LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES OF DOCK WORKERS IN DURBAN,
c. 1900-1959

by

Ralph Frans Callebert

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the livelihood strategies of African dock workers in Durban, South Africa, between the Anglo-Boer War and the 1959 strikes. These labourers did not conform to common conceptions of radical dock workers or conservative African migrant workers. While Marxist scholars have been correct to stress the working class consciousness of Durban’s dock workers, this consciousness was also more ambiguous. These workers and their leaders displayed a peculiar mix of concern for workers’ issues and defences of the rights and interests of African traders.

Many of Durban’s dock workers were not only wage labourers. In fact, only a minority had wages as their only source of income. The Reserve economy played a role in sustaining the consumption levels of their households and, more importantly, more than half of the former dock workers interviewed for this research engaged in some form of commercial enterprise, often based on the pilferage and sale of cargoes. Some also teamed up with township women who sold pilfered goods while the men were at work. This combination of commercial strategies and wage labour has often been overlooked in the literature. By looking at these livelihood strategies, this dissertation considers how rural and urban economies interacted in households’ strategies and reinterprets the reproduction of labour and the household in order to move beyond dichotomies of proletarian versus rural consciousness.

The dock workers’ households were neither proletarian households that were forced to reside in the countryside because of apartheid, nor traditional rural homesteads with a missing migrant member. The households were reproduced in three geographically separate spheres of production and consumption, none of which could reproduce the household on its own. These spheres were dependent on each other, but also separate, as physical distance gave the different
household members some autonomy. Such multi-nodal households not only bridged the rural and the urban, but equally straddled the formal/informal divide. For many, their employment on the docks made their commercial enterprises possible, which allowed them to retire early from urban wage labour. Consequently, the interests of wage labourers could not be divorced from those of African small-scale entrepreneurs.
Acknowledgements

Many people have helped me in different ways during this doctoral degree. Without their assistance, I would never have been able to research and write this dissertation. Most importantly, this research would have been impossible without the help of Sibongo Dlamini and the cooperation of sixty-seven interviewees, sixty-five of whom were once dock workers. I cannot and will not claim that this dissertation can in any way represent their lived experiences, but I do hope to have captured at least an accurate description and analysis of their livelihood strategies and to have done justice to their stories. It is after all only the labour of the working class that makes it possible for others to engage in intellectual labour.

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Abbreviations

£ s. d.  pounds, shillings, pence; see appendix three for more information on currency
ARB  Department of Labour
CAU  Catholic African Union
CNC  Chief Native Commissioner
CNLB  Central Native Labour Board
CPSA  Communist Party of South Africa
CTSDWU  Cape Town Stevedore and Dock Workers’ Union
DAR  Durban Archives Repository
DSA  Durban Stevedores’ Association (employers’ organisation)
DSLSC  Durban Stevedoring Labour Supply Company
GG  Office of the Governor-General of South Africa
GNLB  Government Native Labour Bureau
ICU  Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union of Africa
ICU \textit{yase} Natal  the seceded Natal branch of the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union of Africa
KCAL  Killie Campbell Africana Library and Campbell Collections at UKZN, Durban
KCAV  Killie Campbell Audio-Video Collection at KCAL
MNAD  Municipal Native Administration Department (Durban)
MVE  Ministry of Transport
NAB  Native Advisory Board
<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>Native Affairs Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>Natal Employers’ Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEC</td>
<td>Native Economic Commission of 1930-32</td>
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<tr>
<td>NNC</td>
<td>Natal Native Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td>Department of Native Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNAB</td>
<td>Port Natal Native Administration Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAB</td>
<td>National Archives Repository</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACTU</td>
<td>South African Congress of Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAIRR</td>
<td>South African Institute of Race Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>South African Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.A.R. &amp; H.</td>
<td>South African Railways and Harbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHWU</td>
<td>Seamen and Harbour Workers Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNA</td>
<td>Secretary of Native Affairs</td>
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<td>TAB</td>
<td>Transvaal Archives Repository</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.G.</td>
<td>Union Government Documents, numbered ‘U.G. Number-year’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VWN</td>
<td>Social Welfare and Pension (government department)</td>
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Glossary

*abakhaya*  
people from one’s home area

*amakholwa*  
‘believers’, the Christian, mission-educated African elite

*amalaita*  
gangs of young Zulu men in Durban, typically consisting of domestic servants, emerged in the early twentieth century

*bakkie*  
pickup truck

*dagga*  
marijuana

*gangwayman*  
stevedore responsible for the cooperation of the work of the gangs and the crane- or winch-operator, by means of hand-signals

*ilobolo*  
bridewealth, typically paid in cattle

*induna, pl. izinduna*  
headman, both a position in the traditional political hierarchy and an African supervisor in the workplace

*mahewu*  
fermented porridge, also *mahewe*

*samp*  
porridge made from coarsely ground corn

*shebeen*  
unlicensed bar patronised by Africans, often in the living-room of a shebeen queen

*togt*  
labour casual labour, a word used in Natal and Durban

*umnumzane, pl. abanumzane*  
homestead head

*umuzi, pl. imizi*  
isiZulu: homestead

*umziz, pl. imzi*  
isiXhosa: homestead

*utshwala*  
Traditional low-alcohol sorghum beer, sold under municipal monopoly

*winchman*  
stevedore responsible for operating the winches
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Chapter 1: Introduction

isiZulu-speakers know Durban, a city on the east coast of South Africa (see map 1), as eThekwini, ‘at the bay’.¹ This name is no coincidence, as its harbour is crucial to the city’s existence.

Durban’s port is central to its economic and social life. As the only natural harbour between Nelson Mandela Bay and Maputo, it became South Africa’s dominant port and a major container hub for the western Indian Ocean. This port was and still is the lynchpin of the local and regional economy. Consequently, newspapers and local elites consistently showed great concern for the development and operation of the harbour. Durban and Natal’s fortunes are linked to shipping.²

Since the nineteenth century and throughout the period under discussion (c. 1900 to 1959), the Point area (see map 2) has been the most important site of shipping activities. It is the closest to the city centre (North of the bay) of the two promontories enclosing the bay. As the oldest part of the harbour, it is still used for cargo handling today. The Bluff and Maydon Wharf were the two other main areas that had been developed for shipping by 1959. The Bluff is the Southern headland encompassing the harbour. It was the site of Durban’s first bulk coaling facilities and still handles coal. Maydon Wharf, which received its first vessels in 1906, is located on the eastern shore of the bay and contains a mix of bulk and general cargo facilities. Container


terminals in Durban were not built until the 1970s. Before that, mostly African migrant workers did almost all of the work by hand. As in other ports, there were two types of dock workers in Durban. Stevedores worked in the holds of the ships, stacking or unloading cargo. Shore workers handled the cargo on the wharf. The term ‘dock worker’ can refer either to both groups of workers or specifically to the latter group. In Durban, shore workers are referred to as railway workers as well, as they were employed by the South African Railways and Harbours (S.A.R. & H.). Shore work generally required less skill, was less dangerous, and earned lower wages. Throughout this dissertation ‘dock worker’ is used to refer to both groups, unless otherwise specified.

These workers were one of Durban’s biggest concentrations of labourers and were central to much of the city’s labour history. As casual labourers, not under contract with one employer, they were also a major concern of the authorities. Dockers were commonly known as onyathi, buffaloes, referring to their physical strength and the collective nature of their work. In the early 1940s, legendary dock leader Zulu Phungula proudly talked about a ‘strike called inyathi’ and SS Inyathi, Steamship Buffalo. As African migrants, these labourers were banned from unionisation and denied many other political and industrial rights that white workers had. This lack of formal union organisation, however, did not imply passive acceptance of the industrial order. In fact, Durban’s dock workers have a long history of industrial action, dating back to the 1870s. It was

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3 A brief history of the development of Durban’s port facilities can be found in Jones, op. cit.
David Hemson in particular who stressed this history of radicalism. His PhD dissertation from the 1970s is still one of the most impressive works on Durban’s labour history. Hemson’s dissertation paints a picture of radical and strike-prone dockers, in line with much of the literature on dock workers worldwide.

In Durban, like elsewhere, the existence of a casual labour regime on the docks, which most ports only phased out in the 1960s or 1970s, facilitated this history of strife and strikes. Dock workers were usually hired per day or for a specific job, rather than on a continuous basis. As the number of labourers seeking employment was often much higher than the number required, many would be unemployed several days per week. Thus, their earnings could fluctuate significantly.

Foremen would hire the workers they needed each morning from those who presented themselves that day. This system of daily hiring, in some harbours known as the shape-up, could be “cut-throat, unpredictable, and demeaning,” in Andrew Parnaby’s words. Irregular job opportunities, often brutal working conditions, indifference of employers to these conditions, and the strategic position of these workers in the

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12 Andrew Parnaby, Citizen Docker: Making a New Deal on the Vancouver Waterfront, 1919-1939 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 5.
transport system all facilitated strikes.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, as casual workers they had little to lose, except for one day’s pay. The threat of retrenchment had limited effect on these workers.\textsuperscript{14} In Durban, casual labour was known as togt labour and an African intermediary in charge of hiring and forming work gangs was known as induna, a word that traditionally meant headman.

Throughout colonial Africa transport workers have been particularly militant as well. Several explanations can be offered for this militancy. Port and railway workers occupied a strategic position in the infrastructure of empire, a fact of which they were acutely conscious, not least because they felt a strong presence of the colonial state in their workplace. Transport workers also comprised a sizeable workforce with a significant portion of skilled workers. In the aftermath of World War Two, a wave of general strikes, led mostly by transport workers, swept through the continent.\textsuperscript{15} Considering the importance of transport workers’ militancy in African labour and nationalist politics, the scholarly attention port and railway workers have attracted is not surprising. Peter Waterman, Frederick Cooper, and David Fashole Luke studied dock labour in Lagos, Mombasa, and Freetown respectively. Richard Jeffries and Stephen J. Rockel wrote about West African railway workers and East African porters.\textsuperscript{16} Much of this literature focuses on workers’ organisation and consciousness.

Hemson also wrote about strikes, working class organisation, and consciousness in his dissertation. This interest reflected his political commitment. As a student activist engaged in the Wages Commission and as union organiser, he was concerned with the study of class. In his writings, Durban’s dock workers were so radical and ready to engage in working class action because they had a strong proletarian consciousness. In making this argument, he took issue with an older tradition of liberal scholarship that was more interested in race than in class. For Marxist scholars, racial oppression was not an irrational anachronism that would eventually be dissolved by the colour-blind logic of capitalism, but rather an integral part of a capitalist system of exploitation. Politics determined the triumph of Marxist scholarship over more liberal and Weberian approaches as much as intellectual factors. Jeremy Seekings argues that:

Intellectuals linked to the exiled Communist Party were active in promoting Marxist analysis, whilst a genuinely liberal political opposition remained very weak. The re-emergence of ‘independent’ trade unions in the 1970s, based among semiskilled black industrial workers, legitimated the Marxist pre-occupation with exploitation by powerful capitalists.

Harold Wolpe reacted in his seminal 1972 article against liberal historiography that accepted race as the fundamental unit of analysis and that presented the South African state as an instrument of racial dominance, but more or less neutral in terms of class relations. He also challenged the concept of a dual economy, which is the idea that less developed economies are constituted of two independent economic systems, one modern and one traditional. For Wolpe, the South African state was anything but neutral in class relations and the traditional economy was not at all

independent from the modern sector. Rather, the traditional economy subsidises the wages of those who work in the modern economy. Racist laws upheld this rural subsidy and masked the capitalist nature of the state. Radical scholars countered the liberal idea of ‘men of two worlds’, who were still invested in the rural economy and only engaged in wage labour to supplement their income from Reserve agriculture and pastoralism and who could thus not constitute a real working class with a working class consciousness, as that was not where their interests lay.

In their challenge to these ideas, leftist academics turned their attention to African workers and argued that they did form a working class and suffered from class oppression. Hemson emphasised the working class actions of Durban’s dockers and stressed the proletarian nature of their consciousness and that of their leader, Zulu Phungula. He argues that Phungula struggled, together with Durban’s dock workers, to “force open the possibility of becoming part of the urban proletariat.” They opted for a working class solution to their poverty and rallied for better wages rather than more Reserve land or agricultural assistance.

This radical turn in the historiography of South Africa, however, came to be criticised as well. Firstly, it needs to be mentioned that some of the challenges of the older liberal and Weberian scholarship were somewhat misplaced. In their disputes, Marxists did often not engage directly with liberal historians and sociologists, but rather with certain economists. While

20 Cf. Maurice Webb, “Vanishing Lands and Migrant Labour,” Race Relations XI (1944), 3-4: 45-50. Jonathan Crush concisely explains why it was generally believed that working class unity was difficult to achieve among African migrant labourers. The reasons are: their marginal position in the labour market and their tenuous and intermittent access to employment, making them more easily replaceable, easy targets for reprisal, and more willing to act as strike breakers; their geographic dispersal; high labour turnover; highly coercive mechanisms of control; and continued rural and ethnic identification made possible by migrancy. See: Crush, “Migrancy and Militance: The Case of the National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa,” African Affairs (1989), 350: 5-6.
21 Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm,” 158.
22 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 349.
changing the focus from race to class, they did not usually dispute that race was an important faultline in South African history; just as previous work did not necessarily deny the salience of class analysis.\textsuperscript{23} Secondly, much of the early structuralist Marxist scholarship has come to be seen as too functionalist and teleological. The existence of apartheid was often read backwards to present it as the inevitable outcome of South African history. In Wolpe’s argument, for example, the function the Reserves fulfilled, rather than specific historic evolutions, explained their existence.\textsuperscript{24} Thirdly, in their quest to find proletarians and to ascertain that African migrants could also have a working class consciousness, these authors ignored evidence of other forms of consciousness. Indeed, for some radical scholars racial, ethnic, or gendered identities were little more than false consciousness.\textsuperscript{25}

From the late 1970s onwards, several historians paid more attention to other aspects of consciousness that cannot be reduced to a proletarian identity, without discarding the importance of class. Belinda Bozzoli rendered gender more visible in Southern African historiography and William Beinart and Peter Delius argued that rural attachments continued to shape African identities.\textsuperscript{26} Dunbar Moodie and Patrick Harries went even further and implied that such rural

\textsuperscript{23} Christopher Saunders, \textit{The Making of the South African Past: Major historians on race and class} (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988), 187; Seekings, op. cit., 878.

\textsuperscript{24} Christopher Saunders explains: “[...] though the reserves did eventually come to subsidise capital, they had not come into existence for that purpose [...] . The Wolpe-Legassick argument was ahistorical inasmuch as it suggested a functional relationship that had always existed, when in fact that relationship was the product of a particular set of circumstances.” Saunders, op. cit., 189.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 190.

attachments were expressions of a struggle against proletarianisation, against becoming part of the working class. Durban’s dock workers have thus been regarded both as conservative, because they were migrant workers, and as radicals, because they were dockers.

**Livelhood strategies**

The significance of the rural and other identities, however, should not conceal the fact that Durban’s dock workers did in fact show evidence of a working class consciousness. They organised as workers and frequently engaged in forceful industrial action, as Hemson makes abundantly clear. However, this was not a pure working class consciousness and Hemson did not always take those more ambiguous elements of their consciousness sufficiently seriously. When dock workers participated and even took the forefront in the 1949 anti-Indian riots, for example, he attributed this merely to a displacement of frustrated working class action after a failed attempt at a general strike. In his eagerness to affirm African workers’ status as modern proletarians, he ignored the uneven and often contradictory nature of the process of proletarianisation. In many ways, Durban’s dock workers were no prototypical proletarians with a straightforwardly working class consciousness. They had continued investment in a rural economy and experiences of racial discrimination infused their consciousness with political ideas that cannot just be considered working class.

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28 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 351.

29 Cooper notes that this was a problem with much of the scholarship on African labour, “Work, class and empire: an African historian’s retrospective on E.P. Thompson,” *Social History* XX (1995), 2: 235-241. Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane also note, following E.P. Thompson and Gareth Stedman Jones, that the idea of a theoretically pure worker needs to be questioned: workers “are not only members of a class, but also of communities, located in a specific national past and culture, and [...] work in an industry which is similarly contextualized.” See: Guy and Thabane, “Basotho Miners, Ethnicity and Workers’ Strategies,” in *Workers in Third-World Industrialization*, ed. Inga Brandell (London: Macmillan, 1991), 77.
Neither the Reserve economy nor the urban waged economy accounted for the full livelihoods of these workers and their households. Reserve agriculture, pastoral activities, and wage labour all contributed to the household’s survival; none of these activities could sustain the household on its own. If we accept that there is a link between people’s livelihoods and their political consciousness, then we need to take a closer look at how dock workers’ households combined these different economic activities and how they made decisions regarding their livelihoods to understand their class consciousness better.\(^{30}\) Wiseman Chijere Chirwa looks at how the rural economy and urban wage labour combine in the livelihood strategies of Malawian migrant workers. He looks at how these workers put their wages to work in the rural economy and focuses explicitly on economic motivations and strategies.\(^{31}\) Such an approach directs our attention to the creative responses from the periphery to economic domination and migrant labour. Africans were not simply forced into labour migration by the penetration of market forces, dispossession, the degradation of the environment, or simply through physical coercion. While people may not have been free to decide not to engage in wage labour, they seldom had no agency at all. Migration and taking a specific job were strategic decisions people made and thought about. Hence, the emphasis on livelihood strategies. Similarly, Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane did not regard workers’ strategies as just a matter of leadership, organisation, and resistance, but also of personal struggles by workers and their attempts to gain control over their lives.\(^{32}\)

\(^{30}\) Allison Goebel makes a similar argument that to get a better understanding of political movements and protests by poor South Africans, one needs to come to terms with the internal dynamics of the households and their livelihood strategies, “‘Our Struggle is for the Full Loaf’: Protests, Social Welfare and Gendered Citizenship in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* XXXVII (2011), 2: 369-388.

\(^{31}\) Chirwa, “‘Theba’ Is Power: Rural Labour, Migrancy and Fishing in Malawi, 1890s-1985” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 1992).

\(^{32}\) Guy and Thabane, op. cit.
This approach can shed light on a number of aspects of the lives of workers and their families that have not always received sufficient attention. The relation between the rural and the urban has often been assumed to be sharply dichotomous. However, livelihood strategies bridged that divide; looking at how households combined rural and urban activities can reveal how the rural and the urban economies interacted in the lives of dock workers and their families. What role did wages play in their lives? Were these their main income and was this cash used for consumption, investment, or cattle? What other economic resources did they have access to (land, cattle, labour, etc.) and how did they use these? How did they make decisions about these strategies and who made them? This method can also address how internal household dynamics influenced strategies and how economic opportunities shaped gender and household dynamics. Of course, looking at the economic strategies of households also requires us to examine the composition and nature of the household. Following Jane Guyer, it will be argued that the neoclassical model of the profit-maximising household, the concept of a traditional Zulu umuzi, and the Chayanovian idea of the peasant household all fail to adequately come to terms with the make-up and reproduction of these households. Instead, a more flexible and multi-nodal characterisation of the household will be used.

This is not to say that these economic considerations can explain everything. Indeed, issues of gender and culture, for example, cannot be reduced to economic strategies. At the same time, these issues cannot be separated from economics either. Mark Hunter skilfully links the HIV/AIDS crisis in KwaZulu-Natal to changing gender relationships and household compositions

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resulting from economic changes, “illuminat[ing] the deep connections between political economy and intimacy [...].”

In her study of vernacular capitalists in late colonial India, Ritu Birla also argues that the cultural and the economic cannot be seen as dissociated. While “colonial law carved out a space for the free circulation of capital unbound by culture” and the colonial state hoped to create local capitalists “with rational consciousness and a will effected through contract,” the reality was that “other value systems [...] sustained the exchange and production relations of the colonial economy.”

There was no rational economic market logic that could be isolated from culture. This, however, did not stop Marwari traders from successfully adjusting to the colonial economy. Similarly, it will be argued here that migrant dock workers did not have to be either bound by culture and tradition, and unable to recognise their economic interest as workers, or unambiguous proletarians.

This dissertation will reconstruct and interpret these livelihoods though the use of archival and secondary sources, as well as interviews and newspapers. During 2009, Sibongo Dlamini conducted sixty-five interviews with former African dock workers who started work on the docks between 1939 and 1959. This latter date was chosen as cut-off for this research because the introduction of monopoly hiring and the phasing out of casual labour after the 1959 strikes dramatically changed the labour regime in the port of Durban. All interviews were conducted in isiZulu or isiXhosa and usually at the home of the interviewee. Dlamini is a former dock worker and union activist himself and also a native isiZulu-speaker. His assistance has been vital to the successful completion of this research. Not only did he conduct the interviews, he also found these former dockers. Dlamini also had previous experience in conducting interviews and proved

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to be an intelligent and insightful interviewer, who understood what information I was looking for, and through a number of discussions about the results we were able to fine-tune the interviews.

There were two cycles of interviews. In the first cycle of forty-eight interviews from 6 May to 8 August, the goal was to get more or less comprehensive life stories. Dlamini asked interviewees when and why they came to Durban, how they ended up being dock workers, whether they had other economic activities, whether they had access to land, and so on. In the second cycle of seventeen interviews, conducted between 20 October and 18 November, no attempts at being comprehensive were made. These interviews focused on areas insufficiently covered in the first cycle and were often conducted with people who were visited for a specific reason, for example because they had organised a strike. These latter interviews are more fragmentary and focused on specific issues. Therefore, statistics about these interviews mentioned in this dissertation only relate to the first cycle of interviews.

The use of oral data raises many questions about accuracy and reliability. Memory is composed as a collective act in a certain social, economic, and political context and interviewees may wish to present a certain image that retrospectively makes sense of their lives. At the same time, the interviewer has certain biases. The questions were certainly focused on the material aspects of their lives and were originally designed to uncover a certain working class consciousness and radicalism. However, just like Luise White’s informants, the interviewees for this research were quick to correct my biases and to disprove the idea that informants tend to tell

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you what they think you want to hear. Indeed, there may be some truth to White’s assertion that “oral history has been turned into a higher art than perhaps it needs to be.” While interviewees may have tried to make more coherent sense of their life with the benefit of hindsight and had strong biases when it came to issues of labour politics, there does not seem to be reason to distrust the largely factual information that they have given us. For example, it has been pointed out to me that the emphasis on commercial activities may reflect our current neoliberal age more than the reality of the 1950s. While that may be true, it is also true that these workers did indeed start small businesses.

Use has also been made of two sets of earlier interviews with dock workers by other researchers. The Killie Campbell Africana Library and Campbell Collections (KCAL) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in Durban has transcripts from interviews for an oral history project conducted by the (then) University of Natal in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A few of these interviews were with dock workers. The Historical Papers Collection at the University of the Witwatersrand contains transcripts of the SAIRR Oral History Project, which was established in 1982. The project focused on three areas: African women resisting pass laws in Zeerust, dock workers in Durban, and Indian hawkers in Johannesburg. The transcripts of interviews with Durban’s dock workers have been used in this research, as well as the short book Tina Sideris wrote for the project.

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39 Ibid., 21.
40 For more on this project, see: Sideris, “Recording Living Memory in South Africa: The need for oral history in South Africa,” *Critical Arts* IV (1986), 2: 41-53.
41 Sideris, *Sifuna Imali Yethu*. 
The argument of the dissertation

Hemson provides substantial evidence of the working class consciousness of Durban’s dock workers. Indeed, they have taken action in defence of better pay and better working conditions numerous times. This dissertation does not dispute this characterisation. However, it does note that their consciousness was also more ambiguous. While dock workers did organise as workers to defend their interests as wage earners, not all their actions and concerns were consistent with the idea of radical proletarian dock workers. Dock workers in Durban and their leaders displayed an idiosyncratic mix of concern for workers’ issues and defences of the rights and interests of African traders.

The interviews conducted for this research shed some light on this seemingly contradictory mix. These workers were not ‘just’ wage labourers. In fact, only for a minority of dockers’ households were wages the only source of income. The Reserve economy also played a role in sustaining consumption levels and reproducing the household. Not only did the produce from the land and the milk from the cattle lower the needs for cash to cover consumption needs, several wives also sold some of their produce and many dock workers invested their wages in agriculture. More importantly, more than half of the dock workers engaged in some form of commercial enterprise: they sold dagga in the city, cigarettes and sweets on the docks, or pilfered food stuffs at home or in the townships. Small-scale pilferage was often crucial to these livelihood strategies, as was the casual labour regime that allowed the workers the flexibility to combine these activities with their waged job. Moreover, it was not just men who engaged in these businesses. Wives in the Reserves and urban women in the townships, with whom the dock workers may or may not have had sexual relationships, also sold goods the dockers pilfered, as well as produce and other items.
As such, these households were reproduced in three geographically separate spheres of production and consumption: on the docks, in the Reserves, and in the townships. None of these three spheres could survive without the other and none could reproduce the household on its own. The rural umuzi could not subsist without the proceeds of urban wage labour, but the artificially low wages of African workers could not sustain a family without continued reliance on the rural economy either. Similarly, township women selling pilfered goods contributed to the reproduction of dock workers’ households, but their shares of the proceeds also helped to keep their own households afloat. The livelihoods of these households straddled the divide between formal wage labour and informal trade, as well as the rural-urban divide. These were neither rural households with an absent member remitting cash wages, nor working class households forced to live in the rural Reserves by racial legislation. These were multi-nodal households with different members in different locations contributing to the reproduction of the household, where different members also had diverging interests. Husbands, wives, and mothers had different priorities, although they shared the goal of guaranteeing the reproduction of their household, and each used certain advantages, such as geographic separation, access to cash wages, and access to produce to increase spending on their own main concerns.

However, these diverse livelihoods were constantly under threat. Land degradation and overpopulation put Reserve agriculture and pastoralism increasingly under pressure and neither local nor central authorities were sympathetic towards informal African businesses. Moreover, after the phasing out of togt labour on the docks in 1959, many of the opportunities to combine wage labour with small-scale enterprises disappeared. While their control over the urban African population was never absolute, apartheid authorities did make the running of informal businesses
progressively more difficult. This argument seems in accordance with assertions from authors like Dambisa Moyo or Hernando de Soto that the problem of African and third world economies is that people’s inherent entrepreneurial spirit is crushed by overextended states and development aid. Indeed, these workers and their families used entrepreneurial strategies in the face of attempts of the state to root out informal businesses. However, whether this means that these workers possessed an entrepreneurial essence that was waiting to be liberated is less clear. Few showed any intention to become a part of the petty bourgeoisie. They rather used these strategies to escape dependence on wage labour. Many, but not all, stopped investing in their businesses once they no longer needed to earn wages and preferred to invest in cattle and dependents. This was not so much irrational, as colonial reformers would have it, but followed a socio-economic logic that was not a universal market logic devoid of social and cultural content. Few built out their business enough to allow their children not to be dependent on wage labour either. These workers were generally not the first generation of an entrepreneurial family.

Furthermore, these commercial businesses may not have possessed the developmental potential that Moyo and de Soto attribute to such enterprises. As dock workers mostly invested in the sphere of circulation of goods, these were not productive investments, created little or no employment, and their economic multiplier effect was limited. Most importantly, it should be noted that these entrepreneurial activities were closely related to their wage labour. If they had not been dock workers, they may never have become entrepreneurs. The opportunities to pilfer

and the flexibility of togt labour made these strategies possible. Their entrepreneurial activities were not merely an expression of an innate commercial instinct, but rather a creative way to use the advantages their job offered to become independent from wage labour. Consequently, their interests as labourers and as small-scale entrepreneurs cannot be divorced from each other. Decent wages, workplace control, flexible hours, and decent working conditions do not only help them in their capacity as workers, but also in the running of their businesses. The issues informal African traders faced also concerned them, as many saw trade as their road to early retirement from dock labour as well. Thus, defending both the interests of workers and African traders would not have been a contradiction to them.

The structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three sections. Each of these sections starts with a short, unnumbered pseudo-chapter. These short pieces are fictional accounts of what a day or a decade in the life of an equally fictional dock worker could have been like. These are not meant to essentialise workers’ experiences, but are an attempt to think through some of the practical aspects of living and working on the docks in a less abstract manner. How many people sleep in a compound room? Where and what do they eat? How much sleep do these workers get between the end of overtime and waking up to be ready in time for hiring? Where do workers wash themselves if they sleep outside? Possible answers to such practical questions have been pieced together from different sources, such as the interviews, archival records, and secondary sources.

The first section is broadly descriptive and its first two chapters (chapter two and three) establish the context for the rest of the dissertation. Chapter two, “Labour and society in the early twentieth century,” sketches the socio economical and political context of Durban and Natal in the first decade of the century. It discusses the origins of migrant labour and explains the state of
the labour market up to the 1910s. This chapter also considers many of the dramatic changes that took place around the turn of the century and that make the year 1900 a suitable starting point for this dissertation, such as the Anglo-Boer War, responsible government for Natal, the Bhambatha rebellion and its repression, and the removal of the sand-bar across the harbour mouth. The next chapter, “The Port of Durban and its hinterland, 1910s to 1950s,” sets out the evolution of shipping and dock labour in Durban and establishes that urban labour cannot be considered in isolation from the rural economy. This chapter also looks at the state of the Reserve economies in Natal. The last chapter in this section is the fourth, “Labour, politics, and the city, 1910s to 1950s.” This chapter ascertains the centrality of the actions and politics of dock workers to African politics and the non-white labour movement in Durban. It concludes that these dock workers were indeed very radical, but complicates that picture at the same time. This chapter notes the peculiar mix of working class consciousness with other political ideas that sections two and three of this dissertation will engage with.

The second section contains the core of the argument of this dissertation. These two chapters discuss the livelihood strategies of the interviewed dock workers. This section is chronologically limited to the 1950s, as no interviews are available for the earlier period. Chapter five, “One head of cattle named ‘salt’, another one named ‘beans’: Livelihood strategies of dock workers in Durban in the 1950s,” looks at common trends and the different strategies that emerged from these interviews and specifically focuses on entrepreneurial strategies. The second chapter in this section, “The urban and the rural: Land, labour, and households,” examines how the rural and the urban combine in the lives of these workers. It explores working and living conditions in the city as well as the close connections between rural livelihoods and urban labour.
To conclude this central part of the dissertation, it also reconsiders the conceptualisation of the household in the light of these findings.

The third and last section of this dissertation focuses on specific issues that came up in the previous section, but could not receive the attention they deserve in those chapters. Chapter seven, “Cleaning the wharves: Pilferage, bribery, and social connections on the Durban docks in the 1950s,” argues that pilferage and bribery were central to the livelihood strategies of most dock workers. While these actions were illegal, workers did not perceive them as morally wrong and even employers often knowingly allowed these practices to continue. Such crimes have frequently been discussed as primitive and opportunistic forms of resistance to proletarianisation, but this chapter argues that these were creative and strategic actions that were central to the strategies of these workers and condoned by the employers. The eighth chapter is titled “Gender and generation.” This chapter looks at the gendered and generational relations within these households and the struggles over resources that took place between different members of the households. It debats how male dock workers used their wages to try to reconstruct the gendered and generational hierarchies of the traditional umuzi and kept their wages out of the hands of mothers and wives by investing it in cattle. However, the absence of their men also allowed the women in the Reserves some autonomy, which they tried to maximise by strategically challenging and appealing to tradition. The final chapter of this section, “Buffaloes on Noah’s Ark: Industrial action on the Durban docks,” takes up the history of industrial action by dock workers. It explains how strikes were organised and looks at the relations between dock workers and African elites, as well as between dockers and the rest of the African working class. It concludes that the evidence of entrepreneurialism does not have to contradict the evidence of forceful and frequent working class action.
Chapter ten is the conclusion, titled “Straddling on the Durban docks.” It does more than a typical conclusion, as it does not only reiterate the argument of the dissertation, but also makes a case that the argument made in section two can be applied to the period before the 1950s as well. This is necessary because this section relies extensively on interviews with dock workers who only started working in the port in the 1950s. It does this by taking a closer look at three dock leaders of the 1930s and 1940s: Dick Mate, Amos Gumede, and Zulu Phungula. In doing so, it reaffirms the links between dockers’ livelihood strategies and their idiosyncratic mix of working class consciousness and concern for the interests of informal African traders. Finally, the conclusion also contends that these strategies cannot only be read backward, but that they likely also survived beyond the 1950s.

Apart from these ten chapters, this dissertation also contains four appendices: one has short life histories of a few of the interviewees to illustrate some of the major strategies, the second one gives some shipping statistics for the port of Durban, and the third appendix offers some insight in the cost of living and the value of dock workers’ wages. The latter can be useful to contextualise references to wages and the cost of living throughout the dissertation. A fourth appendix contains a number of photographs as illustrations.
Section 1

Sipho’s day

Sipho Dlamini wakes up at 5.30 a.m.¹ Even if he wanted to sleep in, this would be difficult with 
the whole compound starting its day. He lives in the Brock & Co. 
togt compound at the Point 
with almost seven hundred other stevedores. This is one of the biggest and most crowded 
compounds in the area. In a room shared with twenty others, Sipho often finds it difficult to sleep 
uninterruptedly on his hard bed, which is little more than a wooden board with some blankets on 
it. Not only are the rooms very crowded – one often has to turn sideways to be able to pass 
between the bunks – the whole building is also dark, stuffy, and dilapidated. In the morning, after 
exhausted and sweaty male bodies have been packed together all night in such a space, the rooms 
invariably have a penetrating stench. Sipho has only been working in town for a few weeks now 
and still has to get used to this environment, but this accommodation is free. The money he saves 
can be put towards the ilobolo cattle he needs to get married. Of course, he also needs to send 
money home for household and consumption expenses, as the land does not yield enough to live 
off. His colleagues tell him to be strong and that he will get used to it. He does not want to be 
seen as weak – who would hire such a worker? – and does not complain.

The living conditions in the compounds are not the only thing Sipho needs to get used to. 
The work is heavy and the hours long. Every morning he wakes up with his muscles aching, but 
this morning is especially bad. He worked overtime yesterday and thus laboured thirteen hours

¹ This account of a day in the life of a dock worker is fictional, as is Sipho Dlamini. However, it serves to 
demonstrate what a day in the life of a dock worker in the 1950s could have been like and to illustrate 
living conditions in the compounds, workloads, hiring practices, etc., based on the archival, secondary, and 
oral sources used in this research.
with only one hour for lunch and two for dinner. He only got back to the compound at 11.30 a.m., exhaust ed, and slept for less than six hours. Thirteen hours of carrying bags of rice of about 50 kg each certainly took a toll on his body and six hours of sleep was not enough to recover. As a casual labourer he could choose not to work today, but then he would not get paid and he cannot do without the money. So, despite his sore body, Sipho started to get ready. In an hour he would have to present himself for hiring.

The bathrooms in the compounds are inadequate for the number of people who live there and are not very well maintained. With almost seven hundred people using these facilities each day, a limited number of showers and toilets, and a minimal amount of cleaning, these bathrooms always carry a foul stench. There is no privacy here: there are only group showers and the smelly toilets have no doors. In the morning rush, Sipho can only take a few minutes to wash himself with cold water before others waiting for a chance to use the showers push him aside. He still has some time before hiring starts and he goes to the Native Eating House on Bell Street, where he buys a few slices of bread and some tea. This meal will have to carry him to noon, when he can break for lunch. The eating house is packed with dock workers grabbing a quick bite before work. The building is noisy and chaotic. Sipho has come to know many people here by now, mostly isiZulu-speakers, but few of them are from the same area as him.

He is back at the compound just before 6.30 a.m. and a few minutes later Brock & Co.’s izinduna start selecting their gangs for today. The stevedores stand around and try to get the attention of these gang leaders. It is a hectic scene and as always the same favourites are chosen for the best jobs. As Sipho has not been here for very long and does not yet know many izinduna, he may end up having to handle some of the less desirable cargoes, such as fertilisers or sulphur, both of which are bad for one’s skin and eyes. Sipho may even miss out on a job, depending on
how busy it is today. In that case, he can still try at one of the other stevedoring firms or at S.A.R. & H., but these companies may not have work for him either. If he cannot find a job, he will not receive any pay. However, it is a busy day and soon an *induna* selects him to load maize with eleven others.

Their ship is berthed at the Point wharves and the gang can walk there. They arrive at the ship at seven and work starts twenty minutes later. As it is still early, it is not too hot yet, but soon the summer heat will push the temperature in the hold up to as much as 50°C. But, even before that happens, Sipho’s clothes will be drenched with sweat from the continuous heavy physical labour. All day, he will be picking up 50 kg bags of maize from the ropes on which they are lowered into the hold, usually forty-eight bags per load, and stacking them in such a way that the ship maintains a safe balance. Their responsibility is great. Not only could a smaller ship capsize if the cargo is not balanced correctly, but unsafely stacked bags could fall and injure, or even kill, their colleagues. Sipho may be inexperienced, but the gang knows what to do and they instruct him on how and where to best place the bags. Often, the *induna* takes the initiative and demonstrates the job first; he shows them where and how to stack the bags. If the gang does not work quickly enough, or does not do the work to satisfaction, the *induna* may use vulgar language: “Hey, monkey, stop fooling around and get to work!” Or: “Hey, your mother’s pussy, move away from there!” Sipho cannot afford to slack. As a casual labourer, he needs to remain in good standing among the gang leaders to get hired.

