my preconceptions have been impacting upon the data collection and analysis processes. I regularly reflected on interviews after they were completed and asked myself why I was drawing the conclusions I was from the data. Similarly, when interrogating historical sources I considered not only what the documents said, but also who they were intended for and what their broader purpose may have been when weighing up their particular significance. By adopting a reflexive approach to my research I hope to have minimised the impact that my own prejudices and subjectivities will have had on my conclusions.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond this my research design has also allowed me to triangulate my findings and therefore increase the validity of my conclusions. I checked people's recollections against surviving archival evidence to assess their accuracy and vice versa. Participant observation allowed me to move beyond the explanations offered by leaders to begin to understand the motivations of general participants. I was also able to locate people's explanations for their involvement within the broader structural context.

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<sup>30</sup> Hammersley, M & Atkinson, P, Ethnography...

It has to be accepted that any piece of research will be coloured by the researcher who undertakes it and the methodologies they choose – indeed if this was not the case there would be no academic debate. However, by making clear the decisions I have documented here in terms of research design and interpretation of data I have been able to show that my research was carefully thought out as it progressed and that my research decisions were buttressed by methodological rationale. The multi-method design I used allowed me to cross check my data collection and conclusions and to draw together the thick descriptions on which case studies rely and by being explicit in the choices I have made I hope others will be able to judge the strengths and weaknesses of this project.



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