The gangwayman is on the deck, giving signals to the man who operates the winches. The gangway is the winchman’s eyes, letting him know where the loads should be lowered. A small mistake by either of these two workers could lead to Sipho or one of his colleagues being crushed by more than two tonnes of grain. But, once the load is safely placed on the floor of the
hold, Sipho and an older worker named Wandile pick up the first bag. The induna directs them on where to place it. This first bag does not hurt too much yet, though his body is still sore from yesterday, but the gang will get little reprieve from the hard physical labour until noon, four hours and forty minutes after they start. At noon, they have one hour to eat and to rest their already tired bodies. Sipho goes back to the Native Eating House which is only a few blocks away and has some more bread with lemonade. Work resumes at 1 p.m., when the gang still has four hours of regular time to go. Already tired and with the afternoon heat becoming increasingly burdensome, the workers slow down somewhat after lunch. However, they had a very productive morning and actually finish their quota for the day somewhat early. They finished by 4 p.m. and chose not to continue till five, which would have earned them a bonus. Sipho worked just under eight hours, five less than yesterday. In that time he and his colleagues lifted and stacked many tonnes of maize.

After work, he goes to the municipal Beer Hall to relax and rehydrate. He gets himself one quart of nutritious and low-alcohol sorghum beer for 6d. and also buys the induna one. He socialises for a while, as some of his abakhaya who work on the docks explained that it is important for a new worker to get to know people and be friendly with them. Not only could this help him getting hired more regularly and for better jobs, but it is also important to have friends who will watch out for you in such a dangerous workplace or who will help you when you are out of money. After all, the income of a togt worker can vary. Of course, it also just makes his time at the docks less lonely. When he finishes his beer, he excuses himself and goes back to the compound. Now he can finally take a longer shower and rest a bit without twenty others in the room. He would have enjoyed having a girlfriend over at this time, but the compound rules do not allow it. There are strict rules about when and why they can leave and arrive, who they can have
over as visitors (only men!) and when, etc. These rules are enforced by the compound induna. In a compound, one is never really free.

This evening Sipho eats at the compound. The food there is not very tasty, but it is free. Some nights he will treat himself to some samp with offal from the Native Eating House, but this is a luxury that he cannot afford very often. Nonetheless, for such intense physical work, he does not always get the proteins he needs from the compound food. No eating house in Durban has as many offal sellers as this one, as dock workers need this cheap meat that whites would not buy. Sipho has the chance to present himself for four hours of overtime at 7 p.m. This shift pays comparatively well, but tonight he is just too exhausted. Instead, he rests some more, talks to some colleagues, and goes to bed early. However, the rooms remain very noisy and busy for many more hours. Even if he does manage to sleep early, other workers could wake him up again when they return from their overtime shift after 11 p.m. With so many people in the compound, it is never really quiet.
Chapter 2: Labour and society in the early twentieth century

Dock workers who were active in Durban in the beginning of the twentieth century would have witnessed great changes during their lifetime. While these changes were not necessarily unambiguously detrimental, they were generally not for the better. These workers were born before the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand, the building of the railroad to the interior, and possibly even before the Anglo-Zulu War. War, destruction, and defeat were fresh in their memories, as many had lived through the Anglo-Zulu War, the Zulu Civil War, and the Anglo-Boer War. Rinderpest and changes to the rural economy forced increasing numbers of Africans to leave for the unknown and unwelcoming cities and plantations to earn cash wages. Still, in many ways the worst was yet to come. The commercial boom following the mineral discoveries resulted in relatively good wages and increasing demands for food in growing new towns created favourable opportunities for those peasants not devastated by these wars.

This chapter sets the scene for the rest of the dissertation. It looks at the development of Durban and Natal’s labour market and the state of dock labour around the turn of the century. The chapter takes us to the 1913 Natives Land Act, from where chapter three will pick up these themes. This chapter has four sections. The first part discusses the origins of migrant labour and introduces some of the important literature and debates on labour that have been so central to the historiography of southern Africa. It engages with both the classic literature on the ‘underdevelopment’ of the South African peasantry and more recent literature that has more attention for the role of internal household dynamics in the origins of migrant labour. The next section deals with the urban setting of this work: Durban and its port. It discusses the impact of the commercial boom on the labour market and the origins of urban segregation. The third part of
this chapter returns to the socio-economic changes that were taking place in the colony and shows how the Anglo-Boer War further entrenched labour migration. The last section of this chapter presents a brief state of affairs on the dock labour market at the onset of the twentieth century.

The origins of migrant labour in Southern Africa

Historians and economists have extensively debated the origins of migrant labour. Liberal scholars often stressed the attractions of the cities and the new consumption items that could be bought with wages; this is the ‘bright lights’ theory.\(^1\) For them, migration was a positive choice to take advantage of the opportunities wage labour and urbanisation offered. Later neo-Marxists, however, refuted the assumption of free choice and stressed coercion. They argued that migration was not a positive choice, but the result of political, demographic, economic, and ecological pressures, of creeping but incomplete proletarianisation. These authors generally did not see migration in a positive light and contended that it caused rural underdevelopment.\(^2\)

This structuralist view has come under criticism since then, mainly because it leaves little room for human agency and ignores local dynamics and the way these influenced the outcomes of capitalist development. Jabulani Sithole notes that these authors share a belief in static pre-colonial societies with liberals and that both largely disregarded African initiatives.\(^3\) While these criticisms point to an important weakness, neo-Marxist dependency theory does offer a compelling framework to conceptualise inequality and the effects of commercialisation on non-

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capitalist societies. However, this approach does overlook human agency, the ability of people to change the course of history through their individual and collective actions.

Other historians have tried to combine awareness of the compulsion and the negative effects of labour migration with sensitivity for African agency and initiative. Indeed, labour migration ultimately had mostly negative effects for the sending areas in much of Southern Africa, but it was not just an external imposition. The internal dynamics of pre-capitalist societies equally made migration possible. African communities were, with regional and temporal variations, largely self-sufficient throughout much of the nineteenth century. They had little need to sell their labour, as pastoral and agricultural production remained viable. However, colonisation and environmental factors did effect changes. The decline of hunting and raiding, for example, meant that the labour of young males was underutilised. Some of that labour was absorbed into agriculture, which was normally the sphere of female labour. Men ploughed, but their labour was not needed throughout the year. There was a surplus of male juvenile labour, rooted in a gendered and generational division of labour. Young men could leave home for an extended period each year without undermining homestead production.

The relative underemployment of young men allowed them to migrate, but it is not sufficient to explain the origins of labour migration. The possibility of migration without undermining the self-sufficiency of the homestead also depended on society’s capacity to

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subordinate women’s labour. The ability to resist full proletarianisation was dependent on female labour in childcare and agriculture. This placed an added burden on women, the primary producers. Some young women, however, defied patriarchal norms by leaving the homestead and starting a new life in the cities or in mission stations.

Both for young men and women, migrancy took place in a context of new opportunities in the cities and mines and of the undermining of the securities of the pre-colonial homestead economy. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, however, the impoverishment that would characterise rural Natal in the twentieth century was not yet in evidence. On the contrary, new markets and new techniques gave rise to a relatively prosperous peasantry in certain areas. A few years of wage labour could still be sufficient to establish oneself as a successful small-scale farmer. In fact, in the early decades of mass migration the per capita output of African agriculture increased.

The peasantry could seize the opportunities of the grain and produce markets in part because of labour migration. A few trips to the Rand enabled people to acquire a span of oxen or a plough and to invest in agriculture. Migrancy also helped homesteads to restock after the ravages of rinderpest in the 1890s and access to cash incomes allowed households to mitigate the

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6 Cherryl Walker, “Gender and the development of the migrant labour system, e. 1850-1930: An overview,” in Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, ed. Cherryl Walker (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), 179; Jeff Guy also stresses the importance of control over women’s productive and reproductive capacities, for example in “Women in Labour: the Birth of Colonial Natal” (paper presented at the History and African Studies Seminar at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 29 April 2009).


8 Colin Bundy, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry (London: Heinemann, 1979), 69-83, 174ff. Although there are doubts about the extent of this prosperity, there is no doubt that there were numerous successful African peasant cultivators.

unpredictability of agriculture. However, young men having independent earnings changed the practice of *ukulobola*, which is marriage through the payment of *ilobolo*. Young men could buy their own cattle and were no longer dependent on their fathers, who could often no longer provide *ilobolo* after the decimation of their herds. Benedict Carton points out how this independence fuelled generational and gendered conflicts in rural households.

Marriage increasingly became an individual affair with less leverage for the *umnumzane* (homestead head). New technologies for cultivation and individual access to resources in the form of wages led to smaller families that were less dependent on the wider kin. According to Cherryl Walker, one could even consider this a commercialisation of *ukulobola*, which became a payment one could work for and pay at once rather than a protracted set of obligations and duties between two families. These changes afforded more independence to young couples, but could also isolate women from kin-based support networks and put them in a more dependent position vis-à-vis their husbands. Moreover, as new opportunities for young men and women undermined the position of African patriarchs, colonial authorities grew concerned about the ‘flood’ of Africans to the cities and the loss of patriarchal discipline. They shored up patriarchy through the codification and enforcement of customary law, as they understood it, which ossified these traditions. As new opportunities opened up, an alliance of colonial and African patriarchs tried to close them off again.

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11 Carton, op. cit.
12 Beinart, “Labour Migrancy and Rural Production,” 86.
14 See: Carton, op. cit., 86.
While early migrations were characterised by both opportunities and crisis, the opportunities progressively disappeared. A combination of government interventions designed to increase labour supplies, stratification because of commercialisation, and a series of natural disasters turned the tide. Though it is impossible to put a firm date on such a gradual and cumulative process, it seems that by the first decade of the twentieth century labour migration no longer was a source of agency, but a result of impoverishment.  

African peasantries were no longer successfully competing with settlers, but struggling to survive.

The discovery of minerals in the interior spurred many of these interventions. Mining created a large new demand for African labour, the mobilisation of which became a priority for colonial politicians in the late nineteenth century. Throughout South Africa, colonial authorities implemented new legislative initiatives to ‘encourage’ Africans to take up wage labour. These measures, which often included taxation, were designed to break African self-sufficiency, increase needs, and enforce a ‘discipline of hunger’. A report from 1903 stated: “prospects must be measured according to their ability to exist without the necessity of labour.” Blanket dispossession, however, was not to be the norm in ‘native policies’. As much as the mobilisation of a labour supply was pivotal, colonial administrators and settlers would not accept a South Africa where Africans and whites could mix freely. Settler interests did not want wholesale migration to the cities. They wanted a cheap and subservient rural labour force kept under control by pass laws. This would reinforce the system of migration of supposedly single males who

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17 Beinart, Political Economy, 42.
18 Many of these men were married, but employers and authorities kept the myth alive that these were single men migrating to earn ilobolo. This myth relieved employers from paying a family wage. Cf.: Gerald
were paid ‘bachelor wages’, forcing women to stay in the Reserves. The unpaid labour of these women subsidised the reproduction of labour, thus cheapening African labour.\textsuperscript{19}

The granting of responsible government to white male settlers in 1893 facilitated such legislative changes in Natal. London no longer ruled the colony by mandate, but within certain limits through representatives of the European population. These new leaders were much more receptive to farmers’ and urban entrepreneurs’ need for cheap African labour.\textsuperscript{20} At the same time, new markets in the Rand and a new railway link transformed agriculture in the Natal Midlands and the coastal areas, which also increased the demand for labour. Moreover, shipping in Durban grew steadily, boosting labour requirements there as well.

However, African self-sufficiency was not only broken through political means. The last decade of the nineteenth century was one in which frequent droughts, plagues, and epidemics steadily undermined the homestead economy.\textsuperscript{21} Nevertheless, even natural disasters cannot be isolated from their political and economic context. Land dispossession and taxation had destroyed much of the ability of African societies to deal with adversity and disaster. Tax requirements were

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Harold Wolpe, “Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid,” \textit{Economy and Society} I (1972), 4: 425-456.
\item It is, however, important to note that not all whites wanted the same kind of labour force and policy. Shipping, manufacturing, plantation agriculture, settler agriculture, and coal mining did not need the same type of workers, but they all needed plentiful, obedient, and cheap workers. John Lambert and Robert Morrell, “Domination and subordination in Natal, 1890-1920,” in \textit{Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives}, ed. Robert Morrell (Durban: Indicator Press, 1996), 67.
\item Beinart, \textit{Political Economy}; David Webster, op. cit.; David Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock workers of Durban” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1979); Lambert, “Impoverishment of the Natal Peasantry.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
inflexible and the Reserve policy limited their mobility, which was an important mechanism to cope with environmental vagaries.  

**Durban at the turn of the century**

Having discussed why Africans sought wage labour in the city, though not necessarily in the numbers and at the wages that employers hoped for, this chapter turns to the urban world these workers experienced: Durban and its port. In the first decade of the twentieth century Durban entrenched its position as South Africa’s major port. By 1910, Durban handled almost forty percent of the country’s imports by volume and more than three-quarters of its exports. This made the city an important centre of employment and the ‘labour question’ was as much a burning topic here as it was in the other big labour centres. In fact, David Hemson notes that Durban often preceded developments in labour control in the rest of the country. Most African workers in Durban, by 1900 estimated at eighteen thousand, were active in one of four sectors: togt workers, domestic servants, rickshaw-pullers, and washermen. The first two groups were the most numerous ones and dock workers were the largest group of togt labourers.

**Togt** was the most contentious form of labour in Durban. The name *togt* is Dutch for journey or trip and points at the link between the rural and the urban. This form of casual labour

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22 Patrick Harries, writing about Southern Mozambique, mentions frequent migration as an important strategy to cope with the fragile ecology of the region. This, likely, was the case in Natal and Zululand as well. Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), 7-8.


24 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 22-23.


originated with Africans living on the outskirts of Durban walking to town in the morning to offer their services for the day, rather than engaging in monthly contract labour.\textsuperscript{27} Originally, \textit{tong} was thus not solely associated with dock work, as it would come to be in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{28} Several authors have written extensively about this type of labour in Durban and Natal, including Maynard Swanson, David Hemson, and Keletso Atkins.\textsuperscript{29} One of the main arguments in their work is that these workers understood this new labour market very well and that they, “incontestably equipped with the same intellectual resources as white people,” as Atkins argues, “were responding to the demands of the new capitalist economy in ways typical of wage earners elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{30} Conscious of the scarcity of labour in the city, they were acutely aware of their bargaining power and used it on a daily basis rather than committing themselves to long-term contracts. Consequently, \textit{tong} labour was comparatively well paid; one could earn as much with a few days of casual labour as with a month of contract labour.\textsuperscript{31} Daily labour was also very difficult to discipline, especially if the workers retained a certain amount of economic independence through continued access to land, as it can be withdrawn after a day without consequences.

\textit{Tong} workers often lived in the servant’s quarters of white households, where domestic servants let them stay without their employer’s permission. Employers tended to ignore this,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] By 1903, in a meeting between the Secretary of Native Affairs and the Durban Town Council, \textit{tong} labour was treated as if it only existed on the docks. PAR, SNA, vol. I/4/12, file 17/1903, “Notes of interview between the Town Council and the Secretary for Native Affairs on 8 April, 1903, on the question of housing native labourers working in the borough,” 8 April 1903.
\item[30] Atkins, op. cit., 143.
\item[31] Ibid., 79.
\end{footnotes}
fearing they could lose their domestic workers who insisted on this company. Novel forms of solidarity developed in the kitchens of white households. Workers exchanged information about employers and working conditions, and made price arrangements. These ‘kitchen associations’ served as early trade unions and kept in touch with other associations through ‘kitchen bards’, ambulant poets who kept people abreast of what was being discussed in other kitchens.

Both for this lack of discipline and control and for the high wages it was able to command, casual labour was under constant public scrutiny. However, it served a purpose for both employers and workers. The irregular labour needs of merchants and shippers coincided with the irregular cash needs of the African population and with working patterns linked to the agricultural calendar. Early togt labour could be a source of agency. Casual labourers recognised the advantages labour-shortages and irregular labour needs, and that togt allowed them to escape the punitive measure of the Master and Servants Act. Officials and commentators considered this independence the key of the town’s labour problems. Most of the witnesses from Natal to the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903-5 condemned togt

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32 Swanson, “Multiracial Durban,” 328. See also: Lambert and Morrell, op. cit., 80.
33 Atkins, op. cit., 74, 122ff.
34 Ibid., 79, 83, 92, 108.
35 The Masters and Servants Act was a nineteenth century law that regulated the relations between employers and labourers. It was particularly repressive and extended to employers almost complete control over the workers; strikes and non-cooperation were outlawed. Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 15, 49. Similar legislation was used in other British colonies as a response to labour scarcity following the abolition of slavery. See: Carolyn Brown and Marcel van der Linden, “Shifting Boundaries between Free and Unfree Labor: Introduction,” International Labor and Working-Class History 78 (2010): 6.
36 Apart from a labour problem, it was also considered a moral and social issue: “It [togo] is a class of labour which is under very little or loose control, a circumstance which is detrimental to morality and social order among a people to whom restraint in a form more powerful than public opinion or conscientious scruples is still necessary.” Colony of Natal, Report of the Native Affairs Commission, 1906-7, 30.
labour for driving up wages and discouraging stable employment. Casual labourers refusing to commit to long-term contracts were deemed lazy and idle.  

In their attempts to discipline and control this labour force, authorities came to interpret the labour problem as a police problem. They instituted a wide range of regulations to police the working lives of migrant labourers. The first togt registration scheme, introduced in 1874, established the principle that Africans were only welcome in town as labourers and thus made segregation integral to labour policy. The scheme introduced passes, fines, prison sentences, and banishment. These limitations to the freedom of workers undermined their bargaining power. The 1902 Togt Law extended the control over workers’ lives even further. African access to towns was further restricted and workers were given just five days to find a job. Bargaining over wages became illegal. The law compelled togt labourers to sleep in municipal compounds and re-introduced fixed daily wage rates. The 1902 legislation also introduced a range of new offences, resulting in eight thousand arrests each year out of an African urban population of twenty thousand. The overwhelming majority of arrests were made for offences against the labour and pass regulations. Clearly, labourers continued to resist these regulations and ignored them whenever possible.

However, an account based on legislation and official sources would distort reality. Effective control over the African population was limited and many Africans continued to carve

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37 PAR, SNA, vol. II/4/1, “Summary and Index of Evidence of Natal Witnesses given before the Native Affairs Commission, Section: Native Labour,” no date [1903-5].
38 La Hausse, “Cows of Nongoloza,” 82.
39 Swanson, “Multiracial Durban,” 310-316.
40 In 1925, the Economic and Wage Commission acknowledged this, but still considered these measures fair for an African population supposedly shielded from exploitation by their access to Reserve land. “Report of the Economic and Wage Commission (1925),” U.G. 14-26, 38-39.
41 The 1874 scheme already introduced fixed rates, but these were routinely ignored.
43 Ibid., 28; La Hausse, “Cows of Nongoloza,” 83.
out an independent existence in the city, even if they faced arrest in the process. These regulations were the object of struggle between employers, workers, and the state, which was particularly visible in the sphere of housing. Togt workers ignored legislation that compelled them to live in rickety and uncomfortable compounds and took up residence in shack settlements, backyard shacks, rented rooms, and servants’ quarters. Very few actually lived in the compounds.

Hemson identifies two reasons for forcing togt labourers into barracks. Firstly, having them live in one easily policed place facilitated the disciplining of the work force. Secondly, cheap and affordable housing lessened cash needs and reduced upward pressures on wages. However, many togt labourers already lived free of charge in servants’ quarters or in the streets, but white householders did not want them there. They also lived in the uncontrolled peri-urban shack settlements where Indians, Africans, and lower class whites slept, ate, and drank together.

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45 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 40.
Authorities considered these spaces ‘dens of vice’, but were mostly powerless to clear them.\textsuperscript{48}

This proximity of Africans combined with a lack of control gave rise to what Swanson called ‘the sanitation syndrome’: fears concerning the sanitary and medical dangers of racial mixing and living cheek by jowl.\textsuperscript{49} An outbreak of the bubonic plague in the dock area in 1902 fuelled these fears, leading to renewed calls for residential segregation.\textsuperscript{50} Nevertheless, white Durban did not speak with one voice and employers’ wishes for plentiful, cheap, and flexible labour could conflict with demands for residential segregation and control.\textsuperscript{51}

The completion in 1903 of new togt barracks at the Point gave the corporation a place where they could force workers to reside.\textsuperscript{52} However, labourers evaded the tight controls and squalid conditions of municipal housing, which they compared to jails.\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, these new barracks cost twice the budgeted amount and housed less than half the number of workers originally planned for, which was already significantly lower than the number of togt workers in the city.\textsuperscript{54} Even with the new law and compounds, authorities did not have the capacity to force African workers out of their informal dwellings.\textsuperscript{55} The Town Council’s refusal to require white ratepayers to pay for the policing of African workers reinforced this lack of capacity.


\textsuperscript{51} Swanson discusses these debates in more detail in “Multiracial Durban,” 367-369.

\textsuperscript{52} Lambert and Morrell, op. cit., 80.

\textsuperscript{53} “Accommodation for Natives,” \textit{Ilanga lase Natal}, 22 May 1903. Ilanga lase Natal was founded by John L. Dube and was the newspaper of Natal’s African, mission-educated Kholwa (Christian) elite.

\textsuperscript{54} Swanson, “Multiracial Durban,” 384-385.

\textsuperscript{55} La Hausse, “Drink,” 82.
and other fees paid by the workers had to cover the costs of ‘Native Administration’. By July 1904, only 350 out of some seven thousand togt workers chose to live in these wood-and-corrugated iron barracks, although their rent was included in their monthly registration fee. The failure to exert control over urban Africans gave rise to ‘moral panics’ centring on crime, drunkenness, prostitution, indecency, and other unwanted behaviour.

The emergence of amalaita gangs in the last decade of the nineteenth century especially concerned the city’s white populace. These gangs appeared in the context of a rapidly changing countryside: increasing rural impoverishment, the newfound independence of young men with access to wages, and the resulting loss of patriarchal control. Gangs of young African men, usually working in the suburbs as domestic servants, hung around in the streets, played their mouth organs, stole food from their employers’ kitchens, and pitched stick-fights against other gangs. According to Paul la Hausse, they often had the implicit support of the working poor. They also particularly targeted African police, which suggests a consciousness of the fact that they were part of the system of repression.

Officials and white Durbanites were not only concerned about petty thieving and violence, which mostly targeted other Africans, but also about the loss of parental control over African youth that this phenomenon symbolised. Moreover, they experienced the aggressive assertion of Zulu masculine identities through stick-fights as menacing. However, these fights

56 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 50.
57 Swanson, “Multiracial Durban,” 393.
59 Young men between fifteen and twenty-five, usually in their first job in the city, dominated domestic service. This work paid very poorly and turnover in these jobs was high. Older men relied on their experience in the labour market and respect for age to monopolise better paying jobs. Atkins, op. cit. 61; La Hausse, “Cows of Nongoloza,” 86.
60 La Hausse, “Cows of Nongoloza,” 84-85, 99.
61 Lambert and Morrell, op. cit., 82.
62 La Hausse, “Cows of Nongoloza,” 91, 98.
were not merely expressions of aggression, they were part of the socialisation of Zulu youth. La Hausse and others noted the continuities between these gangs and traditional rural youth organisations, both in form and activities. Both were built around a corporate sense of identity based on age-sets and the pitched battles against other gangs were similar to the rural umgangela fights and ngcweka stick-fighting. These gangs were an urban adaptation of rural socialisation.63

The Anglo-Boer War and its effects

What was developing in Black Natal in the early years of the twentieth century was a classic case of underdevelopment. Political and economic forces were combining to subordinate African society economically to the interests and needs of the dominant European and capitalist community.64

In this quote, John Lambert stresses the destructive effects of the economic and social changes put into motion by colonisation and more dramatically by the mineral revolution. These changes, however, also had contradictory outcomes. They led to land alienation, but preserved communal access to land, and they offered emancipating opportunities to youths and women while codifying patriarchy. New opportunities for African producers opened at the same time as these changes undermined the viability of African agriculture and pastoralism. However, even if some elites prospered the momentum ultimately turned against Africans.

The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) acted as a catalyst to accelerate proletarianisation throughout South Africa. The impoverishment caused by the pests and droughts of the last decade of the nineteenth century was exacerbated by the destructions of war. However, the war also

64 Lambert, “Impoverishment of the Natal Peasantry,” 303.
brought an expansion of wage labour for Africans, as the British army needed transport riders and dock workers to get their troops and weaponry to the battlefields. The troops also needed food, resulting in better agricultural prices. For many Africans, the war brought lucrative opportunities to sell their labour or produce. These high wages concerned British authorities. In post-war Transvaal, the Milner administration worked closely with the Chamber of Mines and the recently established Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA or Wenela) to increase the supply of cheap labour.\textsuperscript{65} In Natal, Governor McCallum called a conference with the purpose of finding ways to cut wages and rations, because “our Zulus were being demoralised by their drawing of military rations similar to those drawn by European troops.”\textsuperscript{66}

However, the destructions of war also brought hardship. Rising grain prices brought riches to the few, but deprivation to many. As such, the war entrenched rural differentiation.\textsuperscript{67} The economic boom lasted until 1903, causing labour shortages, high urban wages, and a flurry of labour conflicts. By 1904, the post-war depression hit.\textsuperscript{68} By now, the African peasantry had largely lost its ability to respond to economic fluctuations on its own terms; the balance of power had shifted. For many, wage labour was no longer an opportunity, but a necessity. People now spent a lifetime in wage labour, rather than a few years. This was illustrated by the fact that by 1904 there was a significant number of Africans over forty living and working in Durban.\textsuperscript{69}

When the increased demand for shipping subsided, the togt system nearly collapsed. In 1903 and 1904, there were on average more than 5,100 monthly registered togt workers in

\textsuperscript{67} Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 52.
\textsuperscript{68} La Hausse, “Cows of Nongoloza,” 83; Lambert, “Impoverishment of the Natal Peasantry,” 296.
\textsuperscript{69} Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 58.
Durban. In 1905, that number dropped to less than 2,000 and by 1909 to 1,035.\textsuperscript{70} Many of those who disappeared from the \textit{toge} labour pool did not leave the city or wage labour. Rather, they turned to less lucrative but more stable monthly contracts. The depression laid bare their dependence on wage labour, that is to say: their loss of economic agency. In 1904, there were 2.10 monthly labourers in Durban for every \textit{toge} worker, but workers who were unable to withdraw their labour increasingly accepted monthly contracts. By 1907, there were 11.26 labourers under monthly contracts for every casual worker.\textsuperscript{71} Being able, however, to offer and withdraw labour by the day remained attractive to some. In 1905, many still preferred not to work at all, rather than to accept the legal daily wage of 2s.\textsuperscript{72}

To make up the shortfall in tax income during the post-war depression, the colonial state turned towards its logical ‘beasts of burden’, the politically powerless Africans. It increased rents for squatters on Crown Lands in 1903 and introduced a Poll Tax two years later.\textsuperscript{73} Natal’s legislators acted on the assumption that Africans did not carry their fair share of the tax burden. Of course, this conveniently ignored different earning potentials and the fact that the bulk of government expenditures only benefited the settler population.\textsuperscript{74} They introduced a £1 Poll Tax to address this perceived inequality. This tax was payable by all adult males who did not pay Hut Tax, the \textit{de facto} tax on wives.\textsuperscript{75} The Poll Tax was thus a tax on unmarried men who often ended

\textsuperscript{71} Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 62.
\textsuperscript{73} Lambert, “Impoverishment of the Natal Peasantry,” 296.
\textsuperscript{74} Marks, \textit{Reluctant Rebellion}, 136-140.
\textsuperscript{75} The Hut Tax was paid by the \textit{umnumzane} and calculated on basis of the number of huts in a homestead. A man became an \textit{umnumzane} when he married and for each wife there would be one hut in the homestead. Cf. Guy, “Women in Labour”; Edgar H. Brookes and Nathan Hurwitz, \textit{The Native Reserves of Natal}, Natal Regional Survey, Volume 7 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1957), 74.
up paying twice, as the homestead heads generally paid the Hut Tax with the wages their unmarried sons handed over.

The first collection of this tax caused an uprising in the uThukela basin. In the context of a rural society that was already under stress, young men refused to pay. This uprising is known as the Bhambatha rebellion, after the chief at its centre, or the *impi yamakhanda* (the ‘war of the heads’), after the poll or ‘head’ tax. For Shula Marks, this ‘reluctant rebellion’ was a last uncoordinated and unpremeditated armed resistance to proletarianisation provoked largely by the overreaction of officials and settlers to the refusal to pay. She argues that this event was mostly free of revolutionary content. It was a reaction to hardship and repression, rather than a revolution against colonialism.76 Hemson, however, linked this unrest to an emergent political consciousness among the African population of Natal. For him, this was not the last episode of resistance to proletarianisation, but the first evidence of a proletarian political consciousness.77 Indeed, the impoverished peasantry and urban workers deserting their jobs to fight the oppressive colonial state formed the backbone of the resistance. A mass exodus of migrant workers from Durban joined the rebels, including more than one thousand dock workers.78 More recently, Carton has discussed this uprising in the context of gendered and generational conflicts within a rural society under stress. He highlights that this tax specifically hit young men and that they were the ones rebelling against both complacent elders and the colonial state.79

The ‘pacification’ of the uThukela basin was remorseless. The settler population enforced its authority through terror. Three to four thousand Africans were killed and some seven thousand

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77 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 123.
79 Carton, op. cit.
arrested. The brutal repression of the uprising caused further unrest in the Maphumulo district when the Natal Field Forces burned people’s crops and homesteads and confiscated their cattle. Jeff Guy stresses the extreme violence used to assert “colonial authority by violent means” and the way the ensuing trials depicted the uprising as an outbreak of savagery by stressing the use of ritual and witchcraft. More than thirty thousand people lost their homes and the loss of killed or imprisoned breadwinners aggravated the hardship. Whether or not the Poll Tax was meant to bring about proletarianisation, the ensuing struggles certainly contributed to it.

Increased taxation was not the only problem Africans faced. White settler agriculture in Natal expanded significantly during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Favourable prices for agricultural commodities on the world markets helped, but this expansion was largely the result of extensive state support. Rural constituencies were overrepresented under responsible government, resulting in a bias towards settler interests. The counterpart of this support for settler farmers was the withholding of similar assistance for non-white farmers. Moreover, in the beginning of the twentieth century, Zululand too was opened up to white settlers. Zululand remained a separate colony without white settlement until the 1890s, but after London granted Natal responsible government, it also allowed for the annexation of Zululand in 1897. In 1902, the *Joint Imperial-Colonial Zululand Lands Delimitation Commission* started the alienation of land for white agriculture.

82 Lambert and Morrell, op. cit., 67.  
Africans north of the uThukela River, the border between Natal and Zululand, were now confined to Reserves, as they had been in Natal since the mid-nineteenth century. These Reserves were overpopulated and discontinuous, which limited both the mobility of Africans and grazing opportunities for their cattle. Moreover, Reserves were often located in areas unsuitable for agriculture and in malarial valleys.85 The outlay of transport infrastructure also favoured white settlers over the African peasantry and served white farming areas well, while starving African areas of affordable and convenient transport links. William Miller MacMillan, a famous liberal historian, noted that the “position [of African Reserves] in truth may be roughly gauged by a glance at a railway map, which will show what areas the railways avoid [...].”86

Moreover, the commercialisation of agriculture in the twentieth century also favoured better-capitalised farmers with access to credit, among whom there were very few Africans. Along with white commercial farmers came white storekeepers, many of whom had a de facto monopoly in their area.87 Scarce resources, limited mobility, and cash needs created by taxation and commercialisation put Africans in a dependent relationship with these storekeepers, who could take advantage of Africans’ short-term cash needs after the harvest.88 Peasants often sold their grain immediately after the harvest at depressed prices only to buy it back later at much higher prices, which many white commentators believed to be evidence of African fecklessness,

87 In the Cape Colony this monopoly was guaranteed through the so-called five mile law. However, even in other parts of Southern Africa the competition between rural stores was very limited. MacKinnon, “Land, Labour and Cattle,” 62; E.S. Haines, “The Transkei Trader,” South African Journal of Economics 1 (1933), 2: 201-216.
improvidence, and irrationality. However, they had to sell their grain as soon as they harvested it to pay their taxes, which were due shortly after the harvest season, and to pay off credit at punitive interests rates, another result of the traders’ quasi-monopolies.

The combined effect of legislative action and commercialisation on rural African societies has become an important theme in South African studies ever since the publication of Colin Bundy’s classic work, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*. This book charts the rise of a relatively prosperous African peasantry, which was responsive to the opportunities that commercialisation created, and the subsequent underdevelopment of this peasantry because of legislation, stratification, and overpopulation. This influential book was subject to some major critiques, yet the discursive framework of a rise and fall of an African peasantry remains persuasive.

Nevertheless, while African societies were being undermined, both socially and economically, they were also being preserved. Colonial officials did not want cities with large proletarian populations and they did not want the loss of discipline that the undermining of African patriarchies would bring. The disintegration of rural African societies would cause social problem they would rather not encounter. This form of preservationism coloured the thinking of British officials. There was a belief that African societies were pre-modern idylls that could be

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89 Bundy, “The Transkei Peasantry,” 216.
91 Bundy, *Rise and Fall*.
92 One of the most relevant criticisms focuses on his emphasis on ‘taking advantage’ of the opportunities of the market, which suggests that ‘rational’ market behaviour is a universal human characteristic. Related to this is the focus on relations of exchange, while neglecting the relations of production. Bundy’s intellectual debt to underdevelopment theory also resulted in presenting the underdevelopment of this peasantry as inevitable. The author acknowledges these problems in the preface to the second edition.
93 Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton note that this was not only the case in South Africa, but also in later colonial policies in British Africa. Officials considered ‘development’ to be a matter of dealing with the
preserved in Reserves. At a more practical level, the use and preservation of African social and political structures provided a convenient solution to a pressing problem of control in the context of limited resources.94 White commentators explained that this was in the best interest of Africans: they knew what was best for Africans and it was not proletarianisation and urbanisation:95

Back to the land is the inarticulate cry of the Abantu, and no relief of the situation is likely to be brought about by those who will accept entirely new conditions of life which would connote abandonment of all they value. Nor is it well it should be so. If our aim is to be the conservation of what is best in this people, if they have any ethnic value as a race unit, then such a fundamental disintegration of what is, so intimately and vitally interwoven in their constitution would be fatal. [...] Torn from the present controls and sanctions and plunged into the whirlpool of city and industrial life, without even the occasional return to sweeter and healthier conditions, makes one who knows them shudder for their future.

These preservationist policies in Natal went back to Sir Theophilus Shepstone, who opted to ‘reserve’ land for the African population to protect them from further alienation of land and to preserve the existing political and social structures, in defiance of the wishes of the settler ‘surplus population’ created by changes in agriculture and of keeping people on the land through ‘agricultural development’. Cowen and Shenton, “The Origin and Course of Fabian Colonialism in Africa,” Journal of Historical Sociology IV (1991), 2: 143-174; Doctrines of Development (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), especially pp. 330-331.

94 The classic expression of this ideology of indirect rule that permeated the British Empire was Lord Lugard’s The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1922). Indirect rule has famously been discussed by Mahmood Mamdani in his Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Anne Phillips, however, points out that the evolution of indirect rule in West Africa was more the result of a ‘makeshift settlement’ than a coherent ideology or blueprint for colonial rule, The Enigma of Colonialism: British Policy in West Africa (London: James Currey, 1989). See also: Walker, op. cit., 194; Carolyn Hamilton, Terrific Majesty: the power of Shaka Zulu and the limits of historical intervention (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 93.

95 Maurice S. Evans, Black and White in South East Africa: A Study in Sociology (London: Longmans, 1911), 149-150.
population. He wanted to avoid anarchy at the lowest possible cost to the British exchequer.96 This also explains why communal tenure, as the coloniser understood it, was preserved in Reserves in much of South Africa. This prevented the creation of a large proletariat, but also complicated the emergence of African commercial-scale farming.97 These ideas of protecting Africans from the demoralising influences of the city were an important justification for segregation and the forcible perpetuation of labour migrancy.

The decline of the African peasantry was not a foregone conclusion. For a long time, settler farmers struggled to compete with small-scale African farmers. Landowners found different solutions to make their properties pay. Some became absentee landlords and rented out their land to Africans who could not or did not wish to live in the Reserves. Others entered in sharecropping relationships, leaving some of their land to African tenants in return for part (typically half) of the tenants’ crops.98 Better-capitalised settlers had labour tenants of hired wage labour. Labour tenants did not pay a fixed rent in cash or kind, or a portion of their produce. They rather paid with the labour of their adolescent sons and daughters, or with their own labour.99 African farmers preferred rent tenancy or sharecropping, as these afforded the most freedom and gave them direct access to the proceeds of their labour, as opposed to labour tenancy where the produce went to the white farmer. Moreover, landlords usually claimed this labour, normally six months, at the same time that it was needed on the tenant’s plot.

Legislators and settlers generally regarded labour tenancy to be the more efficient use of land. It did not rely on the supposedly wasteful and inefficient African methods of farming, but on African labour supervised by whites. Opportunities for renting or sharecropping disappeared as white farmers brought more land directly under their own production. Settlers forced their tenants to either accept labour tenancy or leave.\textsuperscript{100} The 1913 Natives Land Act outlawed rent tenancy and sharecropping. This seminal act in the legislative framework of segregation was a tool to get rid of unwanted tenants and to force unwilling tenants into labour tenancy agreements. However, it did not end these forms of tenancy with the stroke of a pen. Many settler farmers did not have the means or the intention to farm their own land and preferred not to expel sharecroppers. Sharecropping died a slow death and was still practiced in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{101} However, the law did cause significant distress for many: Sol T. Plaatje described the exodus of tenants from white farms in the Free State.\textsuperscript{102} This act caused a steady drift of tenants to the Reserves and thus exacerbated the problem of overcrowding, further straining subsistence agriculture.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{100} Some saw in the shift from rent and sharecropping to labour tenancy the defining moment in the transition to capitalism in South African agriculture, with the relation of appropriation being the crucial difference. In labour tenancy the landlord appropriates the labour of the workers directly and thus owns the products of that labour time, in the two other forms of tenancy the landlord appropriates a rent, leaving ownership of the product of their labour with the direct producers. “This is a primary distinction, in the form of surplus extraction, between the feudal mode of production (FMP) and the CMP [capitalist mode of production]. In the former the products of production do not automatically, by way of the property relation, belong to the non-worker. The non-owner (landlord) does not ‘own’ the labour-power of the tenant. Hence he does not automatically ‘own’ the products of that labour time.” Mike L. Morris, “The Development of Capitalism in South African Agriculture: Class Struggle in the Countryside,” \textit{Economy and Society} \textbf{V} (1976), 3: 299.


\textsuperscript{102} Solomon Tshekhi Plaatje, \textit{Native Life in South Africa: before and since the European War and the Boer Rebellion} (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982), especially chapter four.

\textsuperscript{103} Lambert and Morrell, op. cit., 75.
The first decades of the twentieth century brought increasing stress for African rural households, even before the Land Act, and growing numbers came to try their luck in the cities. The greater African urban presence stirred fears among the white population, which was always looking for new ways to exert control over urban Africans. In Durban, this resulted in the ‘Durban System’, copied by municipalities throughout Southern Africa. The municipality monopolised the brewing of low-alcohol sorghum beer and outlawed the consumption of other alcoholic drinks by Africans. The proceeds of this monopoly paid for the machinery of control and oppression: the police force, the compounds, and later the Municipal Native Affairs Department (MNAD). Moreover, authorities could control where and when Africans could drink, thus limiting indiscipline in the workplace.\textsuperscript{104} The establishment of the Durban System was also an offensive against female petty traders and brewers, whose incomes made working class communities outside the controls of the municipal barracks more viable.\textsuperscript{105}

**Dock work in Durban**

The changes in municipal ‘native administration’ also affected the lives of dock workers. In fact, togt labourers, who were mostly dockers, were a key concern for Durban’s authorities. They were an important and very visible group of labourers in Durban and while they may not have been the biggest group of workers, they were crucial in a city whose fortunes were so closely connected to


\textsuperscript{105} “The influx of African women, although posed in terms of prostitution, venereal disease, and public morality, threatened the drive to force all African workers into barracks by posing the alternative of working class households in the towns.” Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” p. 125.
shipping. Especially the independence that these workers displayed in refusing to move into the compounds or to work ‘steadily’ earned them the wrath of the authorities.

A handful of companies employed these labourers as shore workers and stevedores. In 1916, however, the government handed over all shore work to the S.A.R. & H. and left only stevedoring to private companies. In his evidence to the 1906-7 Natal Native Affairs Commission, a landing and shipping agent put the average wage for stevedores at the Point at £2 per month with rations; togt stevedores would get 2s. 6d. per day without food. The togt inspector of Durban put the average daily wage for stevedores at 3s., with extras for night work or work outside the bay. Hemson puts daily wages in 1902 at 3s. 6d. and at 4s. in the preceding decade. The Native Affairs Commission took place during the post-war depression and these lower figures probably reflected the resulting pressure on wages.

Regardless of who their employer was or how much they were paid, their work was backbreaking and dangerous. Accidents happened frequently and mechanisation at the turn of the century was limited to cranes. All cargo had to be loaded and unloaded by hand. Subsequent technological introductions did not substantially change the nature of this work until containerisation eliminated most heavy manual labour in the 1970s. Thus, when in the mid-1920s the port handled seven thousand tons of cargo per day, this was all lifted by hand by the two to three thousand dock workers in Durban, in summer often in temperatures up to 50°C in the

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106 There were 5,100 dock workers in Durban in 1904, compared to three thousand workers in Natal’s coal mines. Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 55.
hold.\textsuperscript{110} Even coaling was still done by hand at the turn of the century. In thirty-four hours of continuous labour, workers carried as much as seven hundred tons of coal on board of the ‘Harlech Castle’ in 1903.\textsuperscript{111}

By the middle of the twentieth century, isiZulu-speaking workers had almost completely monopolised the dock sector.\textsuperscript{112} The situation was less clear-cut in the beginning of the century. We know that workers from Southern Mozambique had moved into many of Durban’s better-paid positions, including stevedoring, in the 1880s and the early 1890s. However, by the second half of the 1890s, the influx of amatonga labour came to a halt.\textsuperscript{113} There is also evidence that Durban’s small so-called Zanzibari community was involved in dock work in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{114}

By the 1920s, as casual labour slowly disappeared in other sectors, togt and dock labour had become synonymous. In his 1929 report, Justice De Waal believed that togt labourers worked exclusively on the docks. He imagined the word ‘togt’ to be a corruption of ‘dock’, although the

\textsuperscript{111} KCAL, Nolan-Wackernow-Ward papers, KCM 1883, “Minutes of a meeting, with representatives of shipping companies, held in the engineer's office, harbour works, Point,” 28 October 1903.
\textsuperscript{114} “Lazy Zanzibaris,” \textit{Natal Mercury}, 31 May 1904, 10. The Zanzibari community of Durban consisted of freed slaves, originating from the area South of Mozambique Island, and their descendants. Some 500 freed slaves were imported for plantation labour from Zanzibar, under conditions of indenture, similar to those of Indian workers. This happened between 1873 and 1880, and partly coincided with the interruption of the Indian indenture program between 1866 and 1874. They maintained their Muslim and Swahili identities and were classified by the South African state as ‘Asiatics’. See: S. v. Sicard, “The ‘Zanzibaris’ in Durban, South Africa,” \textit{Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs} III (1981), 1: 128-137.
The range of regulations to limit the agency and freedom of casual labour thus increasingly targeted dock workers specifically. By insisting on casual labour, dock workers used their strong bargaining position to claim above-average wages. Even if employers wanted to cooperate to curb wages, they were in competition for labour and drove up wage-rates and working conditions as a result. On the other hand, while selling labour by the day maximised workers’ bargaining power, employers also maintained a labour pool in excess of their usual labour needs by rotating hiring. Many workers were hired just frequently enough to stay in dock employment and a permanent surplus could thus be retained, which created a downward pressure on wages. In Cape Town, employers equally strived for a labour pool in excess of their needs as a deterrent against strikes.

The labour market in South Africa was highly coercive, as both white employees and capitalists used their access to the political centres of power to manipulate the market in their favour. A language of order, control, and segregation justified the resulting interventions. Yet, it has been noted that legislation did not translate into reality that easily. Durban’s dock workers did not just accept unequal labour relations, even if they did not openly challenge the racial hierarchy. Within the oppressive political framework of segregation, they did engage in several forms of action to improve their conditions. While the success of these actions was often limited, they were not completely ineffective. One of the advantages of togt was that it allowed for quick

115 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/1146, file 323, part I, Report by Justice De Waal, 13 September 1929. At that time, however, there were still a comparatively small number of casual workers employed in commercial firms in Durban. KCAL, A.W.G. Champion papers, KCM 99/6/25/8, Prof. J. Argyle, “Labour Pool,” 118.
116 Vivian Bickford-Smith makes this argument in the context of dock labour in Cape Town, but it seems appropriate in Durban as well, see: “Black labour at the docks at the beginning of the twentieth century,” Studies in the History of Cape Town 2 (1980): 90, 114.
118 Bickford-Smith, “Black labour at the docks,” 76, 98.
turnover, which increased the competition for labour.\textsuperscript{119} Leaving a job could be a reaction to poor working conditions and low pay, but for monthly workers this agency was limited through passes requiring the signature of the previous employer to get a new job.\textsuperscript{120}

Formal action took the form of strikes and work stoppages. Durban’s dockers realised the potential of collective action at least as early as 1879, when conditions were favourable during the Anglo-Zulu War. In the following three decades, they walked off the job several more times. The authorities usually reacted with repression. Many commentators, even middle class Africans, did not believe that Africans were capable of such actions and routinely blamed white strikers for setting a bad example, denying Africans this initiative.\textsuperscript{121} Reserving judgement on whether these actions were proof of a working class consciousness, one can note that there was at least a job consciousness. Stevedores realised the value of their acquired skills and refused to do the unskilled work of regular ‘jobbers’, such as bunkering coal and carrying timber.\textsuperscript{122}

**Conclusion**

The first decades of the twentieth century were a time of huge changes for the African population of Natal. IsiZulu-speaking workers in Durban at this time were often the first generation to be dependent on urban employment for more than a few years. A combination of droughts, epidemics, war, commercialisation, and racial legislation made rural self-sufficiency increasingly

\textsuperscript{119} However, later in the century job loyalty among dock workers proved to be relatively strong. There are no reliable estimates for the early decades of the century.

\textsuperscript{120} KCAL, Marwick papers, KCM 3073, untitled document, 11.


\textsuperscript{122} Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 70, 725.
impossible. This account of dock labour in Durban should be read in this socio-economic and political context. This chapter had as main purpose to provide this context: it discussed the origins of migrant labour and explained the urban labour market and urban politics at the turn of the century. The next chapter takes these issues beyond the 1910s and discusses the setting of the harbour and the rural world of the labourers who worked there.
Chapter 3: The Port of Durban and its hinterland, 1910s to 1950s

This chapter takes up many of the themes of the previous chapter and takes them beyond the 1910s. It has two main goals. Firstly, it sketches the evolution of shipping and dock labour in the Port of Durban. Secondly, it establishes that urban labour cannot be considered in isolation from the rural livelihoods of these workers, in which they were still heavily invested. In arguing this, the second part of this chapter also discusses the state of the rural Reserve economies in Natal and Zululand and continues to engage with an extensive literature on the origins of migrant labour.

The port of Durban

Durban is one of the busiest ports in the Southern Hemisphere and its harbour is at the centre of economic life. A sand-bar across the entrance of the bay, however, made it dangerous and difficult to enter the port for most of the nineteenth century. Earlier histories of the harbour focused extensively on overcoming this bar. A combination of dredging and building breakwaters accomplished this feat in 1904.\(^1\) This allowed the harbour infrastructure to catch up with the great increase in shipping since the completion of the railway-link with the gold fields in the mid-1890s. By 1904, total shipping had reached 4.26 million tons, up from 1.57 million tons in 1895.\(^2\) However, this was the last year of the post-war boom and by 1905 the depression set in. Only in 1924 did the harbour cross the four million mark again and by 1928 shipping reached five million tons. By 1932, once again, the depression affected shipping. The Second World War brought


\(^2\) Colony of Natal, Census of the Colony of Natal, April 1904 (Pietermaritzburg: Government Printers, 1905), 911.
military activity, but little commercial growth. The mid-1950s brought a new phase of rapid expansion, with tonnage reaching 9.24 tons by 1960, up from only 5.72 tons in 1954.³

Durban was also an important coaling stop for ships steaming around the Cape.⁴ The existence of a coal mining industry in the colony, which was itself heavily dependent on the bunkering-trade, facilitated this development.⁵ Bunkering was carried out exclusively by hand up until 1907. Gangs of ten to fifteen African labourers would carry heavy baskets of coal onto the ship.⁶ This was extremely demanding and low-paying work and was significantly less-skilled than stevedoring. Bunkering one thousand tons of coal could easily take twenty-four hours of continuous work.⁷ By 1910, mechanical coaling appliances were installed on the Bluff.⁸ At the Point, smaller amounts continued to be bunkered by hand for a long time. By the 1950s, however, oil had largely replaced coal.⁹ Between 1908 and the late-1970s, Durban also had a sizeable whaling industry. In the 1910s this sector flourished, but from then on its fortunes were mixed and sources about this industry are very scarce.¹⁰

³ Shipping statistics are provided in appendix.
⁴ Several booklets promoting Durban as a bunkering port were printed; these can be found in KCAL: Natal Navigation Collieries & Estate Co., Limited, Port Natal as Coaling Station and Shipping Port (Durban: W.M. Cotts & Co., 1905); Port Natal: The Coaling Station (Durban: Glencoe (Natal) Collieries, 1907); The Durban Navigation Collieries Ltd., Dannhauser, Natal, South Africa (1925).
⁵ Ruth Edgecombe and Bill Guest, “An Introduction to the Pre-Union Natal Coal Industry,” in Enterprise and Exploitation, ed. Guest and Sellers, 308-351.
⁷ Port Natal: The Coaling Station, 3, 30.
⁸ KCAL, Nolan-Wackernow-Ward papers, KCM 1883, “Minutes of a meeting, with representatives of shipping companies, held in the engineer’s office, harbour works, Point,” 28 October 1903.
⁹ Horwood, The Port of Durban, 143.
¹⁰ There is one book-chapter about this industry by Cornelis de Jong. However, it is entirely written from a management perspective. The only line dealing with labour ensures us that “[t]he personnel – black, brown and white – were well paid and generally satisfied.” De Jong, “A History of Whaling from Durban,” in Receded Tides of Empire: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Natal and Zululand since 1910, ed. Guest and Sellers (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994), 113-135. One of the rare other references to this industry showed that the May 1949 dock strike spread to the whaling workers as well. “Native Stevedores’ Strike Broken In Durban,” Natal Witness, 4 May 1949, 1.
The strong growth in this period led to several phases of harbour expansion. The most important development of the early twentieth century was the development of Maydon Wharf. This area had more flat and open land and could thus accommodate more warehouses and bulk storage facilities. The availability of flat land was also instrumental in the development of the area as an industrial zone.\textsuperscript{11} Maydon Wharf received its first ships in 1906. In having private terminals, it was also an exception to the general rule that wharfside infrastructure was managed by the S.A.R. & H.\textsuperscript{12} Considerable expansion took place on the Bluff and the adjacent Island View area as well. The Bluff was already the principal bunkering and coal export terminal and Island View started being developed in the 1940s to service the growing petroleum industry.\textsuperscript{13} The Point remained the centre of gravity for general cargo activities until the 1970s. The handling of general cargo was the most important, the most stevedoring labour-intensive, and the most skilled sector in the harbour.

Despite rapid growth, labour needs remained unpredictable, as a ‘big Native labour interest’ stressed in his evidence to the Native Economic Commission (NEC) of 1930-2.\textsuperscript{14} Despite dissatisfaction about \textit{togi}, many officials and stevedoring employers defended casual labour. It offered flexibility in a context of fluctuating labour needs.\textsuperscript{15} Employers also argued that African

\textsuperscript{12} Trevor Jones, \textit{The Port of Durban and the Durban Metropolitan Economy} (Durban: Economic Research Unit, University of Natal, 1997), 5.
\textsuperscript{14} University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1438, Native Economic Commission, Minutes of Evidence & Memoranda, Box 6, 6505.
\textsuperscript{15} E.g.: SAB, MVE, vol. 1200, file 538/159/1, “Report of Committee of Investigation appointed to enquire into Togt Labour Strikes at the Harbour at Durban,” 7 October 1942, 16.
labourers preferred togt and would not accept weekly or monthly contracts. While it was convenient for employers to offload the insecurities of shipping onto the labourers, they were not necessarily lying. If shipping was good, one could make much more money as a casual labourer. The previous chapter discussed the freedoms and advantages of casual labour. Indeed, several interviewees had been offered permanent employment, but refused it.

Since casual labourers were hired for the day only, they had to present for hiring each morning. The lack of long-term contracts and the nature of their workplace, which was difficult to supervise, created a double problem for the employers: getting reliable access to labour and disciplining it. Around the world, shippers have used intermediaries to negotiate this problem. The intermediaries hired gangs from the workers who presented themselves that morning and supervised them. Companies not only bought labour through these gang leaders, but also its administration. These gang leaders were quintessentially ambiguous figures: at the same time labour contractor, supervisor, and labourer. Workers needed them to get a job and management needed them to get labour and to discipline and supervise.

In Durban, this system of intermediaries also solved some of the linguistic problems of a workplace where management and workers did not speak the same language and took over elements from traditional Zulu political hierarchies. Izinduna, as they were known, got their

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17 In a meeting between the Department of Labour and Stevedoring Companies it was explained that casual stevedores at Storm & Co. could earn up to £7 per month, while permanent labourers only got £2 18s. 4d. plus housing and food. SAB, ARB, vol. 174, file COM 1/9/1, “Meeting with the Durban Stevedores,” 20 November 1942.
instructions from white superiors, supervised the labourers, and were part of the work gang themselves. Supposedly, they were an urban-industrial extension of the rural izinduna, deputies of the chiefs in direct control of land allocation.\(^{20}\) However, the relationship between workers and izinduna was a new one, created in the realm of urban wage labour, rather than a Zulu tradition. The partly imagined authoritarianism of Zulu political structures, stripped of its nuances, facilitated the use of African foremen in the interest of discipline and access to labour. That is not to say that the labourers were not pleased to have other Africans as direct supervisors or did not play their part in creating this system of supervision. For African workers, it was often easier to create relationships of mutual dependence and interest with other Africans and claims to tradition and common ancestry could give them advantages like preferential hiring, protection, access to pilferage opportunities, etc.\(^{21}\)

The induna gave the worker access to a job for the day and the worker helped to assure that the gang would reach its quota. A relationship of patronage, favouritism, bribery, and victimisation could thus develop between workers and their immediate supervisors. The role of izinduna was not strictly defined, apart from ‘getting the job done’.\(^{22}\) These intermediaries had to control and discipline the workers to retain their officially sanctioned power, but to hold on to their informal power over the workers, they had to represent their grievances and protect them from excessive exploitation. This was necessary to get the job done.\(^{23}\) However, the relation

between *izinduna* and workers was certainly not without conflict. 24 An *induna* could sometimes be seen as a mere ‘boss boy’, a creation of the employer.

Stevedoring companies were not the only ones employing casual labour. Despite official reservations, the state-run S.A.R. & H. employed about half of all *togt* workers at the Point. The Railways established first claim on the labour of these workers by housing them. Several stevedoring employers had their own *togt* barracks as well, which created some stability in the work patterns of many casual workers. Through free housing, employers could exert some power over a group of workers that was notoriously difficult to control: 25

To *togt* and casual employees employed in the industry are housed in the compounds provided by each of the Stevedoring Companies, with the exception of Jack Storm (Pty) Ltd., and these employees as a condition precedent to their being housed by the respective Companies, engage themselves to offer their services first to the Company housing them, but should their service not be required on any day by that Company, they are free to engage in employment for the day with any other Stevedoring Company. In addition, if the number of *togt* or casual employees offering themselves for work to the Companies, is insufficient, the labour force is supplemented from the Municipal Barracks, situated at Bell Street in the Point area.

In practice, a worker would usually get a job with his regular employer, yet he had no job security. Higher daily wages compensated for this insecurity. On days that his regular employer had no work for him, he could offer his services to other stevedoring companies. Some examples

24 One of the causes of the 1959 strikes was a larger wage increase for *izinduna* than for regular labourers. Dubbeld, op. cit., 63.
of earnings by *togt* stevedores at African Associated Agency and Stevedoring can illustrate this process. These earnings are from June 1954:26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worker</th>
<th>Days Worked</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>10s. 3d.</td>
<td>£10 5s. 0d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Associated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 for another employers</td>
<td>at the same rate</td>
<td>£3 1s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One Sunday</td>
<td>15s.</td>
<td>15s. 0d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eight nights</td>
<td>between 5 pm and 9 pm</td>
<td>at 4s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total of</td>
<td></td>
<td>£15 17s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>10s. 3d.</td>
<td>£7 3s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Associated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 for another employers</td>
<td>at the same rate</td>
<td>£6 3s. 0d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Two Sundays</td>
<td>15s.</td>
<td>£1 10s. 0d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Six nights</td>
<td>between 5 pm and 9 pm</td>
<td>at 4s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total of</td>
<td></td>
<td>£16 3s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A68</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>10s. 3d.</td>
<td>£4 2s. 0d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Associated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18 for another employers</td>
<td>at the same rate</td>
<td>£9 4s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One Sunday</td>
<td>15s.</td>
<td>15s. 0d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Four nights</td>
<td>between 5 pm and 9 pm</td>
<td>at 4s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total of</td>
<td></td>
<td>£14 19s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For these workers, *togt* had become a fulltime occupation without the security of a fulltime job, but with higher wages. Their free accommodation was dependent on them offering their labour every day, a power employers would exploit several times in the 1950s to put pressure on strikers.27 Some companies also charged casual workers a refundable registration fee to cement their loyalty.28

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26 SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part I, undated and untitled document. Some more information about currency, wages, and cost of living is given in appendix.
As mentioned in the earlier quote, there were also *togt* workers who did not live in a company compound. Many of those lived in the Bell Street Municipal Barracks and other places in town. The first half of the twentieth century was characterised by a long struggle to force workers into compounds. In 1902, only seven hundred out of 4,800 registered *togt* workers lived in barracks or compounds.\(^{29}\) Others lived in spaces where the white Town Council did not want them, such as Bamboo Square, an early interracial squatter settlement in the Point area which was cleared after the 1902 plague outbreak.\(^{30}\) However, new informal settlements sprung up at this site and vagrants congregated there. In 1937-9, authorities embarked on a new slum clearance campaign. The survey of the settlement that accompanied the forcible expulsion confirmed that several *togt* and other dock workers lived there. Interestingly, this survey also contains some of the few references to Indian casual workers. They were painters and chippers, mainly employed on the two days per week that the mailboat was in the port.\(^{31}\)

Many others lived in the kitchens and servants’ quarters of white households, a practice deplored by officials.\(^{32}\) As they were forced out of these kitchens, some rented rooms or shared accommodation with friends or relatives in one of the official townships on the outskirts of the

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1954, 3. The latter article mentions that this strategy of expelling strikers from the compounds was also used a year earlier.


32 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/1/1/25, Town Council Minutes, “On Inspector of Nuisances reporting re overcrowding of native servants' quarters on the premises of householders, by reasons of *togt* natives using same,” 25 September 1901; Swanson, op. cit., 336. This practiced continued into the 1950s. Sicelo Mbokazi for example lived in with his mother, who was a domestic servant at a white household at the Bluff, interview in Nhakazi, 16 July 2009.
city. These townships were built to deal with the pace of urbanisation\textsuperscript{33} from the 1930s onwards.\textsuperscript{34} The disadvantage of living so far out of town was of course that it added long travel times to already long working days and as casual workers they risked making the long trip without getting hired. In this case, they would hang around the Point in the hope that some jobs would become available during the day.\textsuperscript{35} Others slept under the verandas of sheds or in parks. This accommodation was free, but not very comfortable.\textsuperscript{36} There was only the ground to sleep on and while the verandas or trees would offer some protection against light rain, they would not against heavy summer rainstorms. On cold winter nights there was little protection against cold winds and there were no sanitary provisions, except for public lavatories where they ran the risk of being chased away or arrested by police who considered them vagrants and delinquents.\textsuperscript{37} To protect themselves against robbers and police, veranda-dwellers kept each other company; they cooked together on a small paraffin stove and smoked dagga. These connections often formed the basis for the networks through

\textsuperscript{33} Between 1921 and 1951 the urban population in Natal rose from 12% of the population to 32%. Especially the urban flux among non-Europeans was remarkable. The rate of urbanisation of Indians in Natal grew from 21% to 74%, for Africans from 5% to 16%. Paul Maylam, “The Changing Political Economy of the Region, 1920-1950,” in \textit{Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives}, ed. Robert Morrell (Durban: Indicator Press, 1996), 102.

\textsuperscript{34} Some of the informants for this research lived in the townships: interviews with Godidi Msomi, uMkomaas, 21 May 2009; Mdu Jama, Izingolweni, 30 May 2009; Mtukatshelwa Phewa.

\textsuperscript{35} Hiring for most companies took place around 6.30 am: SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part I, “Questionnaires to Stevedoring Employers,” [1956].


\textsuperscript{37} In Town Council discussions on vagrancy the discourse often seamlessly slipped into discussing delinquency as well. DAR, 3/DBN, 1/1/1/54, Town Council Minutes, 22 October 1934. Similarly, file 19K in the correspondence files of the Durban Corporation, titled ‘Vagrancy in the City’, contains more files on juvenile delinquency than on vagrancy. DAR, 3/DBN, 4/1/2/99 and 4/1/3/166-167, file 19K, 1925-1948.
which dockers found work or learned to pilfer.\textsuperscript{38} These conditions were attractive enough to have nine of our interviewees opting to live there rather than to submit to the disciplines of the compounds, which were overcrowded, filthy, violent, and prison-like.\textsuperscript{39}

During the 1930s and 1940s, increasing numbers moved into emerging shack settlements on the fringes of town.\textsuperscript{40} Cato Manor, known to Africans as uMkhumbane, was the most important one and was ‘cleared’ in the 1950s, as it was too close to white residential areas for apartheid-mores.\textsuperscript{41} The presence of a ‘Black Belt’\textsuperscript{42} around Durban concerned white citizens. However, before its demolition, uMkhumbane developed as one of the main centres of African cultural life, enterprise, and politics. Iain Edwards quotes Brutus Mthethwe, a dock worker: “it was the African city, uMkhumbane. It was not Thekwini, it was ours. That was what Cato Manor was for.”\textsuperscript{43} As uMkhumbane fell beyond the boundaries of Durban, Africans were more free there than in the city. Here, they were not constantly the object of police harassment and bye-law restrictions, while still being on an easy commuting distance from the city and its industrial areas.\textsuperscript{44} Even after Durban’s borders were expanded in 1932 to include Cato Manor,\textsuperscript{45} with the express intention of exerting control over its inhabitants, it took the city several decades to bring the settlements under their control and to suppress its independent and illegal modes of living.

\textsuperscript{38} Interviews with Galo Mtolo, Izingolweni, 30 June 2009; Zifo Mzizi; Zithuele Chemane; Doda Nxele; Co Pityana; Nkomozethu Cikane; Bhekinkosi Zimu; Gampu Ngeamu; Zakhele Mthembu.
\textsuperscript{39} Ari Sitas, “The Sweat was Black: Working for Dunlop,” in \textit{The People’s City}, ed. Maylam and Edwards, 228.
\textsuperscript{40} Interviews with Dumile Ndlovu, Port Shepstone, 20 May 2009; Sihle Zungu, Highflats, 8 July 2009; Bheka Dlaba, Mooi River, 17 November.
\textsuperscript{42} University of Natal, Department of Economics, \textit{The Durban housing survey: A Study of Housing in a Multi-racial Community} (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1952), 356.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{45} Katzen, op. cit., 1.
recreation, and enterprise. uMkhumbane remained an important hub for recreational and illegal activities. Its shebeens and beer brewers were the centre of much of Durban’s working class culture, as thousands of male hostel dwellers flocked into the area on weekends, often doubling its population. Dock workers like Brutus Mthethwe would thus have been familiar with the neighbourhood, even if they did not live there.46

For decades, authorities had been trying to force casual workers into the compounds at the Point, but by the 1930s this area had become a white residential neighbourhood due to its proximity to the beach. Thus, the MNAD wanted to move the Bell Street Barracks to a more purely industrial area. The two thousand residents would have to move to Shepstone Street, a few blocks closer to the wharves. The authorities also wanted to limit their number and relocate six hundred workers to Maydon Wharf.47 Eventually, they did not find a suitable site and the hostel was not moved.48 Yet, accommodation of casual labour remained an important issue in the Town Council.49

Apart from limiting the mobility of workers, officials tried to regulate their after-work behaviour, criminalising many activities that were not working, eating, or sleeping. This absolutist perception of authority banked on the idea that young African men, separated from the

authority of the elders, needed to be reined in. Working anything less than fulltime, was considered unacceptable behaviour by Town Councillors:50

The older and more responsible natives acknowledge that many of the undesirable features of native life in Durban are attributable to the growing realisation on the part of the younger natives (both male and female) that parents, employers, or officials receive little support for their rights or authority under existing conditions. [...] 

Natives living by questionable methods are enabled through the pretence of working for a day or two for a series of different employers to pass as respectable persons, and so render detection or punishment difficult.

Official aversion to Africans doing anything else in the city than working motivated registration regulations that were especially burdensome for a togt worker, “provid[ing him] with a badge, on which shall be shown, in large figures, his registration number; and he shall be bound always to wear such badge on some conspicuous part of his person and keep it always visible.”51 These badges identified dock workers, but soon fell into disuse. Employers made little effort to reverse this trend and habitually hired workers who did not have a badge.52 This increased the labour pool and put pressure on wages.53 As such, Mphiwa Buxton Mbatha could conclude in 1960 that the docks were one of the only places where even Africans without a pass could find work.54

53 Moreover, badges could be reported as lost, or just not returned when the worker ended his registration period, and then handed to others who could wear it without being registered. KCAL, Port Natal Administration Board (PNAB), KCF 43, file H3-20, Superintendent of the Bell Street Togt Barracks to MNAD, 9 June 1948; DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/1/1/1/27, Town Council Minutes, 5 May 1904.  
54 Mbatha, op. cit., 196.
While few *tgot* contraventions were prosecuted,\(^55\) the regulations were used to exert pressure on strikers. Striking *tgot* labourers could not be prosecuted for breach of contract, but bye-laws stipulated that they could not refuse work at certain rates. Both their residence in the barracks and in town depended on accepting work. The MNAD also often provided labourers to break strikes. Subsequent managers of the MNAD considered it their job to assist employers in dealing with labour troubles.\(^56\) When a deputation of *tgot* workers visited manager J.S. Marwick in June 1918 to ask for higher wages, he thought their demands to be preposterous and organised a meeting with employers to help organise their response.\(^57\)

Convinced that these labourers could not have legitimate grievances, Marwick found an agitator in John L. Dube, the prominent *kholwa*\(^58\) politician and newspaper editor, despite Dube’s explicit advice to workers not to strike. Not satisfied blaming one agitator, he also saw the hand of the ‘Independent [sic] Workers of the World’ in this petition. Rumours and an overactive imagination also swayed the other delegates at these meetings.\(^59\) The Durban Corporation did its part to keep wages down. As a big employer of African labour, they generally paid their African workers wages below the average at private firms, in order not to give workers elsewhere

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\(^{55}\) DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/216-221 and 4/1/3/313-318, file 45, Mayor’s Minutes; DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 5/2/8/1, Reports by Heads of Departments.

\(^{56}\) In 1919, the S.A.R. & H. conveyed its “appreciation [...] of the excellent service rendered to the local Railway officials by Mr. J.S. Marwick, Manager of the Municipal Native Affairs Department, in connection with the trouble recently experienced with the Natives employed by the Railway Department at Durban.” DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/1/1/39, Town Council Minutes, 7 October 1919.

\(^{57}\) DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/2/10/1/1, Native Affairs and Police Committee Minutes, 24 June 1918.

\(^{58}\) The *amakholwa* were African Christian coverts. Mission-educated and instilled with new economic values, they could be exempt from Native Law in rare circumstances and were often part of the socioeconomic and political African elite. However, as the Victorian promise of equality for civilised men made place for segregation and overt racial discrimination regardless of education, their fortunes declined. See: Norman Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants, and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835-1880: African Christian Communities in Natal, Pondoland and Zululand* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978).

\(^{59}\) DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1138, file 315E, part I, Mayor Nicolson to General Botha, Reports of two meetings with employers, 9 August 1918.
encouragement to ask for more.\textsuperscript{60} The MNAD could also be counted on to remind workers of the legally binding (and, of course, one-sided) nature of their contracts.\textsuperscript{61} With the government playing the role of strike buster and labour broker, employers could remain relatively quiet about their own labour policies. They disguised their policies in neutral terms as being in line with the laws and bye-laws, which were designed to suit the needs of these employers. They felt securely backed by the authorities.

The conviction that labourers could not have genuine grievances or organise independently, and thus that agitators must be to blame, remained the guiding idea of these meetings with employers, but the bogey-man changed. By 1929, Dube was no longer the dangerous radical, but rather part of the chorus denouncing Allison Wessels George (A.W.G.) Champion of Natal’s breakaway faction of the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union of Africa (ICU \textit{yase} Natal). Only a decade after having been denounced himself, Dube in turn labelled Champion a dangerous man who preached contempt for white authority. Marwick, now in complete agreement with the man he once despised, imagined Champion and the ICU \textit{yase} Natal to be in league with communists and criminals, manufacturing grievances with the goal to disturb peaceful race relations.\textsuperscript{62} Champion did not turn out to be the radical, proletarian leader he was believed to be either, as will be argued in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{60} DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1138, file 315E, J.S. Marwick to Town Clerk, “Memorandum from meeting of employers of Natives at the Point,” 12 September 1919; J.S. Marwick to Borough Engineer, “Rates of pay for togt workers in different companies,” 10 November 1919; J.S. Marwick to Borough Engineer, “Rates of pay for togt workers in different companies,” 24 July 1920.


Crisis and survival in rural Natal and Zululand

Johannesburg, with its glittering prizes (on native standards) in wages, the fantastic excitements of its large vivid life, its opportunities of larger more adventurous experience, the prestige of familiarity with the great unknown which attaches to those who have returned from employment there - Johannesburg has become a sort of Mecca of the native, and quite the biggest factor of change to the native all over Southern Africa. It has profoundly disturbed the ancient immemorial life of Africa [...].

This quote from 1936 by Jan Christiaan Smuts, twice prime minister of South Africa, is exemplary of the ‘bright lights’ theory, the idea that Africans came to find work because they were attracted to the exciting life of the cities, its luxuries, and high wages. While there were many reasons why a young African man would want to undertake a trip to Johannesburg or Durban, this decision could never be adequately understood without looking at the economic and political context of the countryside. There were several reasons why one would want to come to Durban: better wages than on white farms, an escape from parental authority, closer to home than Johannesburg, etc., but there were also reasons why they had to find work away from home. Africans may have had some choice in where and when to go, but staying at home was not an option for most. Therefore, one cannot understand dock labour in Durban without looking at the rural economy.

Reserve agriculture in Natal between 1920 and 1950 displayed both signs of resilience and decline. Official statistics, which are not always reliable, show no clear downward trend in overall output. Due to population growth, however, this could still have translated in a decline in

per capita yields; the same amount of produce had to feed more people. Charles Simkins discerns two main phases in the Reserve economy between 1918 and 1969. The first phase between 1918 and 1954 was characterised by a fragile maintenance of production levels at about 45-50% of food requirements or 28-32% of total income requirements. Migration mostly made up for the shortfall. The real rural decline, however, set in after 1955 when the advent of influx controls compounded overcrowding. The land had to feed 110 people per square mile by 1969, compared to sixty in 1955 and fifty in 1918. By 1969, output per capita had plummeted to two-thirds of the already insufficient level of 1955.

While Reserve-dwellers throughout South Africa produced less than half of their food requirements by at least 1920, this level did not drop dramatically before the institution of influx controls. This gave Isaac Schapera reason to feel upbeat about the potential of Reserve agriculture as late as 1928. Especially Zululand and Pondoland, the areas just North and South of Natal, were among the ‘most nearly sufficient’ areas in the country. Natal South of the uThukela River, on the other hand, was the least sufficient area in 1927, covering less than a quarter of its food requirements. However, even in Zululand, Aran MacKinnon notes, the picture looks very different when one takes into account regional and class differences. The reality was bleak for most commoners in Zululand as well. The situation in Pondoland was not as rosy as the statistics suggested either. By 1937, seventeen percent of the male population was absent from the

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68 Simkins, Agricultural Production, 14.
area, at work. This number was almost double that of 1911, but still significantly lower than elsewhere.\textsuperscript{70} The experiences in Pondoland show how difficult it was to recover from setbacks once the decline had set in and the proceeds from wage labour had to be used for consumption rather than marriage and investment.\textsuperscript{71}

The conditions for Africans living on white farms were statistically similar to those in the Reserves. A similar pattern could be discerned of fragile maintenance of income levels followed by a real decline after 1955.\textsuperscript{72} Farm tenants, however, faced other challenges. The expansion of white commercial agriculture between 1904 and 1929, and especially after 1921, increasingly squeezed tenants off the land or into less favourable labour tenancy agreements, under threat of expulsion under the 1913 Natives Land Act.\textsuperscript{73} Evictions could also result from ‘absconding’ sons. Under labour tenancy agreements, sons often had to work for low or non-existent wages for six months, so that their fathers could maintain access to land. The sons, however, had little to gain from this arrangement and regularly failed to return in time for a new stint of labour; they preferred to earn money for themselves in better paid urban jobs. Thomas McClendon writes about the generational tensions between fathers and sons that these tenancy agreements led to.\textsuperscript{74}

Successive government reports and witnesses to official commissions, going back as far as the 1910s, give a sense of the declining sustainability of African agriculture. Colonel W. Arnott testified in iXopo in 1914: “Twenty years ago there was not a European farmer in the

\textsuperscript{70} Beinart, \textit{The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860-1930} (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982), 70, 95.
district who grew mealies; they relied upon the natives and the natives had a surplus to sell, but now the scale has been turned.”75 Chief Mabojana complained that he could not find land for tenants expelled from farms and that there were even chiefs without any land at all.76 Four years later, another witness complained to the Natal Natives Land Committee that the Reserve land they did have access to was generally of poor quality.77 The Commission report also noted the inferior nature of the Crown Lands on which many African sought to eke out an existence.78 By the early-1930s, the Native Economic Commission found that “[t]he seriousness of the position [could] hardly be overstated.”79 Erosion and the loss of good grass were particularly serious in the Natal Reserves.80

The lack of productivity of the Reserves has traditionally been explained by pointing to different combinations of a lack of resources, a lack of interest in agriculture, and ignorance of modern cultivation methods. H.M. Robertson identified the fact that Africans were only part-time farmers, by force rather than by choice, as one of the reasons for such inefficiency. He also criticised traditional methods of cultivation, particularly the lack of tillage.81 The 1955 Tomlinson Commission blamed a shortage of capital and a general want for enterprise and organisational capacity.82 This lack of investment could be out of choice, as their interest in agriculture waned and changing tastes diverted resources into non-essential consumption, but it could also be

76 Ibid., 508, 513. The theme of lack of security was picked up again in “Report of the Natives Land Commission, Volume II,” U.G. 22-'16, 51.
78 “Natives Land Commission: Minute addressed to the Honourable the Minister of Native Affairs by the Honourable Sir W.H. Beaumont (Chairman of the Natives Land Commission),” U.G. 25-'16, 57.
80 Ibid., 43.
because the absence of secure tenure, savings, and sufficient manpower resulted in limited opportunities to invest. Striking in these explanations is the absence of a discussion of the 1913 Natives Land Act and dispossession in general. In ignoring this, commentators depoliticised the subject of self-sufficiency in a context of racial segregation and white supremacy.

Commentators have also focused on overstocking and overgrazing, a concern that is still regularly raised, to explain this lack of productivity. Africans were, and are still, believed to suffer from what anthropologists and officials labelled a ‘cattle complex’, an obsession with cattle for status rather than as an economic resource and a preference for quantity over quality. Others have, however, pointed out that these interpretations failed to take into account that cattle did in fact have economic value. Not only was livestock a source of meat, amasi (sour milk), and pastoral commodities like hides, it was also a self-reproducing form of capital and a relatively secure avenue for investment in the absence of a land-market and secure tenure. Labour migration also affected the cattle economy less than agriculture, partly because it required less labour and was thus a more appropriate focus for households with several absent migrants. It did not require expensive inputs of seeds and ploughing and was less directly in competition with better-capitalised and better-connected white grain-farming interests. Consequently, cattle holdings by Africans in the province of Natal increased dramatically between 1911 and 1952, but

inequality of distribution was equally on the rise. Chiefs and izinduna, who controlled grazing lands, gained most from this development.87

However, from the perspective of efficient land-use, there was still something irrational about this emphasis on livestock. But, cattle were not just economic resources; they also played an important social and ritual role. Livestock provided a direct link between the ancestors and their living descendants through sacrifices.88 And, through the practices of ukulobola and ukusisa, the loaning out of cattle to poor kin and commoners, cattle remained a crucial feature of the Zulu social system.89 Through ukusisa wealthy cattle owners could become patrons and have access to herding labour. The clients had access to the milk and, depending on the agreement, to the offspring.90 Ilobolo also gave the older generation a claim on the income of the younger generation. It was a redistributive mechanism and an investment in dependants and thus in social security.91 As such, overgrazing could have had a negative impact on agriculture, but may not have been as irrational as sometimes assumed. Furthermore, James Ferguson argues in the context of Lesotho that the social barrier to selling livestock safeguarded the proceeds of migrant labour from female claims to male wages.92

Labour migration was closely interlinked with the rural economy and with the life cycle of individuals. Even in Pondoland, which remained relatively self-sustaining for much of the nineteenth century, a stint of urban labour had become a regular phase in the reproduction of the

87 Ibid., 125; Union of South Africa, op. cit., 18.
88 Krige, Social System, 188.
89 MacKinnon, “Persistence of the Cattle Economy,” 104.
90 Ibid., 111-112.
92 Cattle were thus a good way for men to store their savings, as they could not just be sold to cover household expenses. This issue is discussed further in chapter eight. Ferguson, op. cit., 149-150.
umuzi (homestead) by the early twentieth century. In order to marry, a man needed bridewealth in the form of cattle. As the homestead heads were increasingly unable to provide this, young men had to earn cattle themselves. Even after establishing their homesteads, many men continued to migrate in order to build their herds and buy commodities. As the land became increasingly incapable of feeding the population, the nature of migration changed from a phase in life to set oneself up for adulthood to a long-term necessity.

With the changing fortunes of the rural economy the reasons to migrate changed as well. In 1852, the Natal Native Affairs Commission found two main reasons why Africans needed cash: to pay their taxes and for ilobolo. By 1960, Mbatha notes seven reasons. These were, in order of importance: food, ilobolo (both for oneself and one’s son), clothes, personal expenses (transport, food in town, smoking, drinking, etc.), family expenses (medical expenses, ploughing, building material, ceremonial feasts, emergencies, etc.), livestock, and taxes. People no longer migrated to cover extraordinary expenses linked to their life cycle, but rather for the daily running of the homestead. The main cash expenditure among the Nyuswa was on food, with only a slight drop in the harvest season. He links this to land shortage, overpopulation, and declining stock holdings.

The diminished ability of Reserve agriculture to feed the population compelled people to seek wage employment, even if this was not the only reason. This provides an important counter-argument to the bright-lights theory: while cities did furnish pull-factors, one also has to look at the push-factor of rural impoverishment. Officials recognised the link between hunger and the

93 Beinart, Political Economy, 98; Hunter, Reaction to Conquest, 108.
94 Colony of Natal, Proceedings and Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire Into the Past and Present State of the Kafirs in the District of Natal (Reprinted in 1879), 44.
95 Mbatha, op. cit., 105.
96 Ibid., 96-98.
availability of wage labour and many of them came to see the solution to droughts, famines, and
natural disasters in terms of increasing the rates of labour migration. Some showed little
sympathy for the plight of the hungry population. The Magistrate of Nkandla believed that the
destruction of crops by floods would provide ‘improvident’ Africans with ‘a salutary lesson’.
Government reports equally linked hunger to the supply of labour.

However, impoverishment did not completely strip the population of agency. For much
of this period workers still got enough from the land to make their patterns of wage labour
correspond with the agricultural calendar. For example, in 1950 most workers would still leave
their employment at Durban’s Dunlop factory during ploughing season, i.e. September and
October. In other words, they were still able to leave their job when their labour was needed on
the land and the proceeds from the land were still deemed important enough to leave a job for –
even if that might have had as much to do with an ideal of a rural livelihood as with an economic
reality. During the winter months, on the other hand, workers flocked to Durban. These were
months of relative plenty, but male labour was not needed in agriculture at that time; the harvest
was over but ploughing had not yet started. A second peak in the labour supply occurred in
January and February and corresponded with another period in which male labour was under-

97 MacKinnon, “Land, Labour and Cattle,” 306. See also: Beinart, Political Economy, 75. H.S. Fynn, the
Inspector of Native Labour in Durban, noted in February 1927 that there were more ‘voluntary labourers’
in the city than usual and linked this to droughts. TAB, GNLB, vol. 96, file 220/13/100, H.S. Fynn to the
Chief Native Commissioner in Pietermaritzburg, 2 February 1927.
98 E.g. “Report of the Native Affairs Department for the Year Ended 31st December, 1912,” U.G. 33-’13,
57, 63.
99 University of Natal, Department of Economics, The African Factory Worker: A Sample Study of the Life
100 E.g.: DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/99, file 19K, part I, Chief Constable to Town Clerk, 15 June 1925.
101 Desmond Harold Reader, Zulu Tribe in Transition: The Makhanya of Southern Natal (Manchester:
Manchester University Press, 1966), 32; Hunter, Reaction to Conquest, 111.
utilised the countryside: after ploughing and planting was finished, but before the harvest.\textsuperscript{102} The incomplete data concerning the number of registered \textit{togt} workers in Durban between 1924 and 1947 suggest a similar seasonal pattern, indicating that these workers still had some investment in agriculture. The months with most \textit{togt} workers were January, between ploughing and harvesting, and July and August, between harvesting and ploughing. The months with least workers were April and May, during harvest season.\textsuperscript{103}

Nevertheless, many homesteads were no longer self-sufficient and direct consumption became an ever more important use of wages. Most interviewees mentioned making regular remittances, sometimes using \textit{stokvels} to enable them to save money to send home.\textsuperscript{104} In a 1950 study of the University of Natal, eighty-eight percent of African Dunlop workers had made remittances in the last ten months. Of the remaining twelve percent, more than half had not done so because they had just started work.\textsuperscript{105} Dependence on wages for consumption grew steadily; in 1955 the ratio of wage income to agricultural production on South African Reserves was five to one. Just ten years later, this ratio had risen to eleven to one.\textsuperscript{106}

However, remittances were often irregular. Not everyone was in a position to send money back and others were no longer interested in doing so. They were ‘absconders’.\textsuperscript{107} Of the five examples of remittance-patterns that Edgar Brookes gives there was one who did not send any money, but even among those who did there were large discrepancies in amounts and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{103} DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1131-6 and 4/1/3/1544-9, file 315, Monthly reports of the MNAD.
\item \textsuperscript{104} The use of \textit{stokvels}, rotating credit associations, to remit more money was mentioned in the interviews with Gedla Lukhozi, Polela, 6 June 2009; Libho Qoza, Upper uMkomaas, 15 June 2009; Lihlo Budu, Izongolweni, 29 June 2009; Mzo Mzongo, Izingolweni North, 30 June 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{105} University of Natal, \textit{African Factory Worker}, 12, 144.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Simkins, “Agricultural Production,” 271
\item \textsuperscript{107} Philip and Iona Mayer, Townsmen or Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanization in a South African City (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1961), 6.
\end{itemize}
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regularity. The state did not like absconders any more than their dependents did, as they might cause their wives, now without means of survival, to migrate to the city themselves. Absconders could thus undermine the cheap labour system. Consequently, local officials often engaged themselves in the enforcement of remittances and in tracking down absconders.

Urban migration also was an important marker of masculinity and adulthood. Cash wages enabled young men to buy ilobolo and to marry. Ideally one would also build an umuzi and become an umnumzane. However, as land became a very scarce resource, this ideal could take a long time to achieve. Migration was thus a part of one’s life cycle, even if it was no longer a phase to go through on the path to adulthood, but rather a lifelong reality. Labour migration had become part of the initiation of young men throughout Southern Africa. They travelled to the mines and cities to experience a new world and gain the respect of women. But, when sons started to provide their own ilobolo, some were no longer willing to surrender their earnings to their fathers, which would traditionally have been the case as long as they did not have their own homestead. This caused generational tensions. Yet, thirty-five percent of married Dunlop workers still made remittances to their fathers. Thus, it would seem that many fathers retained a claim on their sons’ earnings, even if this did not go uncontested.

How much a worker could send back home or save for ilobolo depended on how much of his wages he needed to live in the city. Therefore, free accommodation and food in compounds could make a substantial difference. Budget analyses made by mid-century liberal scholars, who

108 Brookes and Hurwitz, op. cit., 85.
110 Mayer and Mayer, op. cit., 91.
112 McClendon, op. cit., 59.
113 University of Natal, African Factory Worker, 12.
wanted to demonstrate that African families need higher wages to survive in the cities, show that rent for even the most basic one-room shacks could easily cost forty percent of a worker’s wages. Other necessities were often equally difficult to afford; the city was an expensive place to live on an African wage.\textsuperscript{114} Labourers who did not live in the compounds, and their families, had to be creative. As such, some workers did appreciate that compounds sheltered them from the need to spend their wages in town, even if they may have disliked the overcrowding and the policing of their lives. Compounds could be part of a process of ‘incapsulation’, the shielding of rural migrants from interaction with the urban economy and social life to prevent them from developing an alternative urban life that could eat away their remittances. Tight male organisation based on \textit{abakhaya} networks and centered on compounds and hostels, characterised this incapsulation. This bonding resulted in social pressures to remit their wages and not to squander money in town. In Durban, however, this relatively narrow cultural identification with \textit{abakhaya} networks might have been less prevalent than in the Rand or in East London, as was the case for M:\textsuperscript{115}

\textit{A move to the ports often reflected and reinforced slightly broader cultural indentification [sic] among migrants from Pondoland, and so it was with M. He lived in a more mixed environment at the S. J. Smith hostel near the city’s industrial area. Although it was for single men, there was little of the tight male organisation which he had encountered on the mines, and little homosexuality. ‘Women were not allowed to go in’ – but they did; access to town was also easier. It was ‘quite different’, ‘we were just together – Zulus, Shangaans . . .’}.


The interviews for this study confirm this anecdotal evidence. Few interviewees limited their social interactions mostly to people from their home area.\footnote{Of the forty-nine interviews where we have this information, twenty-eight mentioned that they did not specifically socialise with people from their own areas.}

Compounds were also in the interest of employers, cheapening the reproduction of labour and allowing for greater discipline, and of segregationists, concentrating the African population to enclosed and more easily policeable areas. A language of racial paternalism and protection from proletarianisation rationalised the building of compounds. White philanthropists saw it as their duty to protect migrants from the immoral world of the city and to prevent the restraints of African society from breaking down. Africans were “apt to imbibe the vices and ignore the virtues of civilization” when released from the controls of rural life, mining magnate and humanitarian Lionel Phillips reasoned.\footnote{Quoted in Patrick Harries, Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), 194.} In later decades, white liberals would however condemn the living conditions in compounds and consider them sites of racial degeneration.\footnote{Ibid.}

Whatever the living conditions, the compounds symbolised the close interconnection between the rural economy and urban labour. Whether workers came to the city because of rural impoverishment and needed wages to cover consumption or were attracted by the high wages in the city and the opportunities to escape patriarchal hierarchies; whether they wanted to earn ilobolo to make the transition into adulthood or needed money to invest in agriculture and pastoralism, their urban lives were never disconnected from their rural livelihoods. It was this close connection between the rural and the urban and their access to land that, according to official discourse, protected African workers from exploitation. Purportedly, they could just
withdraw their labour if underpaid.\textsuperscript{119} This idea relied on two plainly incorrect assumptions: firstly, that South Africa had a free labour market and, secondly, that Reserve agriculture still offered a majority of Africans sufficient means of subsistence to retain independence from wage labour. Much of Africans’ agency in the labour market relied on the viability of the Reserve economy.

**Conclusion**

Together with the previous one, this chapter has outlined the context for the rest of the dissertation. It debated the evolution of the labour market in Durban and Natal and of dock labour and shipping in the Port of Durban. Moreover, these chapters engaged extensively with the literature on labour migration and discussed labour in the context of the rural economy. Importantly, it has been established that the urban wage labour of Africans cannot be separated from its rural context. For these workers neither their agricultural and pastoral pursuits, nor their wage labour was the be-all and end-all of their livelihoods. This point will be further elaborated throughout the rest of this dissertation.

Chapter 4: Labour, politics, and the city, 1910s to 1950s

Durban’s togt labourers, and dock workers in particular, have a long-standing reputation of being particularly strike-prone. They were on the front lines in both the 1929 and 1949 riots and were instrumental in Durban’s 1973 strikes, which constituted one of the first major acts of popular resistance after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. Dockers were also the first significant constituency of the ICU, enthusiastically joined the CPSA’s pass burning campaign, and were on the forefront of the wave of non-white labour activism in the early 1940s.

The two previous chapters have set out the political, institutional, and socio-economic context of this dissertation and this chapter establishes the centrality of dock workers’ action to African politics and the non-white labour movement in Durban from the 1910s to the 1950s. Labour politics in the first decade of the century have been discussed in chapter two. The chapter argues that, just like in many ports around the world, dockers were among the most radical workers, but at the same time complicates that picture. This sets the stage for the sections, which will discuss and explain the peculiar mix of working class consciousness with other forms of political awareness in greater detail. The chapter has three chronologically organised sections: the 1910s and 1920s, the 1930s, and the 1940s and 1950s.

The 1910s and 1920s

In the first decades of the century, what David Hemson calls a “sophisticated programme of paternalistic social control”\(^1\) increasingly constrained African urban life. As the pace of Durban’s industrialisation picked up and the number of African labourers in the city grew, a specialised

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\(^{1}\) David Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock workers of Durban” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1979), 139.
bureaucracy of control was created. The establishment of the MNAD in 1916 consolidated the administration of ‘native affairs’. The proceeds of the beer monopoly funded this department.\(^2\)

A larger non-white workforce, intensified control and oppression, and growing number of expulsions of farm tenants resulted in the development of more clearly stratified class hierarchies and worker militancy. Durban and Natal lagged behind in mobilisation in the early days after the First World War, but when workers did start organising in the 1920s Natal quickly became the centre of African struggles. The nature of this resistance was, however, ambiguous. Zulu workers sought leadership from prominent Zulu leaders, but the support they received was often hesitant and uncommitted. These ‘leaders’ mostly had to follow the lead of the workers. Spurred by high war-time inflation, strikes and riots broke out in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and on the Rand in 1919 and 1920.\(^4\) In Durban, action remained limited to isolated strikes and petitions, mostly undertaken by workers who did not fall under the Masters and Servants Act, such as dock workers and rickshaw pullers. On 15 April 1918, 1,200 rickshaw pullers refused to pay the increased rentals demanded by the owners and did not provide rides.\(^5\) Two months later, a deputation of *togt* workers requested a meeting with the MNAD. They wanted their wages adjusted to the increased cost of living, but did not find a sympathetic ear. Instead the manager of

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\(^5\) In their relative freedom from the discipline of the Masters and Servants Act, rickshaw pullers were very similar to *togt* dock labourers. A very similar discourse about lack of control existed about them. There is still a handful of rickshaw pullers active today, catering to tourists at the beachfront. Ros Posel, “Amahashi: Durban’s Ricksha Pullers,” in *The People’s City: African Life in Twentieth-Century Durban*, ed. Paul Maylam and Iain Edwards (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996), 202-221.
the MNAD organised a meeting with some of the city’s most prominent employers and
councillors to coordinate their reaction to such demands. While some employers were willing to
grant small increases, they would only do so on their own lead. Mayor Nicolson urged employers
to retain the initiative.6

In Cape Town, meanwhile, dockers engaged in a multi-racial export boycott in December
1919. As the country suffered shortages, they refused to load food destined for export. They also
demanded 8s. 6d. per day (up from 4s. 7d.) and 12s. 6d. for foremen. The strike received
significant support from trade unions and even white communities, but the government refused to
budge and blamed agitators. The boycott did not spread to other ports and the moral support was
not matched by material assistance. This enabled the government to break up the strike.7 With
this defeat, the future of inter-racial action in South Africa looked bleak. There was some support
for the cause, but white newspapers had little sympathy for whites who assisted non-white
strikees. “[S]urely,” an editorial in the Natal Mercury argued, “race solidarity should be above
even class solidarity.”8

This boycott was the first big feat of the ICU.9 Only in 1924 did the union start
organising in Natal, but this branch would soon be its biggest.10 When National Secretary

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6 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1138, file 315E, Mayor Nicolson to General Botha, Reports of two meetings
with employers, 9 August 1918.
7 Natal Witness, 18-30 December 1919.
9 Clements Kadalie narrates the origins of the ICU in My Life and the ICU: The Autobiography of a Black
10 Paul La Hausse, “The Message of the Warriors: The ICU, the labouring Poor and the Making of a
Popular Political Culture in Durban, 1925-1930,” in Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in
19th and 20th Century South Africa, History Workshop 4, ed. Philip Bonner et al. (Johannesburg:
Clements Kadalie—who was “[f]ull of restless energy, a born orator, a capable organiser,”11 according to Eddie Roux—first arrived in Durban, he was very disappointed in the Zulu people: “All seemed to be so tame and ready to submit to anything the official European suggested to them.”12 But, the Natal branch went through a phase of phenomenal growth under its Provincial Secretary A.W.G. Champion. The other prominent African political organisation in Natal at that time was the Natal Native Congress (NNC), led by John L. Dube.13 This organisation mostly occupied itself with issues concerning the small kholwa elite of property owners. Thus, radicals within the ICU leadership derided NNC politicians as ama-respectables,14 ‘the respectable people’, hinting at their concern with respectability and their hesitance to take up workers’ issues.

However, much of the ICU leadership equally subscribed to ideas of respectability. They eschewed a language of class solidarity and working class action, preferring a discourse of nationalism, respectability, and Garveyist self-help.15 Nevertheless, the ICU did pay considerable attention to workers’ grievances, even if it was hardly a typical trade union.16 The union captured the imagination of Durban’s labouring poor and of hard-up rural tenants being squeezed off their land. A focus on mass meetings, petitioning, and often successful litigation aimed at farm-evictions and at oppressive legislation, such as the compulsory ‘dipping’ of African labourers

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12 Kadalie, op. cit., 62.
13 John L. Dube was also one of the founders and first president of the ANC (then the South African Native National Congress or SANNC), but was ousted and replaced by Sefako Mapogo Makgatho from the more radical Transvaal branch in 1917. After this, he focused his energies on the NNC. Nicholas Cope, “The Zulu Petit Bourgeoisie and Zulu Nationalism in the 1920s: Origins of Inkatha,” Journal of Southern African Studies XVI (1990), 3: 438.
16 Dube, on the other hand, regularly discouraged workers in his newspaper from taking collective action, even if these actions were not strikes. E.g.: “The Money Famine,” Ilanga lase Natal, 5 July 1918, 2; “The Petition of the Natives of Durban,” Ilanga lase Natal, 16 August 1918.
(similar to the dipping of cattle), accounts for its large membership. These strategies, however, did little to guarantee lasting organisation.  

Dockers formed the first important constituency of the union and the 1929 beer boycott solidified their allegiance. It was in the countryside, however, that the ICU built its first mass-support base in Natal. The 1924 victory of the Pact Coalition of Nationalists and the South African Labour Party heightened the union’s appeal for rural Africans and the black middle class. The new government’s commitment to segregation was not new, but did intensify older policies, entrenching and extending political, economic, and territorial segregation and closing off avenues for advancement for middle class Africans. This middle class came to make up the leadership of the ICU and transformed it from a trade union to a popular movement fighting segregation and discrimination. As commercialising white farmers increasingly pushed tenants off their land or forced them into supplying more labour for less land and grazing rights, this new-style leadership found grass-roots organisers and a ready constituency among farm tenants. Young migrants learned about the union in the cities and became self-proclaimed organisers upon their return. They infused the ICU’s message with their own millenarian discourse of a new order and articulated the resentment of rural Africans, voiced militant demands for the return of African lands, invoked symbols of Zulu nationalism, and challenged evictions with some success. Soon,

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the very name of the union, ‘I see you’, became a symbol of empowerment, letting farmers, employers, and officials know that their abuses would no longer go unnoticed.\textsuperscript{20}

However, evictions continued and landlords ‘smelled out’ ICU members. In this context, the union’s preference for litigation over organisation was more expensive than it could afford. This led the Acting General Secretary to conclude in 1929 that the “failure to procure land for people was the principal factor that led to the downfall of the organisation.”\textsuperscript{21} In 1927, the ICU reached a membership of 88,000 in Natal, but by the end of the decade the union had all but disappeared. Nevertheless, it would not go down without a fight.

In the late-1920s, the ICU \textit{yase} Natal, which seceded from the national organisation under Champion’s leadership, engaged in a recruitment drive among female beer-brewers to bolster its financial position. This new membership’s opposition to the beer monopoly coincided with the resentment of dock workers, who saw beer halls as symbols of their oppression.\textsuperscript{22} In 1929, two events made the interests and resentments of these groups coalesce. The plan to open a new beer hall in Sydenham, at the edge of town, demonstrated the Corporation’s commitment to extending their control over the peri-urban areas where brewers eked out an independent existence. Meanwhile, at the Bell Street Togt Barracks a dock worker had his badge revoked after he instigated a boycott of an Indian trader. This trader had supposedly used his influence to have a compound-\textit{induna} clamp down on \textit{mahewu} brewers in the compound, who were competition for

\textsuperscript{21} Cited in Bradford, \textit{A Taste of Freedom}, 270.
him. Dockers boycotted both the trader’s store and the Point Beer Hall in protest and joined the Anti-Kaffir Beer Manufacturing League, making the following statement:

A meeting of all Natives employed in gangs at the Point as well as togt labourers which was held in the Hall of the ICU yase Natal resolved that all Natives must be told that they must part company with kaffir beer which is obtained by purchase because their funds have become exhausted through buying beer not knowing what benefit they derive from it except to build compounds and barracks which are full of bad laws and disagreeable control; because a Native who lives in these barracks is like a prisoner on account of the regulations governing them. [...] Kafir beer has caused many Natives to lose their homes because [...] they lose their money and self respect [...].

The threat to the livelihoods of peri-urban brewers and traders in the compounds, resentment about dependency on municipal beer halls for leisurely drinking, and frustration at the arbitrary powers of the municipality and compound management combined into a common focus on beer halls as a central institution of subordination. The ICU and Champion picked up on these grievances and helped organise the boycott in June 1929, possibly in consultation with amalaita gangs and the ingudla, an adult dock workers gang, who picketed the beer halls. Some riots also erupted. Dockers played a central role in this boycott and women took the struggle to other parts of the province. For them, beer monopolies were not only competition, but also the cause of their reduced access to wages. This posed a threat to the economic sustainability of the rural homestead.

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26 Bradford, “We are now the men,” 293, 315.
The ICU had instilled a culture of assertiveness in the African population, which contributed to the riots. Riots and the boycott of a crucial instrument of urban control directly challenged the legitimacy of white authorities and their capacity to rule. The state was concerned about this open defiance, which continued after the riots in the form of a refusal to pay taxes and the continuation of the boycott. The Natal Mercury noted that “a big group of Natives in Durban area has adopted an attitude of defiance to the police” and taxes collected by November amounted to £30,000 less than the year before. Dock workers were at the centre of this resistance. The government responded with a massive early morning police raid on several barracks and compounds at the Point, arresting more than six hundred tax defaulters. The importance of this raid was seen to lie in its “wholesome moral effect,” restoring the prestige of white authority and bringing passive resisters “to their senses.”

While the authorities considered Champion and Dube dangerous agitators, neither had clear radical objectives. Despite garnering the support of workers for a certain time, they did not generally approve of working class action, did not usually express explicitly working class demands, and preferred a language of respectability, Zulu nationalism, and self-help over one that stressed class solidarity. They were remarkably moderate to be considered radicals. By the mid-1920s, the conservative NNC had fallen back on its following of a small, propertied kholwa elite.

27 Nuttall, op. cit., 51.
31 Beinart and Bundy make similar observations about the Independent ICU in East London: op. cit., 281-282. David Goodhew also makes the argument that respectability and not class was the marker of hierarchy and what inspired politics in Sophiatown in Respectability and Resistance: A History of Sophiatown (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004). However, Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien argue in their excellent introduction to Alexandra: A History (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008) that class, and property ownership in particular, was in fact important in Johannesburg’s urban African politics.
Dube’s reliance on white missionary patronage for his newspaper and the Ohlange Institute, the industrial school he founded in 1901, made it difficult for him to move away from his cautious approach. The class identification of the lower middle class ICU leadership was more ambiguous and had the potential to inspire alliances with both workers and African elites. In the post-Pact context, this middle class was particularly vulnerable to proletarianisation at the hands of a government intent on eliminating competition for white small-scale entrepreneurs and skilled workers, and was thus increasingly pushed into the arms of the working class.

Populist language, successful court cases, and passionate appeals to ethnic solidarity, smartly invoking the illustrious Zulu past and Zulu traditions, guaranteed the ICU support among the labouring poor, but the leadership sometimes had a different agenda than the workers. The union often addressed the concerns of African traders more effectively than those of African workers and even when it adopted workers’ issues, these did generally not address the nature of the relationship between labour, capital, and the state. A letter the ICU yase Natal’s General Secretary sent to Durban’s Town Clerk in 1933 illustrates the sort of complaints with which it tended to deal. The letter expressed the displeasure of traders at Victoria Market with the restricted trading hours and the fact that they had to pay their rent each day in person. It also

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conveyed complaints on behalf of the *tgot* workers at the Point, namely that the beds in the Bell Street Barracks were of bad quality and that they had to pay for the repair of damaged badges.\textsuperscript{35}

Rather than working class action, the union preferred a form of Garveyist economic separatism, stressing self-help, self-improvement, and co-operative societies over mounting a more radical challenge to the oppression of black workers.\textsuperscript{36} The ICU was not the only organisation promoting moral and economic upliftment though co-operative schemes. Father Bernard Huss, a white Catholic missionary at Mariannhill near Durban, promoted similar ideas, but stressed that this should happen under missionary supervision. In 1926, he founded the conservative, mission-controlled Catholic African Union (CAU) to counter the ICU’s more forceful Garveyist ideas of black collective self-assertion. However, the CAU never gained a big following.\textsuperscript{37}

In the context of rapidly disappearing opportunities for chronically undercapitalised African entrepreneurs and the educated middle class, these groups threw their weight behind this economic nationalism and increasingly came to rely on the ICU for income. The ICU provided them with salaried positions and the All-African Co-operative Society, established in 1927,

\textsuperscript{35} DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1221, file 467, part VIII, James Ngcobo to Town Clerk, 28 March 1933.
provided them with an opportunity to put their entrepreneurial skills to a good use. Especially Champion used the union to promote his business ventures. Both his *Vuka Afrika* (Africa Awake) general store and Natal Boot and Shoe Repairing Hospital benefited from his connection to the ICU. He was not averse to funding these ventures with union funds either. Members also sponsored the leadership’s middle class tastes through the African Worker’s Club, which did not attract many workers, but rather the aspiring African lower middle class.\(^{38}\)

The ICU leadership’s agenda often differed from the interests of African workers. They were more interested in fighting for their share of the pie than in challenging the cheap labour system. Champion could also be quite condescending about black labourers. In one of his columns for *Ilanga lase Natal*, for example, he complained that African workers were not trustworthy.\(^{39}\) The beer halls were thus a suitable target for the ICU leadership, as they symbolised the marginalisation of African enterprise, yet dock workers initiated the boycott. One of the reasons for this was the stifling of African petty traders in their compounds. They resented the lack of opportunity for African entrepreneurs. This resentment was not only directed at the state, but also at direct competitors, such as Indian traders.\(^{40}\) These grievances increasingly translated into support for economic segregation and calls for ‘Africa for the Africans’.\(^{41}\)


\(^{40}\) The evidence from the Native Riots Commission clarifies the conflict between the Indian shopkeeper across the street from the Bell Street Barracks, Akob Ally Mahomed, and the workers. The latter complained that the compound-*induna* clamped down on *mahevu*-brewing in the compound on request of that shopkeeper. One of the traders in the Native Eating House also complained that he had to close earlier than the Indian store. Mahomed admitted that the brewers in the compound were competition, but denied that he had asked for this clamp-down. SAB, NTS, vol. 7665, file 46/332, part I, “Native Riots Commission: Minutes of Evidence,” 3-13 July 1929; La Hausse, “The Message of the Warriors,” 36.

\(^{41}\) Nuttall, op. cit., 123-124.
The ICU leadership thus did not support industrial action and advised its membership to approach the authorities instead of engaging in strike action. Champion in particular was more at ease in a court room than on a picket line. Legal action avoided open conflict with the authorities, leaving lawyers to decide disputes and giving him the prestige of beating whites on their own terrain. This approach suited his longing to be in the limelight. However, workers appropriated the discourse of the ICU, just as farm tenants had done. By 1929, the union had to step up the rhetoric in order not to be outpaced by the rank-and-file. Dock workers took the initiative, commenced the boycott, and marched on the city.

The limited reforms proposed in the aftermath of the riots, however, were meant to appease the middle class leadership, for example by establishing a Native Advisory Board (NAB) as a co-optation mechanism. The Chief Native Commissioner considered this Board a useful buffer between the masses and the local authorities, a response to a situation where the shared experience of racial oppression made cross-class alliances possible. The leadership bought into these reforms and dropped its support for the boycott in 1930. Yet, the boycott continued as it started, spontaneously carried by the workers and strongest at the Point. Again, workers did not just follow the leadership. Champion lost much of his influence on Durban’s working class and, just like Dube before him, found a new rural support-base through connection with the royal

43 Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm,” 153.
48 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 222.
house and Inkatha. This caused some consternation among the authorities, who had seen in Solomon kaDinuzulu and Inkatha a conservative bulwark against radicals like Champion.\textsuperscript{49}

Several scholars have pinned the blame for the demise of the ICU on the petty bourgeois origins of its leadership.\textsuperscript{50} However, the social distance between the ICU leadership and the rank-and-file was not absolute. As Helen Bradford points out, the lower middle class leadership of the ICU in the post-Pact period was under constant threat of being pushed into the ranks of unskilled labour and many workers did occupy the lower levels of the union’s organisational hierarchy.\textsuperscript{51} Moreover, the African middle class and labourers shared common racial oppression.\textsuperscript{52} The last section of this chapter will argue that at least some dock workers also shared the ICU’s concern with the interests of African traders.

The 1930s

By 1930, the ideological breach between the ICU leadership and the general membership had become clear. The workers were not yet ready to end their resistance and the beer hall boycott continued without ICU support. The pass-book would become their next target. The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and its local organiser, Johannes Nkosi, filled the political void left by the union. In the late 1920s, the Communist Party only had a few African members in Durban,

\textsuperscript{51} Bradford, “Mass Movements.”
\textsuperscript{52} Bonner, “The Transvaal Native Congress.”
mostly at the Point. Yet, its appeal grew spectacularly and soon the government saw the CPSA as the new major threat to their authority in Durban, fearing new riots.

This new organisational push was in line with the ‘South African Native Republic’ strategy, an approach advanced by the Comintern, which aimed for national democratic revolutions in the colonies as the first step to a classless society. Thus, the late 1920s brought an Africanisation of a mostly white CPSA and a focus on racial discrimination. The party did not challenge wages and working conditions, but the pass system and the beer monopoly; not the employers, but the government was the antagonist. Similarly, during the beer boycott dock workers stressed that they would not strike because their action was not directed against the employers, but against the authorities. The beer boycott evolved into a pass burning campaign organised by the CPSA in 1930. This was a dangerous strategy, Roux explains:

It could prove effective only if carried out on a really big scale. If an individual destroyed his pass, he would be at once arrested and imprisoned. It would be a personal protest, a heroic gesture, but useless. Even if many individuals burned their passes their sacrifice would be in vain. The only hope of success lay in the burning of all passes at the same time. But the Party felt that its influence was now strong enough to make the venture worth while. “You cannot imprison millions,” they said.

The pass burning event at the Cartwright Flats on Dingaan’s Day, 16 December, did draw a large turnout despite the denunciation by the ICU. This underscored the union’s loss of popular support. Once again, dock workers were among those workers who responded in greatest

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53 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 258.
54 La Hausse, “The Dispersal of the Regiments,” 98.
57 Roux, op. cit., 244.
numbers. The police attacked the protestors, killing four people; Nkosi was one of them. Roux tried to keep the party’s momentum going, but was arrested and deported from Durban.

The challenging of the pass system and the boycott of municipal beer halls show that Durban’s workers, and dock workers in particular, were very well aware of the political nature of their exploitation. Beer halls and pass books were part of the system of racial exploitation. Durban’s African labourers were already paid less than those elsewhere in South Africa and the prevention of permanent migration meant that migrant labourers, who were not entirely dependent on wages, continued to undercut urban wages. Yet, even if the authorities hoped to maintain an entirely rural contract labour force, the reality was different. In the mid-1920s, about half of the African work force worked on a casual basis, refusing to submit to the discipline of long-term contracts. Moreover, a lively informal sector flourished despite restrictive legislation. There was still space to earn a livelihood outside, or besides, wage employment. These ‘illegal spaces’ on the fringes of town not only made alternative livelihoods possible, but also gave rise to forms of cultural expression that were suppressed in the controlling environment of compounds and beer halls. One could find African family life, shebeens, dagga, prostitution, and dances which attracted thousands of workers each weekend.

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58 Marks, The Ambiguities of Dependence, 85.
Throughout much of the twentieth century, local and central authorities worked hard to eliminate such opportunities. Women especially bore the brunt of measures to prevent the formation of a stable working class with an independent proletarian culture and alternative earning opportunities. This is because women symbolised the emergence of a stable urban African population, but also because their earnings enabled this urban residence. These attempts at rooting out independent livelihoods were couched in a language of order, crime, and vagrancy. The Mayor called these uncontrolled spaces the ‘meanest quarters’ and in Town Council Minutes or government reports discussions of loafing or vagrancy, of not being in stable employment, merged seamlessly into issues of delinquency.

The economic depression of the early 1930s did not make it any easier to keep the city free of ‘loafers’. Many who had been evicted from white farms were now jobless in the city. Moreover, the informal settlements were mostly located beyond the municipality’s boundaries, but in 1932 eight peri-urban areas were included in the Borough of Durban. This allowed the Corporation to expand its drive to eliminate the informal sector to those areas where it was most lively. African women and families eked out a living in these areas, which was reflected in the sex ratios of the African population. In 1951, the Old Borough (Durban before the inclusion of these ‘Added Areas’, i.e. the inner city and the closest white suburbs) had 440 African men for every hundred African women, while the Added Areas had only 138 African men for every hundred African women.

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23. Also, white Durbanites regularly complained about illicit brewing and the amount of Africans it draws to uMkhumbane in particular: DAR, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/167-168, file 19L, part I-V.
hundred women. Thus, comparatively more women and families lived in these peri-urban areas. These uncontrolled spaces continued to survive despite all attempts to stamp them out, but the life of the urban poor was often one of extreme hardship. While it is true that Africans had some agency and managed to build relatively independent livelihoods, they did this in the context of a repressive society and enduring poverty. Moreover, low wages, no job security, no social security, and limited avenues for investment made African workers very vulnerable. Some bad luck was all one needed to become destitute. Health infrastructure that was accessible for Africans was also limited and ill-health was a major problem.

During the depression liberal anthropologists and economists started researching urban poverty among Africans. Gary Minkley argues that this was significant, because: “[f]ocusing on poverty implied an acceptance that black people had a certain permanence in the city and that their needs would have to be dealt with there; focusing on influx implied that the ‘problem’ was transitory and that it might be repatriated to the rural areas.” Ellen Hellmann wrote about female beer-brewers in an inner-city slum yard in Johannesburg, about how they dealt with the risks of arrest and how they stabilised their income by extending credit and thus nurturing a group of regular customers. Her work also illustrated how expensive urban life was for Africans who were

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69 The 1942 Smit Report noted insanitary living conditions and high incidences of ill-health among urban Africans, see: SAB, GG, vol. 1574, file 50/1698, “Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Social, Health and Economic Conditions of Urban Natives.” Thirteen years earlier, however, Commissioner De Waal thought that Africans at the Point “all looked clean, healthy and well nourished.” It is not so much that the situation changed so dramatically during the 1930s, though it probably did deteriorate, but rather that De Waal did not seem to take the plight of African workers very seriously. He did not consider urban Africans to have any legitimate grievances. DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1146, file 323, part I, Report by Justice De Waal, 13 September 1929.
paid as if they had access to Reserve land and cattle. This is why women had to brew, although it was illegal.71

The 1940s and 1950s

uMkhumbane, also known as Cato Manor, was one of the main centres of African life, culture, and politics throughout the 1940s and 1950s. It had been a centre of Indian market-gardening, but as African immigration increased, especially during the Second World War, Indian landlords started renting makeshift shacks to Africans in need of housing. Indians were the shopkeepers, bus operators, and landlords.72 In this sprawling settlement within walking distance of the city, Africans successfully resisted attempts to force workers into hostels or formal townships and non-workers out of the city.73 uMkhumbane was often the first point of contact for rural Africans coming to Durban.74 It was where people could stay to visit their relatives or look for a job without having to go through the Native Affairs bureaucracy.75

For entrepreneurs it was also a haven beyond the grasp of a bureaucracy bent on restricting African independent businesses as an alternative to wage labour. There were cooperative shack shops, shebeens, dagga sellers, artisanal craft producers, hawkers, and even people selling stolen and forged passes. These gave the area a bad reputation in the eyes of the authorities, white rate-payers, and Christian or traditionalist Africans who, within their own

72 Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, 57.
73 Many authors who have described these struggles over ‘illegal’ space in African cities have been influenced by Frederick Cooper’s introduction to The Struggle for the City: “Urban Space, Industrial Time, and Wage Labor in Africa,” in The Struggle for the City: Migrant Labor, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa, ed. Frederick Cooper (Beverley Hills: SAGE Publications, 1983), 7-50.
74 Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (London: Longman, 1983), 149.
75 Africans from nearby Reserves would frequently come to stay with a family member at uMkhumbane while they were looking for a job. Mphiwa Buxton Mbatha, “Migrant Labour and its Effects on Tribal and Family Life among the Nyuswa of Botha's Hill” (M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1960), 129.
paradigm, treasured the idea of African workers as sober, honest, and conscientious labourers.76 Discussions of illegal settlements used the same discourse of crime, order, and ‘undesirable elements’ as the debate on vagrancy.77 In the 1943 Town Council Minutes, the building of shacks appeared under the telling header ‘Alleged increase of crime in Durban: Unauthorised erection of shacks’. The Councillors agreed that influx controls were not stringent enough and that ‘undesirable natives’ were thus encouraged to flock to the city and engage in activities which “to them are remunerative but are in many cases undesirable from every social and moral point of view.”78 However, Africans did not just come to Cato Manor because less than absolute controls over influx allowed them to. Most shack dwellers were already living in the city before they moved there and many newcomers had been evicted from farms or were otherwise unable to continue making a living in the countryside.79

In the late-1940s, an urban African millenarian populism known as ‘New Africa’ originated in uMkhumbane. It was spread verbally and was continuously open to change and redefinition. Some of the characteristics of this idea of a ‘New Africa’, which uMkhumbane came to symbolise, were an emphasis on the dignity of ordinary Africans, faith in the power of education, and a belief in an alternative and distinctly African society.80 This striving for a

78 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/1/1/70, Town Council Minutes, 5 November 1943.
manifestly African society incorporated an economic nationalism and a vibrant co-operative movement that exhorted African workers to spend their money with African entrepreneurs and to avoid commercial exploitation by white and Indian shopkeepers.81 Nevertheless, independent African traders did not always get the support of the co-operative movement, as some merely tried to get the biggest share of the pie and did not necessarily feel any obligations towards other Africans. However, by 1950 most co-operatives had become little more than profit-driven enterprises without any interest in transforming society.82 As such, these co-operatives were not that different from the ICU-run co-operatives of the 1920s.

More forceful industrial activism in the 1940s, led by Zulu Phungula, took place at the docks. Phungula was a militant togt worker from a farm in the iXopo district. Some one thousand togt workers elected him as their representative in 193983 and Hemson considered him to be “free of the politics of ambiguous deference characteristic of the petty bourgeoisie” and to have a proletarian outlook, despite being a migrant labourer.84 In the context of war-time inflation and a high work-load, Phungula became a particularly militant dock leader. Workers interviewed in the early 1980s and in 2009 still remembered him.85

Thus, on 9 May 1941, Phungula and two other togt stevedores aired their grievances at the Native Commissioner’s office. Because of high prices, workers had to spend all their money on food and had nothing left to send home; cost cutting measures also had smaller gangs doing

81 Ibid., 85-86.
84 Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm,” 156.
the same amount of work. They asked to double their daily wage to 8s. to make up for the rising prices and pace of work. They did not go on strike, but decided to make representations to their employers, who referred them to the authorities. The delegation invoked a language of paternalism: "we regard you as our father, and we have confidence in you as representing the Government."86 Unsurprisingly, the commissioner did not grant this increase, but stalled the matter by referring it to the Wage Board. The workers were not satisfied and more than 1,500 togt workers struck.87 The state responded by declaring stevedoring a controlled industry under the war regulations and by slightly increasing wages.88 The workers returned to work, but Phungula insisted that the employers had offered to pay 8s. if the Wage Board would set that rate. Once again, the employers had managed to shift the responsibility onto the government and made wage demands into a legal issue to be dealt with by the Wage Board: “[we are] of opinion [that] this is a Legal matter and must be dealt with by the Union Government.”89

Declaring stevedoring a controlled industry did not end strike action. The workers were very persistent and kept pushing for 8s. throughout 1942.90 They claimed that their employers had promised to pay this when the government legislated it. Thus, they concluded that the government denied them their raise. In a meeting with the Native Commissioner on 11 March, Phungula made a remarkable claim. Not only did he accuse the government of withholding their wage increase,
but when the Commissioner threatened to send the strikers home, he also asserted the urban status of these workers:91

The Government must show us where to go because our homes are here in Durban. It is clear that the Government does not sympathise with us. Is there not another Government to which we can go and which will listen to us more sympathetically. [sic]

Phungula was a smart man and recognised the link between their low pay and the idea that the families of migrant labourers continued to get subsistence from the homestead economy.

Although many of his colleagues had strong attachments to their land, he would not let this fact be used to depress wages. He recognised the relationship between cheap labour and commercial growth and even appropriated the state’s own paternalist language, making a radical demand for equal pay with white workers: “Our fathers have told us that we are now of the same family and now we want to get the same salaries as that family […].”92 Later that year, during a new strike in July, he stepped up the rhetoric and stated that the Native Commissioner “is our enemy who is causing us to hunger.”93 It also seems that he too had become enamoured by the co-operative movement. In February, the Native Commissioner noted that Phungula had been unsuccessfully trying to form a co-operative society and that he had been advising workers not to strike.94 It is possible that he still believed at this point that the government would allow them to earn 8s., as he

92 Ibid.
94 SAB, NTS, vol. 2222, file 416/280, part I, Native Commissioner to S.A.R. & H. System Manager, “Strike – Stevedoring Labourers,” 4 February 1942. In the mid-1940s, there was an African co-operative at Maydon Wharf and it is likely that some dock workers would have been involved in this. Hemson, “Dock Workers, Labour Circulation,” 108n64.
was said to be eagerly awaiting the arrival of Ivan Walker, the Controller of Industrial Manpower.\footnote{SAB, NTS, vol. 2222, file 416/280, part I, Statement by James Nabamvu, 2 February 1942.}

The government repressed these strikes, arrested Phungula,\footnote{SAB, NTS, vol. 2222, file 416/280, part I, Chief Native Commissioner to Secretary of Native Affairs, 10 August 1942.} and used African troops to replace striking workers. This angered unions around the country and especially the Cape Town Stevedoring and Dock Workers’ Union (CTSDWU) was outraged. It sent a delegation to establish a branch in Durban.\footnote{Some reactions of trade unions can be found in SAB, ARB, vol. 174, file COM 1/9/1, 10-13 August 1942.} The CTSDWU was a moderate reformist trade union, committed to working through constitutional channels. However, it did want to work with the more radical Phungula and convinced the local Department of Labour and employers that the representation of grievances through a reformist trade union would help avoid wildcat strikes. With the blessing of the Department of Labour, Phungula was released and appointed as organiser.\footnote{Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 333-334.} He established the Durban Stevedoring Union, which was enthusiastically accepted by the workers.\footnote{Nuttal, op. cit., 190.} However, the conditions for success were absent. The war measures left African workers and organisers powerless, especially after the Controller of Industrial Manpower froze stevedores’ wages for two years.\footnote{SAB, MVE, vol. 1200, file 538/159/1, “Meeting with the Durban Stevedores,” 20 November 1942.} The Dunlop strike in December further complicated the work of non-white unionists by provoking a strong counter attack from employers and the state. Phungula was one of the most influential African labour leaders and thus a logical target. In early 1943, he was banished from Durban for five years under the Urban Areas Act.\footnote{Nuttall, op. cit., 193.}
Meanwhile, the CPSA made a remarkable, but short-lived, resurgence. The alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union gave communists in South Africa a new-found respectability. The party, in line with the Comintern, dropped its ‘native republic’ strategy in favour of a call for a ‘popular front’ against fascism, which was much more acceptable to white authorities and commentators. With this change came a new leadership and a clean sheet. The new CPSA moved away from radical Africanist populism and was more interested in unionism. It had some successes in setting up inter-racial and non-white unions among Durban’s growing non-white work force, especially among Indian industrial workers. The popular front strategy, however, could put them at odds with the workers, for example when their support for the war effort precluded support for the dockers’ strike of July 1942.

Inter-racial unionism also proved hard to sustain. The Dunlop strike in late-1942 was particularly damaging to unity. African workers had demanded and gained a Wage Board investigation, which had set new wages far in excess of the old rates. The employer blamed Indian communists and unionists, as they did not believe that Africans could take such initiative. In retaliation, they slowly replaced Indian with African workers and just before Christmas they dismissed thirteen prominent unionists. The union was facing a dilemma. If they were to strike when the iron was hot, they would walk off the job just before the factory closed for the holidays. They did decide to strike and the break gave the company ample time to recruit African strike breakers with the assistance of the Marianhill Catholic Mission. The steady retrenchment of Indian workers and the use of African ‘scabs’ hurt inter-racial unity in the labour movement.

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104 Edwards, “Recollections,” 74-75.
The CPSA’s influence diminished quickly after the war, when the liberalisation for which they supported the war effort failed to materialise, the Cold War took shape, and growing racial tensions continued to complicate united action.\textsuperscript{105} Non-white unionism also never fully recovered from the Dunlop strike. African trade unions were described as “going fast asleep” by 1948, because of the continued applicability of emergency regulations and the organisational void left by the CPSA.\textsuperscript{106} But, in June an announcement at the S.A.R. & H. stirred up new conflict on the docks. New regulations, applicable to permanent shore workers, stipulated that workers who were fifteen minutes late would only be able to start work after a certain hour and that workers who were on leave in the rural areas for more than three months would be dismissed. On July 9, two thousand workers struck and demanded the retraction of these regulations.\textsuperscript{107} One could interpret this as a defence of migrant labour, protecting the right to go back at busy times in the agricultural cycle. However, this could also be seen as a reaction to an attempt of management to increase their control over the work rhythm. A newspaper article indeed stated that the strongest protest was against the rules regarding tardiness.\textsuperscript{108}

Phungula was as togt stevedore not part of this strike, but he was back in Durban after his five years in exile. In September 1948, he wrote a report on the economic conditions of Natal’s African workers as President of the newly-founded Dock Workers’ Union. In this report, he once again pointed out that many Africans could no longer live off the land and were thus dependent

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 82-83.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 109; “Native Dockers Stop Work in Durban,” \textit{Natal Witness}, 9 June 1948, 1.
\textsuperscript{108} KCAL, Bourquin papers, News clippings book 22, “2,000 Native Dockers Meet In Protest At Point,” unidentified newspaper, undated.
on wage labour. As such, workers brought their wives and children to the city, in the hope to earn enough together to survive. This destitution, he said, breeds crime:109

The wife brews (isiqata) with the mind to supplement wages and still there is not enough. It is not true that natives like isiqata. Women by doing so are trying to help their husbands. They all left their homes with the idea of helping each other. Here you are, the children burgle, they pick-pocket because they are starving and naked on account of the government and the employers.

The report demanded £1 5s. per day, £7 10s. per week, or £32 10s. per month. Phungula proposed a general strike to achieve this, but in a mass meeting at the Bantu Social Centre his idea was defeated by a more gradualist approach of making demands in a constitutional manner.110 For Hemson, there was a direct link between this defeat of class action and the anti-Indian riots that rocked Durban in January 1949: “The strategy of a general strike having been defeated, the African workers turned towards more nationalistic forms of action. Instead of class action the African workers turned against Indian people; both petty bourgeois shopkeepers and landowners, and Indian workers.”111

These riots, in which dock workers once again played a leading role, and their late but bloody suppression left 142 dead and more than a thousand wounded.112 Contemporary accounts mostly painted this as an unprovoked outburst of violence by a savage African mass.113 However, this riot was far from an uncontrollable eruption of barbarity. Just as in 1929, Africans were

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111 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 351.
112 Among the dead, there was only one white person. “Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Riots in Durban,” U.G. 36-'49, 5.
claiming a larger share of the pie in a city that excluded them and blocked their upward mobility. This time the target of the resentment was not the city and the government, but Indians. There is no easy explanation why Africans turned on Indians, but some useful suggestions have been made. Firstly, the relationship between African workers and the Indian petty bourgeoisie was often an exploitative and conflictual one. Through interactions with Indian shopkeepers, landlords, and bus operators Africans gained firsthand experience of their commercial exploitation. In competition for the better paying industrial jobs Indians usually gained the upper hand and in politics Indians also often received better treatment, even if they were still discriminated against. However, their relation was not purely exploitative, as Hemson points out: “Indian enterprise did enable African workers and their families to break out of the straightjacket of municipal control.” Indeed, Indian landlords, bus operators, and shopkeepers made it possible for African workers to escape the dreadful living conditions and many controls of the compounds and for families to evade influx controls.

Secondly, the African aspiring petty bourgeoisie often found their advancement blocked by Indian competition. Moreover, by 1949 the influx of wages that fuelled uMkhumbane’s informal redistributive economy dried up. Real wages were in decline and entry into the city, and thus into uMkhumbane, became more difficult. This resulted in fewer opportunities for African informal traders, as fewer workers had less money to spend. Additionally, after the victory of the National Party on the platform of ‘Apartheid’, some Africans traders expected that Indians would be deported and that trade in uMkhumbane would become their monopoly. The Afrikaner

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116 Webster, “The 1949 Durban ‘Riots’,” 43.  
117 Edwards, “Mkhumbane our Home,” 49.
plea for economic segregation, urging Afrikaners only to shop at Afrikaner businesses and these businesses to limit themselves to Afrikaner customers, appealed to African aspiring petty entrepreneurs and converged with the economic nationalism of ‘New Africa’. However, these expected commercial opportunities did not materialise. It was thus not surprising that one of the epicentres of the riots was in Cato Manor, where Indian and African entrepreneurs competed. There was, however, another factor that contributed to the riots. The widespread and open anti-Indian racism among whites combined with the initial inaction of the police during the first fighting and looting in the Grey Street area, a main commercial downtown hub with mostly Indian merchants, created the impression that Indians could be attacked without repercussions, that they were “licensed scapegoats,” as Edward Webster puts it.

The question remains as to why dock workers were at the centre of these riots. Living in compounds at the Point, they would have had limited interaction with Indian landlords and bus operators. As stevedores and shore workers, they did not compete for jobs with Indians, as dock work was effectively a Zulu monopoly. Many would, however, regularly visit uMkhumbane and would have been familiar with the grievances of those who lived there. Dock workers also lived in close proximity with traders active in the Bell Street Native Eating House, many of whom stayed in the Barracks. The few dock leaders of the 1930s and 1940s that are identified in the archives were concerned with the interests of these traders as well as the interests of the workers. Both Dick Mate and Amos Gumede complained about European and Indian competition for

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119 Webster, “The 1949 Durban ‘Riots’,” 41.
African traders in the compound as well as workers’ issues. Mate clearly had entrepreneurial ambitions himself, as he applied for a license to open a store in uMlazi even before the township was built.

Phungula espoused an economic nationalism similar to that of uMkhumbane’s African entrepreneurs. In fact, he may have lived in Cato Manor for some time, as at least one source indicates that he was not a compound-dweller. He also tried to establish a co-operative society earlier in the decade. In the aftermath of the 1949 riots his nationalism became most apparent. In his evidence to the Commission of Enquiry he complained that Indians and Coloureds got preferential treatment, while “[i]t is not their country, my Lord, neither of them has any claim to this country [...].” He also sent a letter to the Corporation asking it not to put municipal buses on the routes abandoned by Indian operators, so that African workers could buy buses and operate these routes. These riots were not just a form of displaced working class action. Some workers, like Mate and possibly Phungula, had entrepreneurial ambition and may have regarded Indian traders as competition. The next chapter will argue that such labourers were no exceptions.

Shortly after the riots, Phungula was once again banished from Durban, this time for ten years. This was his last documented political appearance. However, dock workers remained militant,

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121 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1054, file 269, part VIII, Dick Mate to Town Clerk, 6 August 1932; vol. 1/2/1/2, Minutes of the NAB, “Letter from A.P. Gumede,” 10 October 1934.
123 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 42, interview with Mr. Delwa, 18 November 1982.
125 DAR, 3/DBN, 4/1/3/1582, file 323B, part IV, Zulu Phungula to Town Clerk, 17 February 1949.
even without their leader.127 For Hemson, this was proof of the advanced nature of their consciousness.128

African entrepreneurs did benefit from the riots. They took over properties and businesses from Indians who fled Cato Manor. Many felt that they had achieved an important victory, that they had usurped an Indian area.129 However, few managed to continue their commercial advance into the 1950s. With wages in decline and entrance into the city increasingly difficult, the purchasing power of their clientele was under pressure. As people struggled to survive the populist ideal of ‘New Africa’, urging workers to support African traders, lost much of its appeal. Better capitalised Indian merchants were more competitive and African landlords proved as exploitative as their Indian predecessors.130 Moreover, while Africans had the upper-hand in uMkhumbane for a brief time, their challenge of the established order put the issue of informal settlements and unlicensed businesses on top of the official agenda. Despite considerable indecisiveness and infighting among different layers of government, uMkhumbane was cleared of its inhabitants less than a decade later. The opportunities for informal entrepreneurs disappeared with the settlement.

These shack areas had, however, concerned authorities even before the riots. They established the Broome Commission in 1947, which had to enquire into the issues of housing, health, welfare, and recreation for Africans and the responsibilities of the different levels of

129 Nuttall, op. cit., 309.
government.\textsuperscript{131} In appointing this commission, the authorities acknowledged that Durban had a housing problem due to the explosive growth of the urban African population during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{132} The Report found that the solution was not simply to send Africans back home and to enforce stricter influx controls. The great majority of shack dwellers were gainfully employed in the city and the city needed “readily available a reservoir of labour.”\textsuperscript{133}

According to the commission, the housing problem was linked to the problem of casual, migratory labour. A more stable labour force would mean less continuous flux and would make it easier to accommodate workers in permanent housing and to control and discipline the labour force. The stabilisation of labour was thus directly related to the housing crisis and the crisis of control. Some employers already offered incentives for more stable employment through pay increments for continuous service and the introduction of unpaid leave and sick leave.\textsuperscript{134} This concern with labour stabilisation tapped into a liberal discourse of urban poverty that appeared in the 1930s. The focus on poverty continued into the 1950s with poverty datum surveys and scholarship exploring the links between poverty, social unrest, and ‘moral collapse’.\textsuperscript{135}

The least stable of all labourers were \textit{togi} dock workers, who were the only substantial group of casual workers left in the city. Attempts at decasualising dock labour had been taking place since the mid-1930s, when the S.A.R. & H. hired 137 permanent dock workers to replace striking casuals.\textsuperscript{136} Employers undertook further attempts throughout the 1940s and 1950s.\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Togt

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 28-29.
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labour might have been useful to shift the burden of unpredictability onto the labourers, but it was comparatively expensive, strike-prone, and difficult to discipline. Several Wage Determinations and cost of living adjustments throughout the 1930s and 1940s also made togt less interesting for the workers by limiting the pay differential between daily and monthly paid labour. There were even suggestions that some form of worker organisation could be useful in the prevention and quick solution of strikes. The Natal Witness noted that there was otherwise “no organisation of any sort with which employers can bargain and which could put forward reasons for the labourers' actions.”

Workers had mixed reactions to these changes in the work regime. Some welcomed it, as “[t]here were days when we did not work because there was no work for us although our wish was that we should work daily.” The majority of the former dock workers interviewed for this research, who mostly started on the docks in the 1950s, worked as permanent labourers for most of their career. Many appreciated the security this offered and talked about permanent labour as an opportunity you got if you were strong and willing to commit to hard work. On the other hand, in the early 1950s stevedoring companies stressed that they were willing to work with a decasualised labour force, but that the workers were unwilling to let go of togt. Indeed, in 1956

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138 Togt workers had to work sixteen days per month at official rates to earn the same as monthly workers in 1937, but by 1941 they had to work twenty-six days to do so. However, togt workers were often paid more than the official rates. DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/1/1/67, Town Council Minutes, 10 November 1941.
139 “Nine Ships Lying Idle In Durban Harbour,” Natal Witness, 2 April 1959, 1.
140 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 45, interview with Absolom Ngema, 17 November 1982.
141 Interviews with Lunguza Mbelu, uMbumbulu, 14 June 2009; Libho Qoza, Upper uMkomaas, 15 June 2009.
142 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/2/11/10, Native Administration Committee Minutes, 14 April 1950.
five hundred labourers went on strike after the introduction of monthly contracts.143 Numerous interviewees also preferred *togt*.144

By the end of the 1950s decasualisation was a fact, but before that could happen, Durban’s harbour went through another wave of militancy. The second half of the 1950s was characterised by regular conflict, despite a lack of recognisable leadership or organisation. Moreover, in 1957, stevedoring employers were given another reason to stabilise their labour force. They were already gradually hiring more permanent labour, but the National Party government was not happy with the fact that there was still a substantial group of casual workers living relatively freely in the middle of the city and wanted to move them to the outskirts.145

While officials and employers discussed the future of *togt* labour, the ANC called for a three day stay-at-home, from 14 to 16 April 1958, as part of the ‘pound-a-day’ campaign of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the Congress of the People.146 The response in Durban was mixed. The threat of eviction from the compounds can partly explain this limited success.147 Instead of striking, dock workers refused to work overtime. This was a useful tactic to put pressure on the employer without breaking the law.148 Two labour disruptions in short succession in early 1959, however, were the turning point that brought an end to casual labour on the Durban docks. In February and March, stevedores once again refused to work

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144 About a quarter worked as *togt* labourers, usually despite having been offered a permanent position.
147 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 361.
The employers reacted by establishing the Durban Stevedoring Labour Supply Company (DSLSC). They agreed not to compete for daily labour, but rather to establish a hiring monopoly for the DSLSC which would in turn supply labour to the companies. Workers were now hired by the week, receiving a weekly allowance with extra pay for the days that they actually worked. They were part of a labour pool.

Consequently, labourers lost the bargaining power that came from daily competition for their labour and lost the relative freedom of togt labour. The DSLSC was a model apartheid institution that changed the labour regime from one with limited control over the labourers to one where the company controlled the workers’ daily life in the compound, on the ship, and through increased rural recruitment even at home. The DSLSC remade labour relations in the Port of Durban. This study would have looked completely different if it dealt with the period after 1959 and therefore these strikes are the cut-off point for this work. The absence of substantial industrial action on the docks between 1959 and 1969 illustrates the magnitude of this intervention in the labour market.

Conclusion
Between their first strike in 1879 and the Durban strikes in 1973, Durban’s dock workers played an important role in African politics and the labour movement in Durban. Throughout the period covered in this dissertation, dockers were on the front lines of resistance and worried employers

and authorities. The histories of progressive organisations in Durban, such as the ICU, the CPSA, non-white trade unions, or co-operative societies, were intertwined with the activities of dock workers. However, the politics of these groups were not ‘purely’ working class. It was not only the ICU leadership that defended traders’ interests as much as workers’ interests, three identified dock leaders from the 1930s and 1940s did the same. This cannot just be seen as a betrayal of their workers’ constituency; working class politics and entrepreneurial interests cannot be separated that easily. The African lower middle class and unskilled labourers had a shared interest in fighting racial discrimination. Moreover, at least some dock workers also shared entrepreneurial interests and ambitions with the middle class, as will be argued in more detail in the next section. Thus, when dock leaders defended the interests of African traders, they defended the interest of some of their colleagues.
Section 2

Sihle’s day

It was around 5.20 a.m. that the first sunrays hit Sihle Mthembu’s face.¹ Mornings are still chilly, but the cold winter nights have now gone. Even in Durban’s mild climate sleeping outside can be uncomfortable in winter, especially when there is a strong wind coming from the ocean. Sihle slept under the veranda of storage shed M at the Point, where he sleeps most nights. In summer he may occasionally sleep on the beach, but the police are more likely to bother him there. In the past he has also slept in Albert Park, near Maydon Wharf. However, there too the police often harass or even arrest him when whites living along the Victoria Embankment complain about vagrants. On the docks they are usually afforded some license to sleep outside. When Sihle first came to Durban and started working on the docks, he lived in the compound of the African Associated Agency and Stevedoring for a few years. However, he did not want to continue as a permanent labourer, because then one cannot choose when and where to work. He also did not want to pay to stay at the Bell Street Barracks. Saving money by living under the veranda of shed M allows him to send more home.

Sihle did not sleep there alone. He never does, as that would make him an easy target for the ingudla gang or other unsavoury characters. Four to eight dock workers, depending on who is in town, meet here every night to keep each other company and spend the night in each other’s company. As they wake up, they fold their blankets, collect their possessions, and put them in their sacks. They hide bigger items behind the shed. Noone will notice that people slept there last.

¹ As with Sipho Dlamini, this account of a day in the life of Sihle Mthembu is entirely fictional. Sihle himself is also invented. This account is meant to illustrate what the life of a dock worker could have been like.
night. To wash up they go to one of the public washrooms at South Beach, just a few blocks away. There are no showers and the taps with cold water will have to do. They have to hurry: if the first whites on their morning stroll see them using these washrooms, they will complain to the police, which would result in more harassment.

His friends go to the Native Eating House to get a few slices of bread and a cup of tea, but Sihle decides to save his money and has some bread he had stashed away with a cup of tea from an Indian tearoom on Bell Street. Before hiring starts he makes a quick round of the most important stevedoring companies and talks to the izinduna. They tell him which ships are in the harbour this morning. Sihle has been a familiar face on the Durban docks for over ten years and the izinduna know and like him. They know he is a strong worker who does not complain; they also know he has experience and can teach the younger stevedores a few things. As such, he can choose where he wants to work, as most izinduna will be happy to take him on. Today, he wants to work on a ship carrying beans and other food stuffs. He still has some maize stashed away from a few days ago and with some beans he will have dinner for several more days. He also talks to the induna about a new young man he wants him to take on. Amos joined them last night at shed M. He had just arrived in Durban and had no other place to stay. Sihle told him to show up for hiring today and that he would get him a job.

Sihle gets hired on the ship he wanted and Amos is chosen for the same gang. Sihle will thus be able to look out for him on his first day. In a dangerous job like stevedoring, it is good to have somebody looking out for you, both for safety and in case you temporarily run low on money. By taking Amos under his wing, he also establishes a new friendship. After about twenty minutes the newly formed gangs make their way to their wharves. On the way there Sihle has a brief chat with Amos, who fears that this work may be too hard for him. Sihle tells him that his
body will hurt after the first day, but that he will get used to it and that there are few places in Durban where he can earn as much as here in the harbour. After all, is earning money not why they are here?

Soon the gang is hauling heavy crates full of tins. Sihle and the induna show Amos how the job goes. Amos quickly proves to be an eager and strong worker. The summer heat has not quite set in yet, but carrying these weighty crates in the steel hold still makes the workers sweat profusely. In no time, Sihle’s shirt is drenched with his sweat. He is not the only one and the poorly ventilated hold starts to smell like perspiration. However, Sihle is confident that his choice for such a heavy cargo will soon pay off. When handling food stuff, it is expected that some bags or crates will break. Then they can take the spilled food with them. As such, he can save his money and eat for free. The more he saves, the more money he can send back home to his wife, parents, and three children. By noon, no crates had been damaged yet. But, Sihle does not worry, as he has an ace up his sleeve.

As the workers get tired in the afternoon, chances that a crate will fall and brake increase, but Sihle does not want to take that chance. He does not want to pay for dinner tonight. A few hours into the afternoon shift, he sees an opportunity, when one crate is stacked somewhat poorly. He could either put it right, as he does not want anyone to get hurt, or give it an extra push to make it fall. He makes sure that there is nobody who could get crushed and he checks that there is no supervisor around. A quick powerful push sends the crate crashing to the floor. It breaks and a number of tins are dented and can no longer be sold. The induna probably knows exactly what happened, but turns a blind eye. Good workers like Sihle are hard to come by. The workers gather to clean up the mess and the dented tins disappear in the sacks of the workers. Amos was not really sure what was happening, so Sihle whispered to him to help himself to some free food.
Everything is expensive in the city and you have to take advantage of any chance to get something free.

Their shift ends at 5 p.m. This ship is not nearly finished yet and thus they will continue working on this one tomorrow. Sihle feels like having a beer, but instead he decides to save his money. He does go by Bell Street and finds that a friend is on duty as security guard at the Togt Barracks. The friend lets him in to use the showers; he just needs to make sure that the compound induna does not spot him. After an arduous day in a hot hold, it is nice to be able to take a real shower. It is a luxury that Sihle does not have every day. By the time he finishes, the sun has set. He decides not to present for overtime today, as his body is tired and his muscles ache. He needs some rest and some food. After those working in the evening shift go back to the ships, Sihle and his friends find themselves again on the veranda of shed M. There is still some activity at the far end of the shed, so they will have to keep at this side of the shed and not draw too much attention to themselves. However, they are hungry and Sihle fires up the little paraffin stove he made from an old paint tin. He has some samp he can boil and a few tins of beans; one of his friends pilfered a few tins of fish. They share their loot and make a satisfying meal out of it, which they also share with Amos.

It is a clear and cool night with a chilly wind coming from the ocean. Sihle takes his blanket and wraps himself in it. At least it is not raining. One of Sihle’s friends takes out some dagga and for the next few hours they will smoke together and talk about their day. They share rumours about izinduna, supervisors, and companies, and talk about life at home. They don’t stay up late, though. The next day, they need to be up early once more. Amos is only just getting to know the world at the docks, but he has already pilfered cargo. Likely, he will spend many nights here in the coming years, socialising over pilfered food and sharing dagga.
Chapter 5: One head of cattle named ‘salt’, another one named ‘beans’:
Livelihood strategies of dock workers in Durban in the 1950s

After discussing the socio-economic and political context of Durban and Natal in the first half of the twentieth century and after establishing the centrality of dock worker activism in African political and labour movements throughout this period, this dissertation now turns to the livelihood strategies of these workers in the 1950s. This chapter reconstructs the economic lives and decision making of individual workers and other members of their households, and it identifies trends and different strategies. Through this approach, we can begin to understand the peculiar mix of working class radicalism and the concern for the interests of African traders that was noted in the previous chapter. This method also allows us to move beyond the opposition between supposed migrant-conservatism and docker radicalism by considering the workers’ consciousness in the context of their more concrete material interests. This is not to suggest that livelihoods alone can explain their consciousness – gender, rural identities, collective action, and race are also discussed in this dissertation – but this chapter argues that it is an important part of what shaped their consciousness and politics.

Durban’s dock workers were more than ‘just’ labourers and their wage labour represented only one part of their livelihoods.1 Moreover, their livelihoods were not individual strategies; the decisions they made should be seen in the context of households in which they were not the only ones bringing in income, consuming, or making decisions. However, due to the nature of the sources, the focus is mostly on their decision-making. The focus on how they purposefully

combined different sources of income directs our attention to creative responses from the periphery to economic domination and the migrant labour system. Labour migration was a consequence of proletarianisation, but it was also a strategic decision people made and thought about, hence the focus on strategies. However, while this chapter argues that workers strategised and made thought-through choices, this happened in a context of severely restricted options: they could, for example, not choose whether or not to engage in labour migration.²

This chapter is mostly based on the sixty-five interviews with retired African dock workers conducted by Sibongo Dlamini in 2009. There are four sections in this chapter. The first section describes some of the commonalities that most, if not all, of the interviewees shared. Next, two clearly distinct strategies that emerged from the interviews are discussed. The third section offers a closer look at entrepreneurial strategies and how dock workers used their job in the port as a stepping-stone to starting their own business and becoming self-employed. Finally, there are some concluding remarks about how these findings relate to the literature on migrant labour. An appendix to this dissertation contains some brief life histories of interviewees that illustrate some of these main strategies.

**Some commonalities**

The first observation is that almost all interviewees were very clear about one thing: they never seriously considered settling in town. Indeed, all informants presently live in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. Doda Nxele expressed his feelings about the city as

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² Samir Amin reminds us of that: “A comparative costs and benefits analysis, conducted at the micro-economic level of the migrant, has no significance. In fact, it only gives the appearance of objective rationality to a ‘choice’ (that of the migrant) which in reality does not exist because, in the given system, he has no alternatives.” See: *Modern Migrations in Western Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).
follows: “it was only money that brought me there.”³ Dock workers even had a certain disdain for those few who did settle. At least three interviewees considered them stupid,⁴ Sofa Nkomo thought they were confused by city women,⁵ and Vela Mtolo said that “people laugh at you when you stay permanently in the city and call you umbhunguka.”⁶

Only a few interviewees did not dismiss the idea of becoming permanent city-dwellers out of hand. While Lihlo Budu was not himself interested in moving to the city, he did invest in a house in Durban for his children to use when they would come to school.⁷ On the other hand, Dumile Ndlovu kept the possibility open for a while, as faction fights were tearing his home area apart. However, he changed his mind when he found a new home near Port Shepstone.⁸ Lalani Dumakude lost interest when he experienced the cost of living in the city.⁹ In an interview in 1979, Morris Ndlovu said that he did not want to keep paying rent after his retirement.¹⁰

The fact that all interviewees, except one, had access to some land facilitated this strong rural orientation. This land, usually in the Reserves, could be very small, but “you can’t establish an umuzi without land”¹¹ and it is “where you make your home and raise your children.”¹² This

³ Interview with Doda Nxele, uMzinto, 11 July 2009.
⁵ Interview with Sofa Nkomo, Dumisa, 12 July 2009.
⁶ Interview with Vela Mtolo, Bulwer, 28 May 2009. Umbhunguka can be translated as ‘absconder’ and can be considered the isiZulu equivalent of itshipha. For a discussion of the concept of itshipha, see Philip and Iona Mayer, Townsmen or Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanization in a South African City (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1961), 6.
⁷ Interview with Lihlo Budu, Izingolweni, 29 June 2009. A house in Durban could be an important asset, which could earn rent, allow others in your family to stay in Durban, or serve as the basis for a small business. This theme also came up in the interviews with Lungani Xulu, Mkhunya, 13 July 2009; Mtukatshelwa Phewa, Izingolweni, 29 May 2009.
⁸ Interview with Dumile Ndlovu, Port Shepstone, 20 May 2009.
⁹ Interview with Lalani Dumakude, Impendle, 7 June 2009.
¹¹ Interview with Velile Goba, Riverside, 17 June 2009.
¹² Bongela Faku.
attachment to the land is a common theme in Southern African labour historiography. In the 1980s, William Beinart and Peter Delius offered valuable insights into the importance of the rural in the migrants’ consciousness. Patrick Harries and Dunbar Moodie, however, go one step further and argue that this rural attachment “implied resistance to proletarianization,” and a “distinct unwillingness to join an uprooted proletariat.” Moodie goes on to argue that “[p]easant proprietors resisted proletarianization as long as they had access to land and the means to work it, however dependent they were on the proceeds of wage labor.” These authors reacted to a radical and revisionist tradition in South African history that stressed the importance of class and asserted the working class status of African workers.

While it was valuable to bring the rural back into the picture and to challenge the idea of African workers as ‘pure’ proletarians, one should not discard the proletarian and urban elements in the lives of these workers. Part of the argument in this chapter and this dissertation is that while

16 Moodie, op. cit., 22.
their eventual goal was to return to the rural areas, these workers did interact with their urban environment through both commercial and working class strategies to achieve this goal. Only a minority confined themselves to the compound in an effort to have as little as possible to do with the city. A strong rural commitment does not have to exclude elements of working class consciousness and urban enterprise.18

While their rural attachment was strong, one has to remember Beinart’s warning that “[a]n interpretation of migrancy based on the memories of old men who have long settled back into rural life is bound to overstress the importance of rural links.”19 We should consider the possibility that urban life may have played a more important role in their lives than they attribute to it today, as a certain phase in their life. Indeed, while their life stories confirmed their commitment to rural life, it is also clear that many workers actively used the opportunities the urban economy offered during an extended period of their lives.

Most workers had remarkably similar early life-trajectories. They came to Durban in their late teens or early twenties; only Amos Sibaya and Velile Goba were twenty-seven and twenty-nine respectively.20 The interviewees gave three main reasons for coming to Durban: poverty and bad luck, becoming a man, and having goals to fulfil. Setbacks that brought young men to Durban included the passing away of parents, drought, eviction, faction fights, witchcraft, and poverty. Faction fights and the resulting need to rebuild their imizi could force people to leave their rural

20 Interviews with Amos Sibiya, eMpangeni, 10 June 2009; Velile Goba.
homes and earn money on the docks.\textsuperscript{21} Godidi Msomi replaced his sick father on the docks and Thoko Mlaba, the only woman interviewed, replaced her husband who died on the job. She cleaned for his employer at his old wage.\textsuperscript{22} For at least seven people their decision to come to the city was related to the loss of one or both parents.\textsuperscript{23} Some homesteads were stricken by witchcraft. Hlolomzi Ngcwangule was from a poor home and Sosha Masikane was an evicted labour tenant.\textsuperscript{24}

It did not have to be misfortune that brought workers to Durban. It was also something people came to expect from a young man. As Velile Goba puts it: “It is a culture where when a boy turns eighteen, he must go to work.” It was part of the process of becoming a man; it was a step most had to take before marrying, even if their fathers paid \textit{ilobolo}. A first trip to the city served as proof of a young man’s masculinity.\textsuperscript{25} If they were already married, they still had to work to establish their own \textit{umuzi}.\textsuperscript{26} Going to the city was just part of becoming independent: “I had to proceed my own way,” Sonke Zizi explained.\textsuperscript{27}

A third set of motivations for taking up wage labour in the city centres around the need to fulfil certain goals. In that sense, one could consider them target workers. Many of the dock workers interviewed noted that they came to the city to earn money for cattle, for establishing their \textit{umuzi}, for wiring their land, etcetera. These specific goals tended to be part of a greater plan

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Interviews with Zithulele Chemane, Siphofu, 9 July 2009; Dumile Ndlovu; Doda Nxele.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Interviews with Godidi Msomi, uMkomaas, 21 May 2009; Thoko Mlaba, New Hanover, 8 June 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Interviews with Zolile Khumalo, Newcastle, 16 May 2009; Thembinkosi Miya, iXopo, 26 May 2009; Mdu Jama, Izingolweni, 30 May 2009; Lunguza Mbelu, uMbumbulu, 14 June 2009; Nelson Ndaba, Nkwezela, 17 July 2009; Mtukatalwela Phewa; Bongela Faku.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Interviews with Xolani Ngema, Kranskop, 9 June 2009; Zandile Mbile, Highflats, 7 July 2009; Hlolomzi Ncwangula, Lusikisiki, 29 July 2009; Sosha Masikane, Mooi River, 23 October 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Mayer and Mayer, op. cit., 91.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Of forty interviewees who gave this information, twenty-six married after starting work on the docks and only fourteen before. Of those fourteen, eleven still needed to establish their \textit{umuzi} when they started dock work.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Interview with Sonke Zizi, Lusikisiki, 31 July 2009.
\end{itemize}
to establish *imizi* that were viable economic units. However, their life trajectories do not fit the picture of target workers, who would only work as long as is necessary to achieve their specific goals. Most were dependent on wage labour for daily survival and not just for establishing homesteads or buying cattle. In the nineteenth century it was true that many African workers would only work until they had enough money to buy *ilobolo* or a plough, but by the 1950s they were no longer able to withdraw their labour once they reached those goals. However, employers kept thinking of Africans as target worker and argued that higher wages would thus not result in an increased labour supply or increased efficiency. Instead, they thought that Africans would just reach their goals and leave the city more quickly.28

This may explain why a person might come to Durban to look for work, but one usually became a dock worker specifically because he had the right contacts for it. Only six interviewees did not end up on the docks through knowing people there and only three were recruited at home.29 This is in sharp contrast with the situation after 1959 when organised recruitment, often in cooperation with traditional authorities, became an important pillar of the labour regime in the port.30 Lunguza Mbelu took the advice of people he met in the beer hall on his first day in Durban and presented himself that same evening at 9pm for the night shift.31 Zithulele Chemane slept under the verandas in the Point area when he first arrived in Durban and met other dockers there. They told him where and when he could be hired. All others were referred by uncles, brothers-in-law, cousins, or other acquaintances that made arrangements for the new workers to be hired.

31 Lunguza Mbelu.
This pattern of recruitment through kinship and *abakhaya* networks characterised dock work, partly because hiring casual labourers was the responsibility of *izinduna* and a rather informal affair. For most interviewees this was their first urban job: only one had worked as a domestic for two years before the kitchen maid’s boyfriend arranged a job on the docks, where he earned significantly more.

Once they found a job in the port, their job stability was remarkable. In 1950, African workers in Durban remained in a job for eleven months on average. For most interviewees, however, dock work was their first and only job in the city. The average length of employment on the docks was twenty-five years, which illustrates how dependent many really were on urban wages. The reason for this unusual loyalty could be that when shipping was good and there were plenty of opportunities to work overtime and do double shifts, one could earn as much as £6 per week in the late 1950s. The African Associated Agency and Stevedoring estimated average

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32 Sack, op. cit., 146.
33 Interview with Gobile Mbhele, Springs, 14 July 2009. Domestic work earned notoriously low wages and was often done only as a first job. After that, young men would look for a job that earned ‘adult money’, as Magomazi Mjwara put it. KCAL, KCAV 346: Interview with Magomazi Mjwara by N.W. Mthembu for the Oral History Programme of the University of Natal, uMlazi, 6 July 1981.
35 The figures given for wages in these interviews are somewhat problematic. Firstly, this is rather detailed information to ask from informants for such a long time ago. However, most figures for basic weekly wages without overtime are within an acceptable range to assume that they are credible. Secondly, the difference between basic wage without overtime and potential earnings can be very large. The figure of £6 was offered by Dumile Ndlovu and might be somewhat exaggerated, but Khethekwakhe Zondo also mentioned potential earnings of £4.10s and more per week. Figures from the Department of Labour for the togt rates starting on 30 July 1956 indicate that one could earn 19s. 6d. working from 7.20 a.m. to 9 p.m. With a special cargo allowance that would have been 20s. 6d. Earning £6 per week was thus possible, but only at a work pace that would be hard to sustain. After the April 1958 overtime-ban, these potential earning became even higher, according to the Natal Witness, with 14s. for a regular dayshift and 2s. per hour for overtime. This brought the potential daily earnings to 22s. before extra allowances. SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part 1, “Notes on Meeting with Employers in the Stevedoring Industry Held,” 15 August 1956; “Durban Stevedores Back To Work: Dispute Is Settled,” *Natal Witness*, 22 April 1958, 1.
monthly wages for togt stevedores in 1954 at £15. Very few uneducated African workers in Durban could ever hope for such earnings. A survey of employers indicated that less than five per cent of the African workforce in Durban earned more than £15 per month and that sixty per cent earned £10 or less. However, the participants in this survey were mostly the more generous employers. In the 1970s Gerald Sack noted a similarly low turnover among dock labourers in Durban.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that they did not have grievances. Twenty-eight interviewees were the first and the last dock worker in the family and only sixteen had a father, brother, uncle, or cousin who also worked on the docks at some point. Only one had a son who ended up working on the docks and even that was only for a short time. While dockers mostly owed their jobs to acquaintances who arranged for them to be hired, they did not do the same for their own sons. The work was too dangerous and too heavy. Lihlo Budu notes that this work was acceptable for him, because he was uneducated, but Cacile Khozane thought that “no one in my family should do such a hard job after having been to school.” Others shared this conviction. While they mostly looked back with pride on their working lives, they did not romanticise being a dock worker and wanted their children to be more economically mobile.

Many stressed the importance of education. These remarks were often a reflection on their own lack of education and some commented that they did not engage in industrial action or

36 SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part 1, untitled document, June 1954.
38 Sack, op. cit., 141.
39 Amos Sibiya.
40 Interviews with Cacile Khozana, Flagstaff, 8 August 2009; Velile Goba; Lihlo Bubu; Nelson Ndaba; Xhegu Ntozakhe.
41 Xhegu Ntozakhe sent his children to school to save them from such heavy and dangerous work and Velile Goba’s sons could not work on the docks because they were educated.
did not have a business because they were not schooled. Others apologised for not being able to answers certain questions because of their lack of education. Furthermore, according to Mabhalane Dlamini they found out that they were working more than in other ports, because the ‘educated people’ told them. Several authors have written about the importance African workers attached to education in a changing world where Reserve agriculture decreased in importance and tenants were increasingly being evicted from white-owned farms. Indeed, most interviewees made sure that their children went to school.

Land and livestock were also important in the livelihood strategies of these dock workers. Almost all of them had access to some land and attached great importance to that; most also invested in cattle and other livestock. “Ya, livestock is the life of a man and that is what I wanted to have when I came to Durban,” Mzenkosi Duma explains. Cattle were crucial to the reconstruction of a peasant world, a traditional ‘idyll’ based on pastoralism, peasant agriculture, and the traditional homestead or umuzi. Khetekwakhe Zondo remembers: “I just wanted to carry on with the old ways: having enough cattle for ploughing and continuing with agriculture, as you see now.” However, this peasant world was only sustainable through continued wage labour, as Khetekwakhe worked on the docks for fifty years of his life. These efforts to hold on to the

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42 Interviews with Doda Ndaweni, Gxuha, 28 June 2009; Bongela Faku; Lihlo Budu.
43 Interviews with Mzenkosi Duma, Mkhunya North, 13 November 2009; Xhegu Ntozakhe.
44 Interview with Mabhalane Dlamini, Hebuhebu, 22 October 2009.
46 Mzenkosi Duma.
47 Khetekwakhe Zondo.
traditional homestead took place in a context where the material base of the umuzi had been undermined and households had to adapt to new economic realities.

As mentioned in previous chapters, cattle also enabled workers to pay ilobolo and to marry. Traditionally this bride wealth would have been paid by their fathers, yet having access to cattle of one’s own did give youths some independence. This self-reliance of wage-earning sons combined with the frequent inability of fathers to provide ilobolo caused tensions within many imizi. Monica Wilson recognised these generational tensions as early as 1936, as she quotes an elder: “Formerly an umzi was under the thumb of the father, now it is under the thumb of the son. Things are bad now.”

The patriarchs, however, had an ace up their sleeve. As migrant labour became entrenched, ilobolo increased. Bride wealth ensured that elders could lay claim to a portion of the migrants’ wages in the form of ilobolo payments; it ensured redistribution towards the elder generation. Indeed, in several parts of Southern Africa high bride wealth has been linked to labour migration and in Zululand and Natal the legal maximum of ten heads of cattle plus one beast for the mother, as codified in the Natal Code of Native Law, became the norm rather than an upper limit. Elders insisted on payment of ilobolo in cattle, as this reinforced their authority: they were the ones with control over the grazing land. Women had interests in high bride wealth as well. They were often the ones with effective control over the homestead when men were away

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49 Beinart, The Political Economy of Pondoland.
and mothers would not accept their daughters and themselves being ‘devalued’ by low bride payments.\textsuperscript{51}

While cattle remained an important aspect of social life, these were not unproductive assets. The survival of the cattle economy in Zulu society (and elsewhere in Southern Africa) was not just a result of a ‘cattle complex’ or ‘innate traditionalism’. Livestock was also a productive asset and a rational investment; Mzo Mzongo’s “goal [...] was to have many cattle, breed them, and sell them.”\textsuperscript{52} Nhlanhla Sokhela agreed that economy is about land and cattle.\textsuperscript{53} For Zithulele Chemane having cattle symbolises his freedom; because of his livestock he is now free from having to engage in wage labour. Cattle are his capital, which is self-reproducing and can be sold to meet cash needs.\textsuperscript{54}

Building up a herd of cattle and smaller livestock did indeed allow people to retire.\textsuperscript{55} Once a herd reached a certain size and if one had access to sufficient land, breeding and selling cattle could become an independent enterprise. Mzwakhe Sosibo withdrew from wage labour in 1975 and is still living off breeding and selling the herd he built up as a dock worker. Some built up herds as big as eighty or even one hundred head of cattle.\textsuperscript{56} Mpho Jaca’s herd reached a size that allowed him to retire after his two daughters married and he received \textit{ilobolo} for them. These

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{52} Interview with Mzo Mzongo, Izingolweni North, 30 June 2009.
\textsuperscript{53} Interview with Nhlanhla Sokhela, Greytown, 17 May 2009.
\textsuperscript{54} Zithulele Chemane.
\textsuperscript{56} Interviews with Lihlo Shange, Sizamenjane, 20 October 2009; Mr. Sibiya, Dumile Sibiya’s son, eShowe, 18 November 2009.
\end{flushright}
workers also had limited other avenues at their disposal for investing money that was not needed for direct consumption, as they were barred from buying land in the Reserves or assets in town.57

But, cattle were expensive and the small wages of African labourers did not make it easy to come up with such sums.58 Therefore, most workers participated in stokvels or rotating credit associations (RCAs). Shirley Ardener defines an RCA as “[a]n association formed upon a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given, in whole or in part, to each contributor in rotation.”59 Such associations were a common phenomenon in cultures around the world and in many places they still are, though increased access to formal financial institutions has somewhat limited their appeal.60 In South Africa, they are best known as stokvels,61 though other names exist: gooi-gooi, mahodisana, kuholisana, and umgalelo.62

The most basic type of stokvel operates as follows: two individuals who have a close relationship and trust each other agree to contribute, at regular intervals, a certain amount of money to a fund. Alternately, one of the participants keeps the money, thus creating a ‘lean month, fat month’ pattern in their finances. In alternate months, these people can then make expenses that they would not be able to meet in a regular month. This club can be expanded by incorporating other trusted people and can grow to ten or fifteen members, but usually not more,

60 Clifford Geertz wrote about RCAs in different cultures, though his idea of a hierarchical progression to more formal Western-style banking and credit institutions is questionable: “The Rotating Credit Association: A ‘middle rung’ in development,” Economic Development and Cultural Change X (1962), 3: 241-263.
61 Alternative spellings are stokfel, stockvel, and stockvelt.
as trust disappears in larger groups. The strong relationship of trust and the social sanction of stokvels make ‘absconding’ on one’s payments a rare occurrence.

The social aspect of stokvels was also very important. The members did not only come together to make contributions, but also for entertainment. This function was probably the most pronounced in the stokvels of female urban beer-brewers. On Mondays they got together for two reasons: getting rid of the unsold beer from the weekend and to make contributions to a stokvel. Every Monday it took place at the home of another brewer who was the ‘owner’ of the stokvel for that week and received the contributions of the others. The owner provided beer, tea, lemonade, cake, etc. Visitors were also welcome and paid a 6d. entrance fee. When these associations came into existence in South Africa is not entirely clear, but the interviewees for Hilda Kuper and Selma Kaplan’s study in 1944 could remember these being around when they were children. Thus, stokvels must have been in existence at least since the early twentieth or late nineteenth century.

The advantage of these RCAs was that they allowed people to save in the face of immediate pressures to spend their limited cash resources on daily needs. One informant of Kuper and Kaplan explained this as follows: “The contribution is not much and I would spend it in any case on nothing. This way I put it away until it is my turn to be on and then I can really buy something with it.” The social character of these associations enforced a saving-discipline: there was social pressure to make your weekly or monthly contribution that was absent when

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63 Ibid., 296.
64 Ibid., 295.
68 Kuper and Kaplan, op. cit., 183.
saving at the post-office or a bank. Stokvels were also a source of solidarity and reciprocity, as they moulded relationships of trust. Loshini Moodley and Grietje Verhoef mention having a social support system as an important reason to join these organisations.

Stokvels were ideal for enabling large expenses, such as the purchase of cattle. But, cattle were not the only mainstay of the rural economy. While Reserve agriculture did not persist as well as the livestock economy, it did certainly not disappear. The dockers’ wives planted crops, even if the yields were not always very good. Some women sold some of their produce, others bartered, and many did not grow enough to do either. The more commercial women sold on the markets in Pietermaritzburg and other towns. They used these proceeds for other consumption needs and for the purchase of inputs, including seeds, fertilisers, and wire for fencing the land. By giving women access to a source of income independent from men, these sales provided them with a certain financial independence.

Direct consumption and supplementing meagre wages were, however, the most important reason for planting. Despite often poor returns of their women’s and children’s hard labour, the importance of this produce should not be underestimated. As Dumile Ndlovu mentioned: “it was important because my wife was not a lazy woman; by committing herself to garden labour, we could save a lot on spending and she sold a little bit of vegetables from that garden.” By refusing to give up on the poor Reserve soils, these women fought complete dependence on their

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70 Moodley, op. cit., 362; Verhoef, op. cit., 9, 20.
71 Interviews with Bhekinkosi Zimu, Elandskop, 22 October 2009; Sofa Nkomo; Sosha Masikane.
husband’s insecure and insufficient wages. Even if it were only a little bit, all the food that they could grow would not have to be bought. How much of their consumption needs it covered varied, but many insisted that it helped. Indeed, dock workers’ wages were subsidised by Reserve production, as Harold Wolpe and Martin Legassick famously argued.

While many left the decisions regarding land use to their wives or mothers – though others insisted that “no women could make decisions” – they often stressed their own role when it came to investment in land. That many men emphasised their agency in investment might be because this required money and they were usually the ones bringing in the cash. By far the most widespread measure to improve the land was fencing it, so that the livestock could not damage the crops. The second most popular investment was obtaining a generator and hoses for watering the land. Some of those generators were stolen from the wharves. Other ways of investing in agriculture were buying manure and seeds or getting experienced farmers to teach their wives.

Different strategies

Durban’s dock workers showed a strong commitment to their land and to returning to it, but how and when they retired from the city differed. This is where two clearly different strategies emerged. Some chose to maximise their earnings by working as much overtime and as many weekend shifts as possible and often combined this with a strategy of minimising their expenditures on consumption in order to be able to send as much money home as possible. Others opted for a more commercial-entrepreneurial route to maximise their returns. In fact, a majority

72 Only Phumla Nyathikazi, Mabhalane Dlamini, and Gampu Ngcamu did not attribute the returns from the land to their wives. They said their wives were lazy and for Nyathikazi and Ngcamu the land only started yielding good returns when they returned to their homes after retirement. Interviews with Phumla Nyathikazi, Lusikisiki, 1 August 2009; Gampu Ngcamu, Sinadini, 25 October 2009; Mabhalane Dlamini.
73 Wolpe, op. cit.; Legassick, op. cit.
74 Interview with Zodwa Tenza, Hlokozi, 15 November 2009.
75 Interviews with Zifo Mzizi, Underberg, 16 June 2009; Libho Qoza.
76 Interviews with Sihle Zungu, Highflats, 8 July 2009; Xolile Jaca, Mabheleni, 10 July 2009.
of interviewed dock workers had some small commercial enterprise on the side. This allowed them to maximise their earnings and sometimes entrepreneurialism even became their main source of income.

The first strategy relied on the fact that comparatively good money could be made on the docks when shipping was good and if one was willing and able to double up shifts. This was especially true in the 1950s, when there was a strong growth in tonnage handled in Durban. In 1958, the Assistant-Secretary of the Natal Employers’ Association (NEA) called stevedoring labour “incomparably the highest paid labour of its type in Durban [...].” Representing the employers, he had an ulterior motive for exaggerating how well dock labourers were paid. Stevedores were also better paid than shore workers. Yet, several interviews confirmed that pay on the docks was in fact comparatively good. Therefore, a number of dock workers elected to double up their shifts. There tended to be sufficient opportunities to work extra shifts if one wanted to. Of course, one could always slack off during the day shift in order to have enough energy for overtime. Not only did certain dockers not feel that they needed other sources of income, some of them were also not very confident in their abilities to successfully engage in a

77 Between 1950 and 1960 the tonnage handled in the port of Durban grew by fifty per cent. Some statistics can also be found in appendix. Trevor Jones, *The Port of Durban and the Durban Metropolitan Economy* (Durban: Economic Research Unit, University of Natal, 1997), 15.
79 Yet, in a Wage Board report on unskilled labour in Durban thirteen years earlier, weekly wages for permanent dockers were already similar to other workers before overtime and weekend pay and daily wages for *toig* stevedores were only second to four lonely builders. SAB, ARB, vol. 2976, file 1069/197, part 1, “Report to the Honourable Minister of Labour by the Wage Board. Unskilled Labour – Durban,” 1 June 1945.
80 Khetekwakhe Zondo; Dumile Ndlovu; Sihle Zungu; Gobile Mbhele.
81 Nhlanhla Sokhela. From Brock & Co’s response to a questionnaire by the Department of Labour it seems that in October 1956 on average about half of all stevedores on any given day worked overtime. SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part 1, “Questionnaire to Stevedoring Employers.”
commercial endeavour. Bongela Faku ‘just worked’ because he was not educated and for Lihlo Budu “business is for educated people.” Dock work was also just too heavy to combine with other activities.83

Doubling up shifts was usually combined with efforts to minimise expenditure. Permanent workers could typically stay in the company compound, where food and accommodation were free. Their consumption expenditures in the city could thus be kept to an absolute minimum, as Tunyawa Dlamini put it: “if I was given 'two bob' [2s.], that 'two bob' would last me till the end of next year. I wouldn't have bought anything with it.”84 Cash requirements for the family’s consumption needs in the rural areas could also be minimised by women trying to reap as much as possible from the poor soils. The difference living in a compound made can be deduced from household budget surveys. Invariably rent and food were the top items in African urban budgets, with rent accounting for up to forty per cent of expenditure.85 Some did not want to live in the compound or could not live there, because they were not permanent workers. They had to find other ways to live in Durban without using all of their wages.86

At least one worker lived in the compound even though he was not supposed to. Phumla Nyathikazi started as permanent worker and decided to work on a casual basis after six months. As he had lived in the compound, he had befriended the security guards who let him live there...

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83 Bongela Faku.
84 KCAL, KCAV 305: Interview with Tunyawa Dlamini by B.T.C. Mkhize for the Oral History Programme of the University of Natal, KwaMashu, 14 and 17 June 1981.
86 Twenty-four out of forty-eight interviewees who answered these questions did not live in a compound for at least some of their time in Durban. Of those twenty-four, seventeen never lived in a compound.
after he stopped working permanently. A much more common strategy was to live off pilfered food from the docks. Bags and tins of food regularly broke during loading and unloading. Loose food was thus always lying around and it was not really considered stealing to take it home.87

Popular and convenient food items to pilfer were flour, samp, beans, sugar, tinned fish, salt, and rice.88 These practices will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven. Sleeping under the verandas of sheds or in parks was a more extreme form of saving money; five respondents did this.89 This was an older practice of which the police were aware and with which they did not seriously interfere for most of the period under review.90 Not only those who supplemented their income by working more shifts tried to minimise their expenditure; dock workers with a little business used similar strategies.

About six out of ten interviewees had some sort of business on the side. The most common and lucrative sector to branch out in was the commercial sector.91 This was also one of the few avenues for investment open to Africans. Some of these labourers ended up as relatively successful entrepreneurs, but they started with small-scale retailing and hawking. By far the most common activity that workers combined with dock labour was the retailing of consumption goods. There were three main categories of retailing in which they engaged: the selling of dagga in town and on the docks; selling cigarettes, matches, sweets, and fruit on the docks; and selling pilfered goods at home or in the townships.

87 Lungani Xulu.
88 Interviews with Gcinokwakhe Sobiso, Creighton, 18 June 2009; Doda Ndaweni; Lungani Xulu.
89 Interviews with Galo Mtololo, Izinolweni, 30 June 2009; Co Pityana, Mt. Frere, 28 July 2009; Nkomozethu Cikane, Lusikisiki, 4 August 2009; Zifo Mzizi; Zithulele Chemane.
90 For example: “This class of man – of whom there are numbers – daily come to the Park [Albert Park], obtain occasional work, just enough to subsist on and sleep in the Parks, Beach &c.” DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/99, file 19K, part I, Chief Constable William Alexander to Town Clerk, 20 April 1925.
91 Sara Berry came to the same conclusion among Yorùbá cocoa farmers, op. cit., 1-5.
The selling of cigarettes, sweets, etc., was the most accessible and least risky of these undertakings. Thoko Mlaba started retailing these things shortly after she arrived on the docks. She always heard people asking for these and decided to invest some of her wages. She sold these in the township, on the train to work, and on the job. The limited investment that was required made this a very popular means to supplement wages. This was the sort of penny capitalism that also existed on the gold fields, as mentioned by Harries.92 However, such commercial activities could take much time out of one’s day. A number of workers mentioned that between dock work and selling, they did not have much time to socialise.93

Moreover, the best times to sell these goods were when people were on the job and thus when the seller should also be working. Another good source of customers were the workers who did not get hired in the morning and were hanging around to see if a job would become available later in the day.94 Several dockers, therefore, entered into a commercial partnership with girlfriends in the city. These women could offer their labour and sell all day and the men could offer pilfered goods to sell and a client base of colleagues, izinduna, and supervisors. The interviews provided several successful examples of such collaborations. Two men took these girlfriends as second wives95 and another one gave his girlfriend the considerable sum of R400 when he retired from the city.96 Mtukatshelwa Phewa did not rely on a girlfriend for selling goods from the docks, but on his aunt. They lived together in a shack in Chesterville, an area of

92 Harries, op. cit., 113.
93 Interviews with Sicelo Mbokazi, Nhlakazu, 16 July 2009; Mtukatshelwa Phewa; Velile Goba; Lungani Xulu; Co Pityana.
94 In June 1936 the police requested that togt labourers staying in the municipal Bell Street barracks at the Point would refrain from hanging around at the corner of Bell and Prince Streets, as they inconvenienced the pedestrians going to the South Beach. Amos Gumede, the representative of the Bell Street barrack dwellers, pointed out that they were there in order to secure employment on the docks. DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/2/12/1/2, Minutes of the NAB, “Bell Street Togt Barracks,” 11 June 1936.
95 Godidi Msomi; Doda Ndaweni.
96 Interview with Mandla Xaba, Bulwer, 28 May 2009.
uMkhumbane, and his work on the docks enabled them to start a small tuck shop. These women may not have been part of the dock workers’ households in a way that is recognised by economists or anthropologists, but they did contribute to the livelihoods of these households and were an integral part of their reproduction.

Food, cigarettes, and sweets were not the only items in high demand. Nhlanhla Sokhela mentioned that ship crews used to ask him for *dagga*. He also sold it in hostels and compounds and he was hardly the only one selling it. At least ten men sold it and two were selling it even before they came to Durban. Like the beer-brewers, *dagga*-sellers did not look upon their business as a crime. Moreover, they often had *izinduna* and white supervisors among their customers. As such, this business was not only a source of income, but also provided them with valuable contacts that enabled other businesses or ensured access to jobs. One of the foremen was among Doda Nxele’s satisfied customers and looked the other way when Doda looted some of the cargo. Lungani Xulu used these connections to transport pilfered goods for his wife to sell, as the bus drivers could be paid in kind. A white supervisor and patron promoted Dumile Ndlovu to gangwayman and Zakhele Mthembu started working on the docks after one of his customers, a stevedoring *induna*, offered him the job. Selling *dagga*, however, remained his main source of income.

Some of the most active pilferers were *tgot* workers. Phumla Nyathikazi even quit his permanent position after six months to become a casual worker:

> You see Dlamis! In those six months, I had started stealing the cargo and had found the way of making money. There were no good chances for this if you worked permanently. If a ship with nice things is at a certain berth you can’t go and work on it, but if

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97 Cf. Durban Town Council’s submission to the Native Laws (Fagan) Commission: “the transgressors do not look upon the [liquor] traffic as a social crime.” DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/1/1/1/73, Council Minutes.

98 Interview with Zakhele Mthembu, Nhlavini, 3 November 2009.
you’re a casual worker, you present yourself for hiring at the company that deals with that ship.

Several others mentioned that they preferred casual labour for that reason. Being a \textit{toig} worker not only gave them the freedom to choose on which ship to work, but also when to work, allowing for flexibility in running other businesses.\textsuperscript{99} Not staying in a compound could thus also be a measure to evade tighter controls which could complicate their not-always-legal business.\textsuperscript{100} The advantage of a permanent job, on the other hand, was that it offered a degree of stability in the uncertain worlds of petty entrepreneurialism and shipping.\textsuperscript{101} All of the non-entrepreneurs interviewed worked permanently. Few workers remained casual involuntarily: if you were interested and strong enough, you could be hired permanently within days.\textsuperscript{102}

Dockers did not just conduct their business in Durban. Working in the port was their source of commercial opportunities, but invariably their eventual goal was to retire in the rural areas and to become independent from wage labour. Just as Keith Hart noted among Frafra migrants in Accra, they saw the way out of wage-dependence in small-scale commercial enterprise, exemplified by the success of others.\textsuperscript{103} Several dock workers did indeed mention being inspired by others’ successes.\textsuperscript{104} Of course, liberating oneself from wage-dependence only happened within the system of capitalist class relations, by becoming a small-scale capitalist. This

\textsuperscript{99} Mtukatshelwa Phewa; Mdu Jama; Sicelo Mbokazi; Co Pityana; Phumla Nyathikazi; Mzwakhe Sosibo.
\textsuperscript{100} Hemson thus correctly describes the refusal to move into the compounds as a form of hidden resistance, yet the high labour turnover he mentions as another form of covert resistance is not evidenced in these interviews, at least not in comparison with other African labourers in Durban: “In the Eye of the Storm: Dock-Workers in Durban,” in \textit{The People’s City: African Life in Twentieth-Century Durban}, ed. Paul Maylam and Iain Edwards (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996), 147.
\textsuperscript{102} Lunguza Mbelu; Libho Qoza.
\textsuperscript{104} Dumile Ndlovu; Co Pityana; Makhehle Gxokwana.
was not a retreat into a long-lost pre-capitalist world, but rather an act of embracing economic changes in order to escape being an underpaid wage labourer.\textsuperscript{105}

With the intention to eventually return there, a number of people diversified their enterprises into the rural areas. Their urban business ventures were in the end only the means to a rural goal. This had the dual advantage that they had a source of income in their home area when they retreated from the urban labour market and that they could operate in a less competitive rural environment. Sicelo Mbokazi mentioned the scarcity of stores in his area and Zifo Mzizi mentioned that before he opened his shop, people had to make long journeys into town.\textsuperscript{106} Ten interviewees mentioned that having a profitable rural business enabled them to retire early from dock work. Sipho Zondi had a chicken farm; Godidi Msomi, Mtukatshelwa Phewa, Zifo Mzizi, Galo Mtolo, Doda Nxele, and Co Pityana ran tearooms or stores; and Doda Ndaweni and Gugulethu Pityana sold produce from the land in which they had been able to invest. The men could, however, not take all the credit for these rural ventures. Just as girlfriends played an important role in commercial success in the city, enterprising wives were an important element in these successes. The role of the wives generally took two forms: selling fowls or produce from the land or selling the pilfered goods their husbands sent home.\textsuperscript{107} They usually did the former on their own initiative. Only Dumile Ndlovu’s wife had another business, making dresses with the

\textsuperscript{105} Cf. Bridget O’Laughlin’s remarks on rural livelihoods in Mozambique, “Proletarianisation, Agency and Changing Rural Livelihoods: Forced Labour and Resistance in Colonial Mozambique,” \textit{Journal of Southern African Studies} XXVIII (2002), 3: 520.\textsuperscript{106} On the other hand, the selling of sweets and cigarettes on the docks must have been very competitive considering the low entry barriers and the number of people doing it. The interviews did not ask for any trading results or earnings, as this would likely not have resulted in useful data. David Pentz notes in his research on informal trading in Durban in the 1990s that traders seldom had a good idea of what their earnings were. It would have been entirely impossible to get any reliable results from people who were engaged in trade fifty years ago. Pentz, “Informal Street Trading: A Case Study of Warwick Avenue, Durban” (M.Arch. thesis, University of Natal, 1992), 111.\textsuperscript{107} Wife selling produce and fowls: Nhlanhla Sokhela; Galo Mtolo; and Sihle Zungu. Selling pilfered goods: Mdu Jama; Lungani Xulu; Sicelo Mbokazi; Nkomozethu Cikane.
sewing machine he bought her. The position of these wives was often very similar to that of city women selling the goods dock workers pilfered in the townships. Both were dependent on dockers for their enterprises to be successful, but both also had some independence, as the men had little insight in the day-to-day running of these businesses.

All interviewees wanted to go back home; their goals were in the rural areas, not in Durban. They used two different strategies: a strategy of keeping their heads down, doubling shifts to maximise their earning, while minimising their consumption expenditures; or one that was much more entrepreneurial than most of the literature on labour migration in Southern Africa allows for. Dock work offered something for both groups: good wages and the opportunity to frequently engage in overtime and weekend work, on the one hand, and commercial opportunities through pilferage and the flexibility of tog, on the other. The former strategy, however, did not preclude a one-off deal. Gobile Mbhele once received a number of guns from a white supervisor to buy his silence and sold them, but did not make a career of it. Hlolomzi Ngcwangula too received the occasional share of loot from supervisors and izinduna, but never made a business out of it.108

The commercial route was not only more popular among dock workers, it also enabled these workers to become independent from wage labour more quickly. There is a clear congruence between having some business and retiring from the city early.109 Almost all of those without any business worked on the docks until old age.110 However, only seven of the twenty-eight who had a commercial strategy worked there more than thirty years, with more than half

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108 Hart also noted that many people in Accra were always ‘out for a quick buck’. Hart, “Income opportunities,” 72.
109 The difference between having a business and not having one was not always clear cut. Yet, the average career on the docks for twenty-seven unambiguous entrepreneurs was less than twenty years, while this was thirty-seven years for sixteen interviewees who had no commercial interests at all.
110 Sofa Nkomo retired after twenty years and Cacile Khozana after twenty-one.
retiring from wage labour within fifteen years (and one after as little as four years). Such short careers were very unusual in the 1950s, when early retirement on the land had become a myth. Wage labour was no longer a phase of life young men had to go through in order to be able to marry and establish their umuzi; it had become a lifelong reality.  

Many expressed that they retired after they achieved their aims: they were married, had their own umuzi, built their herds, improved their land, and schooled their children. In short, they achieved independence from wage labour. Investments in their land and herds, or in a business, secured some income and the big expenses of marrying, building an umuzi, and schooling their children were paid for. The importance of educating their children should not be underestimated, as many insisted that they schooled their children so that they would not have to be dock workers. However, they were not target workers; they were dependent on wage labour unless and until they managed to establish themselves as successful entrepreneurs or livestock farmers.  

Entrepreneurs  
This section discusses the petty accumulator side of dock workers’ livelihoods in more detail and compares this to similar tendencies elsewhere. It is important to note that the livelihoods of many of these interviewees are too complex to express in family budget analyses or in studies that focus only on their labour or their land. The idea of a normative umuzi with an absent male member who sends money home does not capture the more complex relationships between migrants and their rural wives, between enterprising township women and dock workers, or between the women in the rural areas and the townships. It is equally problematic to assume regular and

112 Sipho Gazu explains that he had accomplished his goals, as he had managed to educate his children. Interview with Sipho Gazu, iXopo, 27 May 2009.
‘normal’ patterns of income and expenditure. As Keith Hart noted for Frafra migrants in Accra: “‘one man, one job’ is a risky assumption.”¹¹³ Budget analyses make exactly these suppositions.¹¹⁴

There were no regular income and expenditure patterns for African workers in Durban, as they seldom stayed for an extensive time in one job. This unpredictability stemmed partly from the untenable idea that African labour was unskilled and thus easily replaceable. *Togt* workers had the added burden of daily insecurity of employment. Moreover, because wages would not cover an urban family life, labourers remained attached to their tenuous rural livelihoods as well and would sometimes leave a job when they were needed in the Reserve. Low wages encouraged people to find other sources of income, which were often highly irregular. The lack of social security meant that a little bad luck could easily change their cash needs, earning potential, and thus the strategies of a family or extended family.

In case of illness people had to be creative, which was illustrated by Madela Cebekulu in a meeting between officials, employers, and a deputation of *togt* labourers in 1941. He explained that he had not worked for a month because of ill-health and, when asked how he survived during that time, clarified: “I sent home for fowls and sold them in Durban. I used money that was over from my wages. I had eight lots of fowls but I did not know how much I made out of them. Sometimes there were fourteen to twenty fowls in a crate. I sometimes got £2.0.0. for a crate of

¹¹⁴ Of course, this was not coincidental, as these studies were mostly done by liberals who argued in favour of a more stabilised African proletariat. A requirement for this was a more predictable income that could actually cover the cost of raising a family in the city. Cf.: Hellmann, *Rooyiard*; Krige, op. cit.; O.P.F. Horwood, “Some Aspects of Urban African Employment in the Durban Area,” *Race Relations Journal* XXV (1958), 3-4: 19-34.
fowls.”¹¹⁵ Since many of these extra sources of income were insecure and irregular, workers often appreciated their wage employment as an “island of regularity and predictability in a sea of ephemeral opportunities,” as Hart argues.¹¹⁶

Historians of migrant labour in South Africa have often given scant attention to these small-scale entrepreneurs. While Moodie and Harries acknowledge the presence of part-time petty capitalists in mine compounds, they do not expand on this.¹¹⁷ However, historians did pay more attention to African enterprise in different contexts. Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien note the sheer number of commercial and other enterprises in Alexandra in the 1940s.¹¹⁸ In their excellent introduction, they also explain how urban property-ownership and entrepreneurialism was related to prior rural livelihoods. These propertied commercial elites of Alexandra had their origins in the prosperous sharecroppers and better-off labour tenants who were expelled from white farms because of the Natives Land Act. They liquidated their assets and used their practical skills – farms were often the only places where Africans could acquire skills – to invest in urban property and businesses.¹¹⁹

Iain Edwards also wrote about urban African entrepreneurs in uMkhumbane, “an entrepreneur’s paradise.”¹²⁰ These petty entrepreneurs might be more like the ones in this study than the better capitalised property-owners of Alexandra. They were often “not fully employed or unemployed” and constantly on the lookout to supplement their incomes with a new small

¹¹⁵ SAB, ARB, vol. 2854, file 1069/70, “Notes of Interview,” 9 May 1941; “Notes of Meeting held in Native Commissioner Office,” 27 May 1941.
¹¹⁷ Moodie, op. cit.; Harries, op. cit.
¹¹⁹ Ibid., 5.
business-venture.\textsuperscript{121} Other historians who wrote about African entrepreneurs have mostly studied female beer-brewers.\textsuperscript{122} Further discussions of African small-scale business have been mostly confined to literature on the ‘informal economy’ by development sociologists, economists, and anthropologists and tend to deal with a much later period.

As was the case with Yorùbá cocoa farmers in Nigeria, migrants in Accra, and porters in pre- or early-colonial East Africa, commercial ventures were the most common choice for Durban’s dock workers.\textsuperscript{123} Some of these workers later branched out into the taxi industry.\textsuperscript{124} The three most common forms of commercial activity – selling dagga; hawking cigarettes, matches, sweets, and fruits; and selling pilfered foodstuffs at home or in the townships – have been discussed, but there were also some less common businesses. Velile Goba and Mzo Mzongo grew chillies and peanuts at home and sold them in the city. Five others sold pilfered guns, but it was probably not a coincidence that all five came from areas that were plagued by faction fights. They sold them to people from their area for protection, yet at least one also sold them in town.\textsuperscript{125} There were also two money lenders\textsuperscript{126} and three chicken farmers.\textsuperscript{127} Mdu Jama was the only one who was in the transport business in the 1950s, as he repaired his father’s bakkie with his dock

\textsuperscript{124} Nhlanhla Sokhela; Mukatshelwa Phewa; Mr. Sibiya.
\textsuperscript{125} Godidi Msomi; Zithulele Chemane; Doda Nxele; Gobile Mbhele; Bhekinkosi Zimu.
\textsuperscript{126} Interviews with Zwelinjani Sithole, Nkumba, 20 October 2009; Gcinokwakhe Sobiso.
\textsuperscript{127} Interviews with Sipho Zondi, Pietermaritzburg, 7 May 2009; Nhlanhla Sokhela; Amos Sibiya.
wages. As one of the few people with a car in his area, he earned good money transporting goods. He supplemented these earnings by working weekends on the docks and by buying cow-heads in the city to sell at home. That women played a crucial role in many of these businesses will be argued in chapter eight.

Renting out rooms, which was common among Africans with some capital in uMkhumbane, was not a strategy that was popular among these dock workers. Newspapers wrote about the rack-renting in uMkhumbane in the late-1940s. This activity, in which both Indians and Africans were active, could bring in as much as £50 per month according to the ‘Natal Mercury’. Few of these dock workers owned property in Durban and those who did preferred to use it as a place for their children to stay. As such, a house or shack in Durban was a family asset, but not a source of income.

One of Hart’s Ghanaian informants talked about his time as an entrepreneur as “a time when he was free.” This research revealed very similar feelings about wage dependence. Being able to retire to the land and becoming independent from their urban job, was experienced as a liberation. It was freedom from hard physical labour, poor working conditions, compound regulations, and municipal bye-laws; it was an escape from an urban environment they did not enjoy and from abusive izinduna and supervisors. Being able to choose when and where to work and not to work permanently was also seen as a form of freedom. Mdu Jama and Mtukatshelwa Phewa, who cooperated in their business ventures, discussed the possibility of

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128 Edwards, “Mkhumbane our Home,” 197. This was also an important source of income for petty accumulators in Accra: Hart, “Informal Income Opportunities,” 71.
130 Sipho Gazu; Mtukatshelwa Phewa; Lihlo Budu; Mabhalane Dlamini.
132 E.g.: Zifo Mzizi; Zithulele Chemane.
working permanently, but agreed that the strict regulations that came with a contract and living in a compound would limit their freedom and ability to accumulate independently. Thus, they decided to remain casual workers.133

Living in a compound, however, did not have to impede one’s ambition to start a business. In fact, compounds were often hubs of legal and illegal commercial activity. Close to the Bell Street Togt Barracks was the municipal Native Eating House, a place where licensed African caterers and traders could rent stalls and do business.134 Apart from twenty-four caterers and ten butchers, there were also eleven general traders and four grocers.135 As authorities enforced segregation, only African traders were allowed to be active in these eating houses. An exception was made after the First World War, but it was quickly rescinded following protests from the African stall-holders. The minutes of the Native Affairs and Police Committee read: “this Committee is of opinion that the principle of allowing a European to trade in the Native institutions is a wrong one [...]”136 In protesting the presence of a non-African trader in the Native Eating House, the stall-holders subscribed to this segregationist discourse and displayed an economic nationalism similar to the one that would characterise the ‘New Africa’ movement in the 1940s: “this is a Native and not a whitemans [sic] market.”137

The eating houses were under municipal control and thus not free from regulations concerning licensing, opening hours, etc. Even minor infractions unrelated to the business could result in revoked licenses: Mshokobezi Betwana was caught in the possession of liquor;

133 Mdu Jama.
134 Several interviewees mentioned that they sold cigarettes, sweets, etc. on the docks. However, none of them had formal stalls to do their business.
136 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1051, file 269, part II, correspondence between the manager of the MNAD and the overseer of the Native Eating House in Bell Street, 15-16 May 1919; extract from the Minutes of the Native Affairs and Police Committee, 19 May 1919.
Alphineas Mbili did not close punctually; and Dubula Mngqai was in possession of *dagga*.

F.M. Xulu of the of the NNC protested that people going home for just fourteen days could lose their license, which limited their freedom to go back and forth. Opening hours were another object of complaints for both traders and workers who wanted to have a chance to eat something after a long day of work with overtime.

Trade was not only taking place in the municipal compounds and eating houses. Africans were running businesses in company compounds as well. Nkenkwane and Joseph Sikosana, together with Hohlo Dhlamini, ran a catering business in the compound of the African Associated Agency. Sack noted the existence of similar cooperative businesses in the 1970s in the S.A.R. & H. compound. They worked in groups of three, so that one could be on leave without jeopardising their ability to sell and guard the merchandise. Compounds were a good place to conduct business, as the consumers had limited alternatives. Such businesses were often not strictly speaking allowed, but tolerated. When compound managers occasionally cracked down on commercial activities they often faced the moral outrage of the workers. On the other hand,

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138 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1052, file 269, part III, extract from the Minutes of the Native Affairs and Police Committee, 20 April 1920; vol. 4/1/2/1053, file 269, part VII, Robinson and Catterall to Town Clerk, 12 May 1931; vol. 4/1/2/1054, file 269, part VIII, extract from the Minutes of the NAB, 1 October 1931.

139 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1052, file 269, part V, F.M. Xulu, Chairman of the Durban branch of the Natal Native Congress, to the MNAD, 27 September 1929.


141 In 1957 they ended up in court over a dispute about the proceeds: DAR, 2/DBN, vol. 2/1/8, Case 1187/57.

142 Sack, op. cit., 207.
some izinduna did not only tolerate brewing and trading, but organized brewing in their compound both to make a profit and to be able to control the extent of it.  

In its constant struggle to prevent the emergence of alternatives to wage labour for Africans, the Durban municipality limited the legal scope for African trade in the city. Few licenses were awarded to Africans and unlicensed trade was a major preoccupation for both the Inspector of Licenses and the MNAD throughout the period under discussion. Victoria Street, uMkhumbane, and the Point were important centres of such unlicensed trade. Yet, this illegal trade was not necessarily considered illegitimate by the workers. In a discussion of the informal sector in the 1970s – thus in a different context but still appropriate – Rob Davies wrote: “this illegality derives from legal institutions embodying the values of the dominant class and designed to serve their interests. These might not be shared by members of the informal sector, who would therefore regard such activities as legitimate.”

However, Davies’ argument that white authorities wanted to crush small-scale African enterprise to limit the competition for white capitalists does not seem valid here. In places like uMkhumbane or the African townships around Durban there were few if any white traders. Municipal native affairs officials preferred to limit trading with Africans to Africans. The MNAD’s own justification for cracking down on informal trade was that it constituted ‘unfair

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143 Moodie, op. cit., 94; A.W.G. Champion even accused compound managers of controlling the trade in illegal liquor, see: University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1438, Native Economic Commission, Minutes of Evidence & Memoranda, Box 6, 8259.

144 This concern about Africans who are not dependent on wage labour living in the city goes back to the nineteenth century and was described by Maynard Swanson in “The Rise of Multiracial Durban: Urban History and Race Policy in South Africa, 1830-1930” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1964), 406.


competition’ for licensed African traders and that ‘overtrading’ had to be prevented. They favoured a smaller group of traders with ‘high standards’ over many smaller traders in fierce competition with each other.\(^{147}\) This concern about overtrading was, however, also part of a wider concern with informal income opportunities that made African family life in the city and a degree of independence from wage labour possible. Such measures were strongly gendered. Women were not only most likely to be involved in these activities, brewing in particular, but the presence of women was also a direct challenge of the migrant labour system.\(^{148}\)

Commercial activities were indeed central to the livelihoods of many dock workers. While there were a good number who just doubled up shifts and sent as much money home as possible, many others diversified their economic activities.\(^{149}\) Indeed, those who did have a business often did not just have one. For example, Doda Nxele sold dagga in the city, guns in Msinga, and opened a tearoom. Sicelo Mbokazi had a tearoom and a chicken farm at home, and sold cigarettes and matches at work.\(^{150}\) These enterprises were never detached from their rural livelihoods. Zitha Xaba’s decision to name one head of cattle ‘salt’ and another one ‘beans’, after the goods he pilfered and sold, symbolised the link between his commercial business and the rural economy.\(^{151}\) Furthermore, investing in cattle did not exclude commercial activity, as the rearing and selling of cattle could be a rather profitable business in itself.\(^{152}\)

\(^{147}\) KCAL, PNAB, KCF 57, file NT1, Native Administration Committee report, 15 August 1956.
\(^{149}\) In this sense they behaved once again very similar to the Yorùbá farmers Berry writes about, op. cit., 4.
\(^{150}\) Doda Nxele; Sicelo Mbokazi.
\(^{151}\) Interview with Zitha Xaba, Lusikisiki, 2 August 2009.
\(^{152}\) Nhlanhla Sokhela; Mzo Mzongo; Sofa Nkomo; Gobile Mbhele; Nelson Ndaba; Xhegu Ntozakhe; Kotozi Memela.
While the movement from wage employment into self-employment has been relatively absent in the literature on South African labour, this is not the case in other parts of the continent. In fact, the strategies of these dock workers were remarkably similar to those of civil servants in Kenya who ‘straddled’ between employment and private enterprise, a notion introduced by Michael Cowen and Kabiru Kanyanjui. They too used the resources that their wage labour offered them, i.e. comparatively good wages, and invested these in small-scale businesses or agriculture.\textsuperscript{153} Moreover, while the access to cargo and the flexibility of togt certainly made dock work especially suitable for such a strategy, dockers were not the only African workers in Durban to move from wage employment into self-employment.\textsuperscript{154}

These employee-entrepreneurs also diversified their interests because colonial restrictions often kept them from making a significant career in their wage employment or in business alone.\textsuperscript{155} Other transport workers have been observed to make independent careers for themselves as well, for example: porters becoming traders or former truck drivers in Malawi running their own transport company.\textsuperscript{156} Wiseman Chijere Chirwa also mentions how labour migrants invested in commercial fishing on Lake Malawi, a business which did not require much labour and was thus less affected by migration. This did require a capital outlay for canoes and nets that could be


\textsuperscript{154} Philip Dlamini, a storekeeper in Stanger who was interviewed for the University of Natal’s Oral History Programme, started off his career working in a pharmacy in Durban. He sold chickens on the side and later hides. Eventually, he opened a store in 1953. KCAL, KCAV 374: Interview with Phillip Dlamini by Ernest N. Yengwa for the Oral History Programme of the University of Natal, Stanger, 11 September 1981.

\textsuperscript{155} Cowen and Shenton, loc. cit.

provided by migrant wages. Not only did migrant labour make such investments possible, Chirwa argues, it even had real developmental potential.157

Without making a judgement about Chirwa’s specific claim of economic development, it can be said that such an assertion would be inappropriate for the side-businesses of these dock workers. These were not productive investments. These businesses mostly sold goods that were sourced from the cities: they created little or no employment and lacked a substantial economic multiplier effect. As such, it is difficult to see the same potential for economic development here. Legassick even argued that such rural traders commercially exploited other rural Africans.158 This is a very harsh assessment and one should be conscious that the socio-economic difference between the rural African petty bourgeoisie and migrant labourers was not only very small, but that they were frequently “the same people at different but often closely juxtaposed periods of their lives,” as Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone point out.159

This informal African trade would later become known as the ‘informal sector’ and has since attracted significant scholarly attention.160 Scholars of South Africa only picked up on this literature relatively late.161 In 1981, John Argyle wrote a paper about informal meat sellers in

158 Legassick argues that “[f]or those blacks who were not a part of the migrant workforce, segregation encouraged activities of petty bourgeois social exploitation of, or social control over, their own people.” Legassick, op. cit., 7.
159 Marks and Rathbone, op. cit., 2.
Durban, all women, and concluded that this income mostly served to supplement other income, either from themselves or from other household members. Their aspirations were largely limited to survival and supplementing the insufficient earnings of their family, which was also noted by David Pentz in a study on street traders in the early 1990s. This informal sector was, and still is, largely dominated by women, both in the city and in the countryside. While there are certainly important similarities between the informal traders of the 1950s and the informal economy described in this later literature, there are also important differences. The ‘informal economy’ literature has a strong focus on survivalism. While there is often a strong celebration of the initiative of the African traders and the ease of entry, the focus is usually on self-exploitation in order to survive.

The dock workers in this research, however, were not ‘merely’ trying to survive. They traded from a relative position of strength that is absent in most of the informal economy literature. They had a job which paid comparatively well and were not trading to survive but rather to accumulate enough to retire from the city. In that respect, the literature on straddling might be a more appropriate comparison than that on the informal sector.

**Conclusion**

The relatively high wages on the docks, access to goods, and the flexibility either to work many extra shifts or to run a side-business gave these workers a certain agency, which is insufficiently acknowledged in the historiography on Southern African labour. Moodie does mention

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163 Pentz, op. cit., 111.
165 Potts, op. cit.
entrepreneurial activity in the compounds, but forgets about it on the next page. Harries has more attention for this small-scale entrepreneurialism, but also does very little with it. He mentions it a few times, but never really asks the question whether this could have had any impact on the livelihoods and consciousness of these miners.

Their job did enable dock workers to choose between different livelihood strategies. As a result, a good number of workers managed to withdraw their labour relatively early and to become independent from wages. However, it is important not to romanticise this agency. All this took place during a period of rural impoverishment, continuously reducing the options of African migrant workers and making alternatives to wage labour more precarious. Not only rural conditions were changing, the urban labour market was being transformed as well. Both Maynard Swanson and Keletso Atkins attributed the strong bargaining position of labourers in Durban largely to the togt system. In 1959, however, a stevedoring labour pool was established and casual labour was phased out after more than a century of struggle.

While the changed nature of work after 1959 certainly offered some advantages to the workers, it also closed off many of the opportunities that enabled this choice between different strategies. Monopoly hiring decreased workers’ bargaining power and increased controls over their movements, activities, and use of time limited the flexibility that dock work offered to engage in other enterprises. From the 1970s onwards containerisation also drastically reduced the

166 Moodie, op. cit.
167 Harries, op. cit.
170 In 1947, the Broome Commission still called Durban’s labour supply “one huge casual market,” but by 1969 only nineteen per cent of dock labourers, the last important groups of togt labourers, were casual. Edwards, “Mkumbane our Home,” 109; Horwood, ed., The Port of Durban, Natal Regional Survey, Volume 15 (Durban: University of Natal, Department of Economic, 1969), 78. Swanson’s PhD dissertation discusses the long struggle to increase control over Durban’s casual labourers, op. cit.
opportunities for pilferage. These changes made the vulnerability of the strategies discussed here painfully clear.

The economic lives of these workers and their households revolved around three spheres of production and consumption: the rural Reserves where women grew crops, sold produce and pilfered goods, and where cattle was raised; the docks where men earned wages and pilfered foodstuffs and goods; and the compounds and townships where both men and women, but not the same women as in the rural areas, ran small businesses. However, the third sphere did not always exist. One could of course argue that the rural sphere subsidised urban labour, as Wolpe and Legassick did. Even the small businesses in the townships, compounds, and Reserves could be seen as just another example of shifting the burden of social reproduction away from the employer and onto the household. Indeed, it has been argued about the informal economy that it subsidises cheap labour as much as the Reserve economy once did.

It is true that by staving off complete proletarianisation these labourers could be paid less than the cost of the reproduction of their labour. However, the relation between these three circuits of accumulation is more complex than such an interpretation allows for. While commercial enterprises, Reserve agriculture, and pastoralism did indeed make it possible for labourers to work so cheaply, this was not a one-directional subsidy. Dock labour also kept the rural homestead alive, as well as some female-headed households in the townships. Moreover, women in the townships could be instrumental in these commercial strategies, as were rural wives and mothers. As such, these two spheres were dependent on each other as well. None of these

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three spheres could survive independently from the others. These circuits were mutually dependent, but were also separate as physical distance made it impossible to make decisions in consultation for any one of these actors (dock workers, rural women, or township women) to exert significant control over what the others did in their absence.

Furthermore, to the extent that dockers managed to leave the labour market as a result of these strategies, they cannot be seen as mere victims of a system of ‘articulation of modes of production’\(^{173}\) in which the pre-capitalist economy is preserved in the Reserves so that it could subsidise migrant wages. The withdrawal of labour was a common form of covert resistance to enforced proletarianisation in Africa.\(^{174}\) These strategies of course constituted both a form of informal resistance and a subsidy to wages, as even those who did manage to withdraw their labour supplemented their wages for at least the time that they worked on the docks. Their alternative income gave them some independence and thus bargaining power, but that income depended on getting work on the docks. These workers went through a phase of intense self-exploitation before they could become independent entrepreneurs.

This chapter has started to explain the idiosyncratic mix of working class action and concern for the interests of small-scale African traders. With petty entrepreneurialism playing an important role in their livelihoods, it is not surprising that their political strategies reflected that. Nevertheless, this does not make them into an African petty bourgeoisie. As chapter nine will show, their interests as workers were as important to them. Chapter ten, the conclusion, will

\(^{173}\) Although it is commonly associated with Wolpe’s seminal 1972 article, this phrase did not appear in the actual piece. However, it was the title of the later collection by Wolpe of which it was also part. Wolpe, ed., *The Articulation of Modes of Production: Essays from Economy and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

further elaborate on the seeming contradiction between these different interests and the actions that were taken in defence of them. The next four chapters will further explore specific aspects of the livelihoods described here, using interviews, archival material, and secondary sources. Chapter six will look at how the rural and the urban interact in dock workers’ livelihoods and propose a new way to think about livelihoods and households. Chapters seven to nine will respectively look at pilferage and bribery as part of these strategies, gender, and industrial action. While this chapter mostly looked at individual workers, the following four will link these strategies to rural and gendered identities, collective work experiences, and industrial action.
Chapter 6: The urban and the rural: Land, labour, and households

Dock work was and is dangerous and arduous; common experiences of exploitation and insecurity, in combination with the gang system, created a sense of solidarity among workers. Living in Durban was not a pleasant experience either and exposed African migrant labourers directly to political oppression. However, their wage labour did not simply and straightforwardly define their identity or class position; it was only part of their livelihood. For most workers their home was in the countryside and they continued to make some income from the land. Moreover, many engaged in small-scale businesses to supplement their wages and maximise the return on their time in the city. These three parts of their livelihoods cannot be seen in isolation from each other.

The previous chapter looked at the entrepreneurial strategies of dock workers and here their urban and rural labour will be discussed. The first two sections engage with their experiences of wage labour in the city. First, the conditions in the workplace are considered. However, they did not just work in Durban. Living in the city under apartheid, and even before 1948, was a challenge in itself. The urban lives of African migrants were policed through a plethora of regulations and prohibitions. The second section looks at how dock workers dealt with these: where and how they lived, the cost of urban life, what they did in their free time. In the third section, the close connections between rural livelihoods and urban labour are examined. Most interviewees still had some subsistence from their land, which was worked by their wives or mothers, and they continued investment in agriculture and cattle. Becoming a rural umnumzane and returning to live on their land was the goal of most, but a stint of urban wage labour was no longer enough to achieve this.
Work conditions

There are lots of things pressing down on the workers at the docks. The work is heavy and very dangerous. The pay is low. Foreman [sic] swear at workers and treat them badly. And after a long day's work the men can't go home to rest.

Their families live far away in the countryside. So the workers go back to the compounds. The compounds are not like home. The beds are hard. There are no children playing. There are no women. And the food is bad.

But the dockworkers don't just sit and feel sorry for themselves. They are brave fighters. They have fought many times for the things all workers want - more money, shorter hours and a little bit of freedom.1

Being a dock worker in Durban was not easy, as this quote from Tina Sideris illustrates. Yet, their common experiences of danger and hard work engendered a solidarity rooted in the workplace.

Dock work was and is a dangerous job and injuries were a common occurrence on the wharves and in the holds. Many interviewees did not want their sons to work on the docks, as it was too hazardous.2 Zwelinjani Sithole forcibly retired in 1963 after he was “injured on duty” (I.O.D.) and Thoko Mlaba’s husband was killed on the job.3 Three leaders of the 1958 strike also died on the job a few years later.4 Hlolomzi Ngewangula stated that “sometimes people were dying. It is so dangerous there.”5 Sideris’ informants were equally aware of the dangers of working on the

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3 Interviews with Thoko Mlaba, New Hanover, 8 June 2009; Zwelinjani Sithole, Nkumba, 20 October 2009.
4 Interview with Zodwa Tenza, Hlokozi, 15 November 2009.
5 Hlolomzi Ngewangula.
docks and one even had the scars to prove it. Falling to his death, however, was what really scared Mr. Delwa.⁶

“It was the time when steamships used coal as fuel.” says Mr Delwa. “Our job was the adding of coal to the ships. We used to run on a plank carrying baskets full of coal. If you didn’t know that the plank was rotten and you walked on it, then you fell on the ground and died.”

Moses Mabhida of SACTU cited these dangers in 1958: the work was “constantly endangering the lives of employees.”⁷ Not only was the work dangerous, it was also heavy and arduous: “The vests we wore got old after one week of work because we sweated so much. Everyday [sic] we took off our vests. We had to squeeze out the water,” Mr. Mkhwanazi told Sideris.⁸ Workers helped each other when the work got too much for somebody and by looking out for each other’s safety, regardless of origins of the workers.⁹ Apart from the sheer physical strength required for loading and unloading by hand, the workers also had to deal with temperatures that went up to 50°C in the holds. Moreover, some cargoes, such as urea or sulphur, could cause skin complications and eye irritations. Protective clothing, goggles, etc. were not generally provided and workers would bring a bottle of milk with them to wash their eyes out several times during a shift. Strains and hernias were another common problem.¹⁰ Not even children escaped this harsh life, as William Beinart notes: “Child labourers from the Transkei were used for coal loading in the Durban docks in the early 1920s, running up steep gang planks with baskets of coal. These

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⁶ Quoted in Sideris, op. cit., 9.
⁸ Quoted in Sideris, op. cit., 10.
⁹ University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 53, interview with Mr. Zulu, no date.
‘Grimy Imps of the Wharfside’, some ‘mere picannins of 12’, were presented as ‘grubby but happy’ and their employment justified on the grounds of their ‘extraordinary agility’.”

However, no evidence was found of the use of juvenile labour in the 1950s.

Togt labourers could cope with the pace of work by taking a day off to recover when necessary, but when casual labour was phased out in 1959 their freedom to do so was curbed. However, there was seldom enough work for all togt labourers. David Hemson estimates that in 1940 they were employed on average for three to four days per week. During the Second World War unemployment for casual labourers was much lower: about three-quarters of S.A.R. & H.’s casual labour force had work on an average day and those who were not hired often found employment with another company. Nkomozethu Cikane and Co Pityana did not take the opportunity to become permanent labourers. The heaviness of dock labour scared them too much to make a full-time commitment. Zulu Phungula also remarked that he seldom worked overtime, because he was too tired after his shifts.

The exhausting day of dock workers started early. They would get up as early as 4.30 a.m. in order to be ready for hiring at 6 a.m. with S.A.R. & H., at 6.30 a.m. with the major stevedoring companies, or at 7 a.m. with Grindrod. Especially those workers who did not live in

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12 David Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock workers of Durban” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1979), 408.
15 Interviews with Co Pityana, Mt. Frere, 28 July 2009; Nkomozethu Cikane, Lusikisiki, 4 August 2009.
one of the harbour compounds would have to be up early to take a bus to town or walk.\textsuperscript{18} Those who did not find a job would hang around the Point area hoping that some jobs would become available later. This displeased white Durbanites, who were ‘inconvenienced’ by the presence of Africans congregating at the corner of Bell and Prince Streets, and the police.\textsuperscript{19}

Work started at 7 a.m. and continued till noon, when there was a one-hour break for lunch. At 1 p.m. work resumed and the workers would have no rest till 5 p.m. There was a two-hour dinner break before overtime started which lasted till 11 p.m., just six hours before those who had to take a bus needed to be up again.\textsuperscript{20} Overtime was voluntary, at least in theory. However, when stevedores refused to work overtime in April 1958 the Durban Stevedores’ Association (DSA) wanted to evict them from the company compounds.\textsuperscript{21} Dock workers toiled at least nine, but often up to thirteen hours per day. Others, however, would only do overtime on the docks, taking advantage of the relatively good overtime pay and the fact that togt badges were rarely checked. They would work in town during the day and come to the docks when hiring for overtime took place.\textsuperscript{22} Others only worked weekends and went back home on Monday.\textsuperscript{23}

During the Second World War the work rhythm was even more extreme. A blackout to avoid air raids restricted the time at which work could be done by artificial light and the large number of ships, many of them involved in the war effort, made it impossible to abolish overtime.

\textsuperscript{19} DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/2/12/1/2, Minutes of the NAB, 11 June 1936. Similar ‘loitering’ in the dock area was observed in Tunis, see: M.A. Hermassi, “Sociologie du milieu docker,” Revue tunisienne de sciences sociales No. 3 (1966): 153-179.
\textsuperscript{20} SAB, ARB, vol. 174, file COM 1/9/1, “Notes of Meeting held at Durban with the Stevedores’ Association,” 3 August 1942.
\textsuperscript{22} SAB, ARB, vol. 174, file COM 1/9/1, “Notes of Meeting held at Durban with the Stevedores’ Association,” 3 August 1942.
\textsuperscript{23} Interview with Mdu Jama, Izingolweni, 30 May 2009.
Therefore, the dinner break was eliminated to make as much use of daylight as possible. Many workers were required to work continuously from 1 p.m. until 9 p.m., after having done five hours of work before noon. The blackout also caused another problem. When these workers returned to the compound after a long day of work all caterers in the Native Eating House were closed, as per the bye-laws. Rather than affording the workers a break, the bye-laws were amended to allow caterers to stay open longer. Work patterns would change after 1959 when around-the-clock operations were introduced in the Durban harbour.

The actual work was done in essentially the same way as anywhere else before containerisation. The work gang led by an intermediary, which in Durban was an induna, was central to dock labour. A white supervisor, in turn, was in charge of all the gangs on one ship. Most of the cargo handled in Durban was ‘break-bulk’, which was cargo transported in bags, boxes, drums, or just as individual items. The major exceptions were bulk cargoes like coal, oil, petroleum products, and grain. A gang of eight to sixteen stevedores would work in the hold. Unloading generally requires less manpower than loading. Break-bulk cargo would either be

24 SAB, ARB, vol. 174, file COM 1/9/1, “Notes of Meeting held at Durban with the Stevedores’ Association,” 3 August 1942.
25 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/1/1/1/68, Town Council Minutes, 7 August 1942; vol. 4/1/3/1354, file 269, part I, Director of Port and Shipping to Town Clerk, 20 July 1942.
27 More on the work process internationally can be found in Anna Green, “The work process,” in Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, ed. Sam Davies et al. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 560-579.
30 Sideris, however, also mentioned gangs of three or six workers, op. cit., 1.
loaded onto nets by hand, when unloading, or taken from the nets and stacked in the hold in such a way that it was stable and the weight distributed evenly, otherwise the ship might capsize. This is where the experience and skills of the workers were important, despite employers’ insistence that stevedoring was unskilled labour. The use of unskilled and inexperienced labourers could lead to unsafely stacked goods, falling cargo, or poor weight distribution.

Two types of stevedores were not part of work gangs, but worked closely with them: the gangwaymen and winchmen. The winchmen handled the mechanical winches that pulled the cargoes in and out of the holds. If cranes rather than winches were used, these would be handled by whites. Gangwaymen coordinated the activities of the winchmen or crane drivers and of the gangs by means of recognised signals.\textsuperscript{32} This division of work was very similar to other ports.\textsuperscript{33} The gangwayman bore significant responsibility; incorrect timing or bad positioning could result in damage to the cargo or even injuries. On the shore-side, there were similar gangs of African labourers offloading the nets onto carts, railway carriages, or forklifts; or loading the goods from these onto the nets. Bulk cargoes were often loaded mechanically through bunkering facilities and grain elevators, though small amounts of coaling were still done manually into the 1950s. When finishing the unloading of bulk cargoes, however, there would always be a remainder that could only be removed by hand.\textsuperscript{34}

Despite the obvious value of skills and experience, employers both in Durban and around the world considered stevedores to be unskilled and as casual workers easily replaceable.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} South African Stevedores (SAS) had booklets explaining these signals in both isiZulu and English. “Gangway” Signaller Handbook (Durban: S.A. Stevedores Limited, Training Centre, [no date]); Ibhuku Loku Gangwela (Durban: S.A. Stevedores Limited, Training Centre, [no date]).


\textsuperscript{34} Ross-Watt, op. cit., 12.

\textsuperscript{35} Green, op. cit., 570.
Formal training was non-existent, even for winchmen and gangwaymen. Mr. Ngcobo, an **induna**, explained to Sideris how this learning by example worked:

I off-loaded goods from overseas to near the sheds. [You really carried them yourself?] No, I put them in a net and showed it to the workers. [You were the first one to work?] Yes. [Then they started working?] Then they started working. [Then you watched how they worked?] I watched them closely so that they don't mess up the work.

Common experiences of oppression, irregular and uncertain work opportunities, savage working conditions, and the use of gangs fostered certain forms of solidarity, though **izinduna** did not hire existing gangs as in some ports. They formed new gangs during hiring each morning. The dangers of the job also meant that workers had to look out for each other’s safety and cooperate. This solidarity often extended beyond the immediate gang, as wage differences between regular labourers, gangwaymen, and winchmen were small. In 1959 a stevedoring hand in Durban earned 14s. per day or £3 per week before overtime. A gangwayman or winchman would take home 16s. 6d. or £3 10s. and an **induna** would get 19s. or £5 5s. It was a wage increase for **izinduna** without a similar increase for other labourers that sparked the 1959 strikes. Clearly, the workers did not see differential status as a valid reason for differential pay. That this solidarity could also

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36 Ingpen, loc. cit.
37 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 44, interview with Mr. Ntshangase, 19 November 1982.
38 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 39, interview with Mr. Ngcobo, 23 September 1982.
extend to non-stevedores was made clear in the Wage Commission hearings in the 1970s, where
the better-paid stevedores stated that all dock workers should be paid the same.41

As elsewhere, the gang system and hiring through intermediaries partly explains the
predominance of one group of workers, in this case isiZulu speakers.42 The geographic location of
Durban is of course at least as important. Indeed, in the mid-1950s more than ninety percent of all
African dock workers were isiZulu speaking and among stevedores this predominance was even
greater, with many employers only hiring Zulu workers.43 With izinduna fulfilling the roles of
labour brokers, labourers, and supervisors at the same time they could be an instrument of social
control and discipline at the same time as an ally for the workers. In fact, they had to be both;
they had to exercise their authority over workers to get the job done and maintain their legitimacy
in the eyes of the employer, but to do that they also had to obtain the trust and respect of the
workers. As such, they would often allow some theft, absenteeism, and a certain amount of
slacking off. They would also hire people they knew, which often reinforced existing patterns of
employment and facilitated discipline.44 The advantage of hiring relatives and abakhaya is that
such relations come with a mutual sense of responsibility. Indeed, finding employment for people

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41 Grace Davie, “Strength in Numbers: The Durban Student Wages Commission, Dockworkers and the
42 Cf. Taplin, op. cit., 23-24; Aran MacKinnon mentions dock labour as one of the niches that isiZulu-
speakers dominated. A survey of stevedoring companies in Durban showed that four out of six only
employed Zulu-labour, except for coaling purposes; one other engaged about ninety-five per cent Zulu-
labour. The Railways had a more varied labour force. Aran Stuart MacKinnon, “Land, Labour and Cattle:
The Political Economy of Zululand, c. 1930-1950” (PhD diss., University of London, 1995), 216; SAB,
ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part 1, “Report on Conditions of Employment of Stevedoring Workers,”
August 1956.
on Conditions of Employment of Stevedoring Workers,” 2 May 1957. While the titles of the documents
only mention stevedoring workers, the questionnaire was also sent to the S.A.R. & H., which was
responsible for the quayside handling of the cargo.
you know was quite common on the docks. However, the *induna* still had to maintain his authority and often did so by using strong language.\(^45\)

*Izinduna* were themselves often involved in pilferage and turned a blind eye to thieving workers. They would also allow other minor breaches of discipline, such as slacking, which is important for workers to recuperate. That *izinduna* would tolerate certain actions came to be expected and was part of a set of mutually accepted unwritten rules that governed the workplace and the compound. Just like a compound *induna* on the mines faced moral outrage when he banned the sale of *vetkoek*, Durban’s dock workers started their 1929 beer boycott after a conflict about the brewing of *mahewu* in the compound. In 1956 workers at the Consolidated Stevedoring & Forwarding Agency struck when an *induna* disallowed an engagement ceremony that would have brought outsiders into the compound.\(^46\) The workers considered this to be a breach of the mutual expectations of *izinduna* and labourers.

While being a hard job, dock work did have its advantages and there was a certain pride in being *onyathi* or buffaloes, referring to their strength.\(^47\) Some, however, thought of the word *onyathi* as a derogatory term, pointing to the fact that they were “straight from the bush.”\(^48\) Dock labour also had some material rewards, as it was relatively well paid for unschooled African labourers in Durban. Indeed, in 1959 a stevedoring hand would be paid 14s. per day; very few

\(^{45}\) Interviews with Zifo Mzizi, Underberg, 16 June 2009; Mzo Mzongo.
Africans in Durban earned similar wages. However, workers in Durban, including stevedores, were paid significantly less than in other major cities. According to the Native Economic Commission, average weekly urban wages were only lower in Pretoria. Stevedores in Cape Town received 17s. per day and £4 5s. per week in 1959. Up until the early 1940s Durban’s stevedores took home 4s. per day, half of Cape Town’s 8s.

This cheapness of African labour in Durban was related to the overwhelming masculinity of Durban’s African labour force. Even domestic labour in Durban was mostly performed by young African males. Only the mines on the Witwatersrand had a higher masculinity ratio. Eighty-nine percent of Africans in Durban itself were male and sixty-eight percent in the suburban area. Durban was a city of migrating male workers. African populations in other major centres of employment were relatively more balanced and less migratory. Hemson labelled Durban a “historically a low wage area”; this reflected a very strong emphasis from Durban’s authorities on slowing down African urbanisation, as such guaranteeing a ‘Reserve subsidy’, and their relative success. The idea of such a subsidy is probably best explained in Harold Wolpe’s seminal 1972 article on ‘capitalism and cheap labour-power’, in which he argues that workers’ continued access to land in the Reserves allowed employers to pay labour below the cost of reproduction. The migration of women would have enabled permanent migration of the

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54 Harold Wolpe, “Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid,” Economy and Society 1 (1972), 4: 434.
household and thus the loss of this rural subsidy. That African labourers were still invested in their Reserve land in the 1930s would seem from Mrs. Makanya’s evidence in Durban to the 1930-2 Native Economic Commission: “The men leave the urban areas chiefly at ploughing time in larger numbers? – That is so.”

Mike Morris, in the somewhat different context of white farms, turned the argument of a rural subsidy on its head and argued that it was urban labour that guaranteed the reproduction of rural households and agricultural labour. There is indeed no doubt that urban wages kept rural households alive and allowed for the continuation of rural cultivation. As earlier chapters have shown, African agriculture was not productive enough to sustain rural households. Their incomes thus had to be supplemented by wages from migrants. While there was indeed a rural subsidy of urban wages, as households could not have reproduced labour relying just on the wages of African labourers, there was at the same time an urban subsidy of the rural homestead, as it could also not have reproduced itself without these wages. Indeed, by working in the city and investing their wages in cattle and the rural homestead, male migrants reproduced the homestead and its gendered and generational relations. Rather than the rural subsidising the urban or vice-versa, this should be seen as the household being reproduced by its members. However, the household is more than the rural homestead, as the urban worker and in some cases even the women selling pilfered goods in the township also took part in its reproduction.

The masculine and migratory nature of Durban’s workforce also goes a long way to explain the very casual nature of the labour market. Few workers stayed in the same job for a

55 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1438, Native Economic Commission, Minutes of Evidence & Memoranda, Box 6, 6312.
long time and they rather engaged in ‘job hopping’. Commissioner Broome, appointed in 1947 “to enquire into the legitimate needs and grievances of the Native population in the City of Durban in respect of housing, health, welfare and recreational facilities,” considered Durban’s labour supply to resemble one huge casual market. This mobility had both advantages and drawbacks for the labour force. On the one hand, labourers had little to lose by job hopping in search of the best conditions, much like togt labourers in the late nineteenth century used the flexibility and independence of casual labour for finding the best jobs. On the other hand, short term commitments mostly benefit the workers when there is a shortage of labour, as there was throughout much of the nineteenth century. Yet, by the middle of the twentieth century Durban had a permanent labour surplus, which Commissioner Broome wanted to preserve. Consequently, casual dock workers in 1940 worked on average only three or four days per week. In the 1950s up to six thousand workers would compete for only one thousand jobs. The transient nature of the labour force also made it difficult for Africans to acquire marketable skills and specialisations, but the discriminatory nature of the South African labour market meant that the potential reward for skills was limited anyway.

Disciplining casual labour remained a major problem for the employers, as the ‘sanction of the sack’ had limited effect. A casual worker had little to lose in a strike, except for a day’s

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pay.\textsuperscript{63} Even when all striking togt labourers were replaced, the outsourcing of hiring to izinduna meant that employers did not know enough about their workers to ensure that strikers would not just be rehired. It was therefore possible that the casual workers interviewed for this research could still be employed on the docks in the 1960s, although they were in theory all replaced in April 1959.\textsuperscript{64}

During the 1940s and 1950s, employers slowly came to realise the drawbacks of casual migrant labour and showed the first very cautious signs of interest in another, more stabilised labour regime.\textsuperscript{65} As early as 1937, the Mayor of Durban acknowledged that the instability of labour, the constant changing of jobs, was very inefficient. He pleaded for Labour Bureaux which could make sure that Africans were re-employed in jobs in which they had already acquired some skills.\textsuperscript{66} In 1950 the DSA, South African Conference Lines, and NEA told the Native Administration Committee that they would be willing to establish a labour pool, but that the workers were not willing to accept permanent positions.\textsuperscript{67} Later that decade, the Natal Regional Survey still concluded that the migratory labour system prevented Africans from acquiring skills or specialising themselves.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{63} The same was true in colonial Mombasa, as Frederick Cooper notes in \textit{On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 8.
\textsuperscript{65} Though there had been some earlier suggestions to eliminate or limit casual labour, this was never really discussed as a serious option before the 1940s. See: “Export Boycott,” \textit{Natal Witness}, 20 December 1919, 5; “Report of the Native Economic Commission, 1930-2,” U.G. 22-32, 80; Vivian Bickford-Smith, \textit{Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town} (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), 179.
\textsuperscript{66} DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/313, file 45, part VI, Mayor’s Minute, 1937.
\textsuperscript{67} DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/2/11/1/10, Native Administration Committee Minutes, 14 April 1950.
\textsuperscript{68} Brookes and Hurwitz, loc. cit.
These hesitant openings to the possibility of a stable, urbanised African working class cannot be seen in isolation from similar changes that were happening in the rest of the continent. The concerns were usually very similar: the inefficiency of migrant labour, strikes, disorder, and slum development. The lack of differentiation of the workforce facilitated solidarity between different groups of African workers. This classless unity was in evidence in uMkhumbane as much as it was in West or East African cities. A more stratified and stabilised African workforce could break up such solidarity. A range of official commissions exemplified this new thinking about African labour and urbanisation. The 1947-8 Broome Commission ascertained that while a reserve army of labour in the city was needed, a smaller and more stable labour force was also needed to deal with problems of urban housing and disorder. Commissioner Broome suggested a combination of strict influx controls to stem the constant immigration of potential labourers and state-funded housing and welfare programmes to sustain a surplus population in the city.

Earlier that decade the Smit Committee concluded that African urbanisation was a reality that could not be undone. The report also disagreed with the idea that migrant labourers could be paid less than urban labourers:

[...] the claim that the remuneration of the country dweller should be lower can only be sustained if it is considered equitable that industry should accept what would amount to a subsidy from the employee fortunate enough to possess private

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69 After the Second World War social and labour policies had become an object of international and multilateral scrutiny. The International Labour Organization, for example, agreed in 1947 that labour standards should also apply to the colonies. This new-found attention for labour and social policy in the colonies was reflected in a new body of scholarship on labour and urbanisation in Africa. Cooper, Decolonization and African Society: The labor question in French and British Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 361.
70 For an example from Mombasa, Kenya, see: Cooper, On the African Waterfront, 8, 74-76, 184.
71 Edwards, “Mkhumbane our Home,” 80; Cooper, Decolonization, 227.
resources, a frankly untenable position. There is the further difficulty that were differential wages fixed for townsmen and countrymen, married and single, employers would very naturally favour the 'unspoiled' newcomer from the country.

The Smit report advised that African trade unions be allowed to register and to recognise Africans as employees (albeit still with restricted rights), rather than ‘servants’. These official considerations of policy reforms were sparked by the urban war-time crisis caused by a large influx of Africans. Shortly after the war it seemed that at least one important change was made with the introduction of contribution-based unemployment insurance that – in theory – did not exclude Africans. This was unacceptable to many who refused to give up on the idea that Africans had free social security in the Reserves in the form of kin and land. Newspapers were flooded by accounts of Africans supposedly abusing unemployment insurance and inviting dismissal. Farmers were especially disgruntled, arguing that “one of the reasons they are short of labour is that Natives turn down offers of farm jobs and prefer to live in Durban on the dole as long as they can.” In reality, few Africans could enjoy the benefits of this jobseeker’s allowance and access was further restricted in the next few years.

As the war-time crisis waned, however, these ideas for reform were dropped from the South African official agenda, as opposed to other British colonies in Africa where stabilisation, urbanisation, and fostering ‘responsible’ trade unionism were increasingly the guiding policies. White liberal intellectuals kept pushing the issue of stabilisation through organisations like the SAIRR. In its journal ‘Race Relations’ prominent liberal scholars like Ellen Hellmann, Eileen

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74 Ibid., 7.
78 Cooper, On the African Waterfront, 74.
Jensen Krige, and Maurice Webb regularly wrote on topics like migrant labour, trade unionism, and the Reserve economy. After the National Party victory in 1948 stabilisation and orderly urbanisation were even less likely to become government policy. Instead, restriction of urban residency, draconian pass laws, and resettlement in the Reserves were the policies of the new ‘apartheid’ regime. As such, it would take many more years before African trade unions were recognised, influx controls were lifted, and social welfare was extended to African workers. The extent to which these policies were a departure from the United Party policies of the 1940s or rather a continuation is open for debate, though there are certainly important continuities.

Even if wholesale policies on African labour did not change dramatically, there was one sector in which the labour regime did change drastically in the late 1950s: stevedoring. Once more, this was in line with changes taking place in other ports around Africa and the world. Casual labour was replaced by a labour pool in which a rotation system guaranteed the spread of employment opportunities. A hiring monopoly under the DSLSC was established in 1959, at once eliminating the bargaining power and flexibility of togt labour. This limited the supply of labour and increased the disciplinary powers of the employer, effectively ending a period of docker

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79 SAIRR still exists today and can be found online on [http://www.sairr.org.za/](http://www.sairr.org.za/).
80 Martin Legassick famously argued that apartheid was an adaptation of the already established cheap labour system to a new reality of secondary industrialisation, rather than a radical departure from a supposedly more liberal policy under the United Party, “Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1 (1974), 1: 9. However, Saul Dubow warns us against representing the rise of apartheid as inevitable in his introduction to *South Africa’s 1940s*. He stresses that the 1940s was marked by ‘competing visions of the future’ and that none of these was predetermined to be triumphant. See: Saul Dubow, “Introduction: South Africa’s 1940s,” in *South Africa’s 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*, ed. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005), 1-19.
militancy and creating a decade of industrial peace. While there were certainly advantages for the workers to the creation of a labour pool, as it significantly limited the insecurity of earnings, the most important effect of monopoly hiring was the stifling of militancy and increased control over a large group of Africans in the middle of the city. As such, the DSLSC suited apartheid policies, which was also reflected in the fact that the new company increasingly recruited its labour directly in the rural areas, gradually reducing the number of urban workers in the pool and thus reinforcing the migrant labour system.

Living conditions

Although these labourers often worked excessive hours, they also had a life outside of work. This section will discuss their living conditions in the city. Where and how did they live, what was the cost of living in the city, how did they socialise, and how did they interact with urban women?

Most dock workers would have lived in one of the company compounds at the Point or in the municipal Bell Street Togt Barracks. These were some of the few places where Africans could

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83 There were certainly workers who appreciated this greater stability, like Absolom Ngema, who was interviewed for the SAIRR Oral History Project. University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 45, interview with Absolom Ngema, 17 November 1982. However, this interview was conducted in retrospect. Before the decasualisation of the labour force, workers did complain that they did not always find work, but asked for higher daily remuneration to deal with this problem rather than for more stable employment. Indeed, employers were adamant that workers did not want an end to the *togt* system. SAB, ARB, vol. 2854, file 1069/70, “Notes of Interview,” 9 May 1941; DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/2/11/1/10, Native Administration Committee Minutes, 14 April 1950. The strike of five hundred workers to protest the fact that as monthly workers were paid less per day than when they were *togt* workers seems to confirm this assertion. “500 Natives Stop Work At Docks,” *Natal Mercury*, 2 November 1956, 7.

84 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 421.

85 There is a B.Arch. thesis on the DSLSC compounds at the Point and Maydon Wharf by D.M. Ross-Watt, op. cit. These were not the same compounds as the municipal Bell Street Togt Barracks, which were de-proclaimed in 1962; see: Margaret A. Sugden, “The Bantu of the Durban Metropolitan Area: A Case Study
legally stay in town. Those who slept in company compounds would have to offer their services to that company first and could only look for work elsewhere if they were not needed. 86 Topt workers in the Bell Street Barracks could offer their labour to any employer.

These accommodations were anything but comfortable, which was not a new problem. In a letter to the Chief Native Commissioner in Pietermaritzburg on 4 July 1911 the Chief Constable of Durban described the S.A.R. & H. compound as “by no means attractive.” He continued: “[t]here are no windows, and the buildings are low and uncomfortable and in summer time the heat is very great and it must be impossible for Natives to rest properly in comfort.” He added that the building had been negatively reviewed by the Medical Officer of Health for the Colony, Dr. Hill. 87 The conditions at the compound for municipal workers were scarcely any better: 88

[...] about 60 boys are housed in a wood and iron structure that has never been intended for human habitation. [...] Light is admitted by a small door, no windows being provided. During the day time with the door open it is impossible to see boys sleeping at one end of this structure, it is so dark and dismal. When the door is shut any light admitted is from imperfections of the structure. [...] There is no water closet or bathroom provided.

Two years later the Superintendent of Native Affairs, W. Wanless, described the state of the same buildings again and no action had been taken. He added that “[t]he floor is of earth and very

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87 PAR, CNC, vol. 12, file CNC 494/1911, Chief Constable Donovan to Chief Native Commissioner Shepstone, 4 July 1911.
88 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/402, file 111, part I, Medical Officer of Health to Town Clerk, 17 May 1912.
damp in wet weather." Time did not bring improvement and by the 1940s the state of the Togt Barracks in Bell Street had become a source of official concern as well. The Smit Committee had been “unfavourably impressed by some of those [housing schemes] seen, notably the Bell Street Compound at Durban, which was over-crowded, dirty, and quite unfit for the purpose for which it was being used.” It would, however, take to the end of that decade before the Durban City Council took these concerns seriously. The manager of the MNAD described the condition of these barracks again in 1948: “This accommodation is in a deplorable condition, and unless completely renovated in the immediate future, will cause loss of human life to inmates. It is definitely not fit for human habitation.”

That year, the state of some of the municipal accommodations for Africans made it into the ‘Natal Mercury’. The article mentioned that eighteen of the nineteen buildings at Bell Street had been condemned years earlier. Immediate action was still not taken, but the next year at least the buildings in the worst condition were being vacated. New residents were not admitted to the barracks, beds falling vacant in those buildings were left vacant, and unoccupied beds in other buildings would be assigned to residents from the evacuated structures. Temporary measures were also taken to strengthen the remaining buildings. By August 1949, seven years after the Smit report, the worst buildings were closed, but no new barracks had been built.

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89 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/402, file 111, part I, Superintendent of Native Affairs to the Mayor and Councillors of Durban, 30 June 1914.
91 KCAL, PNAB, KCF 43, file H4-20, Acting Manager MNAD to the City and Water Engineer, 10 May 1948.
93 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/3/1355, file 269, part IV, report by the Manager of the MNAD to the Native Administration Committee, 10 January 1949.
94 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/3/1355, file 269, part IV, Manager MNAD to Town Clerk, 12 August 1949.
Workers could rent a bed by the month or by the day in these unpleasant dwellings, or stay for free if the accommodation was provided by the employer. However, many compounds were so over-crowded that even floor space was rented out. The actual beds were wooden boards and there could be as many as thirty people in a single room. Some compounds were so cramped that one had to move around sideways. These places lacked privacy and were ruled through strict regulations. While the compounds in Durban were different from the closed compounds in Kimberley and even the Witwatersrand, they were still used to police the life of workers off the job. In cities like Durban, however, not only compounds were governed by strict regulations, but so too was the whole city. For example, a worker’s wife could only visit him after he had been in Durban for two years and even then only when there was accommodation for women available, which was seldom the case. Complaints about police harassment were also common.

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95 Mbatha, op. cit., 151.
96 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 52, interview with Mr. Maghwasa, no date; Tape 53, interview with Mr. Zulu, no date.
97 Ingpen, loc. cit.
100 Mbatha, op. cit., 152.
According to Mphiwa Buxton Mbatha, most compound dwellers cooked for themselves and only occasionally bought food from stalls.\footnote{Mbatha, op. cit., 151.} Dock workers, however, would not have much time to cook when they worked overtime. Indeed, the Native Eating House on Bell Street had comparatively many caterers, indicating that there was a market for prepared food at the Point. There were also more butchers, as they would have needed protein to sustain such hard physical labour.\footnote{In September 1947, there were twenty-four caterers and ten butchers occupying thirty-four out of forty-nine stalls in the Bell Street Native Eating House; in Victoria Street there were only thirty-eight caterers and butchers out of almost two hundred stalls. DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/1/1/1/74, Town Council Minutes, 6 September 1947.} Offal in particular was an important part of the diet of African workers.\footnote{DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1052, file 269, part III, Manager MNAD to Town Clerk, 23 October 1919.} Those who stayed in company compounds would have received rations.\footnote{To name just a few: Khetekwakhe Zondo, KwaMbonambi, 6 May 2009; Zolile Khumalo, Newcastle, 16 May 2009; Godidi Msomi, uMkomaas, 21 May 2009; Thembinkosi Miya, iXopo, 26 May 2009; Gedla Lukhozi, Polela, 6 June 2009.} However, these meals were not always of very good quality. In 1937 workers complained that the food provided by the S.A.R. & H. was “of so very inferior quality that many natives refuse to eat it and actually go and spend their earnings to buy their own food.”\footnote{SAB, NTS, vol. 2206, file 353/280, “Deputation of Native Employees Received by the Native Commissioner, Durban,” 25 August 1937. They were, however, hardly the only ones eating poor food. In the early 1940s the Smit Committee noted that “[t]here is overwhelming evidence of an appalling amount of malnutrition amongst urban Natives both old and young.” SAB, GG, vol. 1574, file 50/1698, “Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Social, Health and Economic Conditions of Urban Natives,” 9 March 1942, 9.} The lives of dock workers in Durban were anything but glamorous and foreign sailors calling on the Port of Durban were often struck by the poverty they saw. Zulu Phungula pointed out that “[e]ven strangers and soldiers coming from other countries are surprised at the state of affairs when they see how we are starving.”\footnote{SAB, NTS, vol. 2222, file 416/280, part I, “Notes of Meeting Held at Bell Street Barracks,” 29 July 1942.}

These are just some of the reasons why many workers refused to live in the compounds. A good number of interviewees lived under the verandas of sheds at the Point or in neighbouring...
Most of these workers only worked in town for a short period of time (four to ten years) or worked part-time on the docks. Others lived in uMkhumbane or one of the early townships, like Chesterville or uMlazi Glebeland. Life was not as closely regulated in a shack or in the townships as it was – at least in theory – in the compounds. With numerous dock workers living with other workers in shacks and townships, it does not seem that they were particularly isolated from the rest of the working class.

There were also advantages to living in the compounds, especially if one also received free food. This would save the workers a lot of money and would result in a larger portion of the wages that could be sent home, saved, or invested in a business venture. Of course, the same could be achieved by living under the verandas and eating pilfered food. Rent and basic needs in the city were expensive and consumed a lot of the migrant’s earnings. In 1958, O.P.F. Horwood estimated that it would take just under £15 per month to feed an African family of five. Divided by five that would be £3 per person, but one can assume that the nutritional needs of an adult man engaging in hard physical labour would be greater. Thus, £4 per month for a single male labourer

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109 Living in uMkhumbane: Dumile Ndlovu, Port Shepstone, 20 May 2009; Bheka Dlaba, Mooi River, 17 November 2009; Chesterville: Mtukatshelwa Phewa, Izingolweni, 29 May 2009; uMlazi Glebeland: Vela Mtolo, Bulwer, 28 May 2009; Mabhalane Dlamini. Of the sixty informants from whom we have information on whether they stayed in one of the compounds for an extensive period, thirty-five did.


111 This supposed isolation has been used to explain the tendency of dock workers to strike more often than other groups of workers around the world. There is a brief overview of this argument in chapter nine.
would not be exaggerated. His estimate for rent is not very useful for our purposes, as no dock worker encountered in this research lived in a three roomed-house. However, Edwards mentions an average rent of £1 3s. for a room in a shack in uMkhumbane in the late 1940s. It is difficult to adjust this for inflation, as the housing market in Durban changed dramatically in the 1950s, with Cato Manor ‘cleaned out’ and its residents moved to the new KwaMashu township. Yet, £5 for food and rent for a single labourer not housed and fed by his employer is a conservative estimate. This is even before other major expenses like fuel, light, transport, and taxes. With £7 10s. to £10 as most common income category, many workers had to find ways to minimise their consumption in order to save any money. Living in a company compound could help with that.

Some workers would also use the compound as a means to shield themselves from the urban environment. Philip and Iona Mayer observed this among isiXhosa-speaking immigrants in East London and labelled it ‘incapsulation’, a conservative response to urbanisation. They divided migrant workers in two groups. The first were ‘school’ people or abantu basesikolweni who engaged with the urban world, educated themselves and their children, and had Western and Christian ideals. Secondly, there were ‘red’ migrants or abantu ababomvu who were only in the city to earn money and avoided unnecessary interaction with urban society; they tried to spend as

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114 Miriam Janisch estimated in 1944 that food and rent respectively made up 49.2% and 18.4% of a family budget; other big items were fuel and light at 13.1%, transport at 6%, and clothes at 5.3%. KCAL, Miriam Janisch papers, KCM 90/19/1, “The Family (with special reference to the Urban Bantu Family)” (paper presented at Conference on Christian Reconstruction: a reconsideration of the Christian enterprise in South Africa, c. 1944).
little as possible in order to send more money home. The fear of a ‘red’ person was that the city could make him into an absconder or itshipha, someone who no longer returns home, abandons his homestead, and no longer sends remittances. They saved their money and did not spend it in town; they were also more willing to put up with unpleasant jobs, as they saw it more as a means to an end. Red people tended to avoid intimate contact with urban women, who they considered loose and immoral and could drag them away from their rural families. They saw more urban-oriented migrants spend their money on urban women and not having enough to send home. This incapsulation was reinforced by limiting social interaction mostly to abakhaya, who would exercise social control to prevent the migrant from becoming too involved in the city, losing his money on urban activities, and ‘forgetting’ his homestead. Compounds allowed workers to save their money and often shielded them from urban interaction. The compound was central to this incapsulation.

One expression of this incapsulation in Durban was ingoma dancing, at least according to Harold J. Thomas and John Argyle.117 Groups of migrant labourers would meet up on Sundays to practice for or participate in dancing competitions. Thomas and Argyle criticised J. Clyde Mitchell’s interpretation of similar dances in the Copperbelt towns as a typically urban phenomenon and as an urban adaptation of rural traditions in response to urban needs and experiences.118 For them, these ‘traditional’ dances were an extension of tradition and a form of incapsulation, of eschewing the urban. Thomas did find evidence of this encapsulating role of

these dance groups, but ignored one very important variable. The overwhelming majority of his informants (eighty-nine per cent) were domestic servants, who were usually young and not yet married. They had a greater interest in protecting their stake in the Reserves, as they still had to pay ilobolo and establish a homestead. Their future in the rural areas still had to be secured. His sample was thus anything but representative.

In reality it seems difficult to divide our interviewees into two groups: incapsulated and urbanised. Most show a more nuanced behavioural pattern that defies this dichotomous classification. Most did not specifically limit their social interaction to their abakhaya, except some isiXhosa speakers, and a number started relationships with city women. On the other hand, many did remark that they preferred rural life and avoided city women. Gerald Sack also noted that while Sotho and Hlubi S.A.R. & H. workers in Durban tended to eat in big groups of abakhaya, Zulu workers tended to eat in smaller groups and were less concerned about the origins of the people they had their meals with. That these patterns of incapsulation were less clear in Durban and among dock workers seems to correspond with Hellmann’s assertion that the sharp dichotomy between ‘red’ and ‘school’ migrants was much less apparent in other cities than East London.

Even if many, but certainly not all, workers preferred the isolation of the compound, they still visited the municipal beer halls, townships, and shack settlements during their leisure time; most still had a social life outside the compounds. Although dock workers would often work on

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119 Thomas, op. cit., 54.
120 Mbatha also notes that young men avoided interaction with city women more than married adult men, op. cit., 175.
121 Sack, op. cit., 65.
Sundays, they did regularly go to uMkhumbane and the townships and participated in festivities quite like the Sunday-scene described in Modikwe Dikobe’s *Marabi Dance*. On Sundays, scores of people, mostly from the suburbs, flocked to Doornfontein and congregated on the pavement in groups. They greeted each other loudly and laughed with their mouths as wide open as they could get them. [...] Scores and scores of people trudged in the mud. In almost every house there was a beer party. Benches and chairs creaked. The smoke from pipe tobacco and cigarettes rose as high as the rafters and gave out a stifling smell that made Martha cough like a T.B. sufferer. [...] They drank and drank and drank.

Some might have engaged in more ‘respectable’ leisure activities, like going to see films or concerts, going to dances, playing soccer, or participating in *ingoma* dance contests. These activities were however not prominently mentioned in the interviews and it seems that beer-drinking was the more important way to spend their free time. In fact, it was quite usual, at least in the 1910s, to drink beer in between the day and the evening shift. The low-alcohol *utshwala* was very nutritious and part of their customary diet.

Beer could be had at the beer halls, brewed under the municipal monopoly, or on the outskirts of town, where it was brewed illegally by African women. Brewing was often essential to the livelihoods of peri-urban women and families. The lives of African women in the city were very insecure; they had limited legal income-earning opportunities and their relationships with men were often unstable, as few men would see them as potential wives. Even when they were in

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123 Ingpen, loc. cit.; Edwards, “Mkhumbane our Home,” 77.
125 Cf.: Mbatha, op. cit., 166ff.
126 Almost all interviewees mentioned beer drinking and socialising as important leisure activities, hardly anybody mentioned the other activities Mbatha listed.
127 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 5/2/8/1, R.H. Stainbank, Compound Manager, Associated Stevedoring & Landing Company of Natal, Ltd., to Mayor and Town Councillors, 8 January 1915.
a stable relationship and had a family, the income of the male ‘breadwinner’ was seldom
sufficient to feed a family.\textsuperscript{129} Women had to find ways to make up this income-deficit and to deal
with the insecurities of urban life. This often meant brewing and selling beer, which brought them
into conflict with the police. Brewing was a task traditionally performed by wives, but which
acquired a different meaning in town, where it was against the law. It was also the linchpin of an
informal economy and of urban working class culture. It was central to the survival of African
women and families.\textsuperscript{130} Moreover, it gave women an independent source of income and thus a
certain status and freedom.

To deal with the difficulties and dangers of living in the city, people relied on the
metaphysical as well; they consulted izangoma (diviner, sing. isangoma) and izinyanga
(traditional healer or herbalist, sing. inyanga), as many still do today.\textsuperscript{131} Eleanor Preston-Whyte
also sees the rise of female-linked families – structured around grandmothers, sisters, mothers and
daughters, cohabitating women, on so on, rather than around a male umnumzane – as a result of
these insecurities. This was an alternative to the normative marriage that was more adapted to the
urban lack of stability.\textsuperscript{132} The impossibility of a ‘normal’ marriage for many, with men finding it
increasingly difficult to provide ilobolo or to be providers, led to creative ways in which women
gained access to the income of men. Mark Hunter describes the rise of transactional relationships
in a later context.\textsuperscript{133} Yet, even in the 1950s women tapped into male earnings in inventive ways.

\textsuperscript{129} Cf. Hellmann, “The importance of beer-brewing in an urban native yard,” \textit{Bantu Studies} VIII (1934):
39-60.
\textsuperscript{130} Edwards, “Mkhumbane our Home,” 276.
\textsuperscript{131} Hellmann, “Social Change,” 173; Adam Ashforth, \textit{Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa}
(Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).
Africa}, ed. Eileen Jensen Krieger and John L. Comaroff (Cape Town and Johannesburg: Juta and Company,
1981), 170-172.
\textsuperscript{133} Mark Hunter, “The Materiality of Everyday Sex: thinking beyond ‘prostitution’,” \textit{African Studies} LXI
(2002), 1: 99-120; “IsiZulu-speaking Men and Changing Households: From Providers within Marriage to
As mentioned, the interviews contain several examples of women teaming up with dock workers to sell pilfered goods in the townships or prepared foods on the docks.\textsuperscript{134} However, this did not imply any emotional attachment: Bheka Dlaba and Mandla Xaba stressed that this was purely a business partnership. Of course, relations with city women were not always business-oriented. Despite the fact that most migrants despised urban women, some did have relationships, adventures, or even children with them.\textsuperscript{135}

**Land and labour**

What officials called casualism was, for workers, part of a complex web of social relations and culture connecting workplace, urban residence, and farms. – Frederick Cooper\textsuperscript{136}

As was the case in Mombasa, the rural and urban lives of Durban’s dock workers were closely interconnected, both socially and economically. Indeed, the sharp dichotomy that is sometimes assumed between the rural and the urban needs to be qualified.\textsuperscript{137} While they spent much of their time on the docks and in Durban, they still considered the rural areas to be their true homes and aspired to return to live there as *umnumzane*. Rural life was more than a dream. Most

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\textsuperscript{134} Interviews with Mandla Xaba, Bulwer, 28 May 2009; Mzwakhe Sosibo, Ngwagwane, 25 October 2009; Godidi Msomi; Mtukatshelwa Phewa; Sihle Zungu; Bheka Dlaba.

\textsuperscript{135} At least four had relationships: Libho Qoza, Upper uMkomaas, 15 June 2009; Doda Ndaweni, Gxuha, 28 June 2009; Zandle Mbile, Highflats, 7 July 2009; Siphesihle Dladla, Sweetwater, 24 October 2009; Doda Nxele; at least seven had experiences with city girls: Sipho Zondi, Pietermaritzburg, 7 May 2009; Xolani Ngema, Kranskop, 9 June 2009; Gedla Lukhozi; Velile Goba; Mzo Mzongo; Galo Mtolo; Xhegu Ntozakhe; one informant said that he fathered a child with a woman in Durban.

\textsuperscript{136} Cooper, On the African Waterfront, 248.

interviewees went home relatively often, more frequently than migrants on the Rand.\textsuperscript{138} Their land in the Reserves, which was worked by their wives or mothers, also contributed to the household budget and labourers continued to invest in both agriculture and cattle.\textsuperscript{139}

Several interviewees noted that they went home every few weeks or at most every few months:\textsuperscript{140} “People who worked in Durban visited usually once a month, those from Jo’burg only once per year.”\textsuperscript{141} This was considered a major advantage of working in Durban. Even permanent workers would regularly go home for the weekend. Some casual workers were in Durban for about two or three weeks at a time and then at home for two or three weeks.\textsuperscript{142} The freedom of togt labour made this possible: “You see: I was only working as a casual worker. Therefore, nothing was forcing me to be at work all the time.”\textsuperscript{143} Workers from the Eastern Cape tended to stay for longer periods.

When workers arrived home, they expected their wives to brew beer: “In our culture, when your wife knows that you are coming, she must make beer. When you come there, some neighbours come by and greet you. Then you bring an \textit{ukhamba} [clay pot] full of beer and share it with them and socialize together.”\textsuperscript{144} Though their time at home would often be busy with ploughing, doing repairs, etc., interviewees mostly recalled the socialising. They remembered drinking beer, dancing, visiting friends and relatives, and rituals for which livestock was

\textsuperscript{138} This regular movement back and forth between town and countryside combined with the often unhealthy living conditions of workers facilitated the spread of contagious diseases, including venereal ones. See: Sidney L. Kark, “Migrant Labour and Family Health,” in \textit{A Practice of Social Medicine: A South African Team’s Experiences in Different African Communities}, ed. Sidney L. Kark and Guy W. Steuart (Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone, 1962), 194, 204.

\textsuperscript{139} The vast majority of interviewees lived in the Reserves and the discussion in this section is thus limited to Reserve land and agriculture.

\textsuperscript{140} Khethekwakhe Zondo; Sipho Zondi; Zolile Khumalo; Libho Qoza; Zifo Mzizi; Velile Goba; Mzo Mzongo.

\textsuperscript{141} Mzo Mzongo.

\textsuperscript{142} Galo Mtolo; Zithulele Chemane; Doda Nxele.

\textsuperscript{143} Doda Nxele.

\textsuperscript{144} Interview with Gobile Mbhele, Springs, 14 July 2009.
slaughtered. Sihle Zungu put it as follows: “That was my life: I gave and went to parties, drank beer, danced and socialised nicely at home.”

While the men would often do some work when they were home, most of the agricultural labour fell on the shoulders of the women, the youth, and the elderly. Labour was thinly spread in agriculture and yields would often suffer as ploughing could not be done at the ideal time, weeding was not done systematically, and there were not enough people scaring birds away from the ripening sorghum. For newly married women the absence of their husbands and their subordination to their mothers-in-law often made for a very difficult and stressful time.

Moreover, women could often not take innovative decisions without the consent of their absent husbands, although they were the ones doing the agricultural work. However, not all men were so insistent on their sole right to make decisions. At least fifteen interviewees acknowledged that by virtue of being the actual cultivators, their wives were also the ones who could and did take decisions about cultivation. However, there were even more men, twenty-three, who insisted that they were the ones to take decisions. By investing their wages in cattle, which women could not access, these men could maintain control over the use of this money. Seven others took decisions collectively, but that would not have eased the problem of having to take decisions in the absence

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145 Interviews with Sipho Gazu, iXopo, 27 May 2009; Xolile Jaca, Mabheleni, 10 July 2009; Mandla Xaba; Gedla Lukhozi; Lunguza Mbelu; Zithulele Chemane; and others.
146 Sihle Zungu.
148 The kernels of sorghum are not protected like those of maize. Thus, one has to keep the birds away when the grain is ripening. Brookes and Hurwitz, op. cit., 87, 102.
149 Kark, “The Health Implications of the Changing Rôle of Women in Rural Pholela,” in A Practice of Social Medicine, ed. Kark and Steuart, 210-211.
of the husbands. Eight interviewees left the decisions to the elders in their family, usually their father or mother. Another common situation was the one where the wife would be in charge of day-to-day decisions about planting, weeding, and harvesting, but the husband would decide on investment for which his wages were needed.\footnote{E.g.: interview with Sofa Nkomo, Dumisa, 12 July 2009.}

Of course, it was only through marriage and through their husbands that women had access to Reserve land. When a couple married, the wife would move in with her in-laws. Only when the man has accumulated enough resources and can get access to land can they establish their own homestead and become independent. This communal land would be allocated for use by the induna, the local headman and deputy of the chief in whom the land is vested. Before that time his wages would traditionally go to the umnumzane. Building one’s own umuzi was thus part of becoming a man and one would go to work with the express intention of building one.\footnote{Mbatha, op. cit., 210-211.}

Normally the land allocated would consist of a site for their home, a small plot of land close to the house to put in some seeds (izala, pl. amazala), a small garden for vegetables (isife, pl. izife), and a main field (insimu, pl. amazimu). These lands would be available for each wife in the homestead and they would also have access to grazing commonage. The congestion of the Reserves, however, meant that many homesteads would not receive enough land to live off.\footnote{Mbatha, op. cit., 55ff; Desmond Harold Reader, \textit{Zulu Tribe in Transition: The Makhanya of Southern Natal} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 33.}

This shortage, however, benefited the izinduna in charge of allocation. They gained increased status and access to migrants’ earnings, because they could give people access to this scarce resource. They thus demanded money for the allocation of plots or accumulated land which they
then rented out. This new importance earned them political support in their power struggles with chiefs.\textsuperscript{154}

Having different fields helped families make it through the year, as different fields would be planted at different times. The \textit{izife} would normally be planted in September and yield the first crops, mostly vegetables, to carry the family to the main harvest. These vegetables were ready for harvest by December, just before the leanest month of January. The main fields would be ploughed and planted in October and November, but would only yield in March, later for sorghum. August was the month with the least agricultural work to be done and it was thus not incidental that in the mid-1920s Durban’s Police noted an influx of African migrants during the winter months, when their labour was not needed.\textsuperscript{155} Early in the next decade, evidence to the Native Economic Commission indicated that African workers did still leave Durban in greater numbers at ploughing time, signalling the continued importance of Reserve agriculture.\textsuperscript{156} In chapter three it was discussed that the returns from \textit{togi} registration showed a similar, yet imperfect, seasonal pattern between 1924 and 1947. By the 1960s, however, a social medicine team in Polela noted that this pattern had become less pronounced.\textsuperscript{157} This is in line with Charles Simkins’ observations that the mid-1950s was the real turning-point for the productivity of Reserve agriculture.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{156} University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1438, Native Economic Commission, Minutes of Evidence & Memoranda, Box 6, 6312.
\textsuperscript{157} Kark, “Migrant Labour,” 199.
Despite the declining returns of Reserve agriculture, dock workers continued investing in both agriculture and livestock. Agricultural investments were discussed in the previous chapter and were mainly limited to fencing the land and buying or stealing a generator to water the land with. Other agricultural investments had the problem that they would make cultivation dependent on continued imports of seeds or fertilisers. Another important avenue for investment was cattle and other livestock, often paid for with the proceeds of stokvels. The cattle economy fared better in the first half of the twentieth-century than Reserve agriculture, as it was less labour intensive and more suitable for a society where labour was in short supply. The herding labour it did require was mostly done by the young boys. Migrants also maintained a tangible stake in rural society through cattle. Moreover, Africans often lacked other legal opportunities to invest. Of course, as Reserve agriculture deteriorated a larger portion of the wages had to be used for consumption, further limiting the opportunities for investment.

An important reason for young dock workers to buy cattle was of course to be able to marry. *Ilobolo* was in itself a large investment and the *izibizo* gifts given during the negotiations only make the process more expensive. Marriage through *ukulobola* was an

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159 This was not only the case in Natal: James Ferguson notes that even throughout the second half of the twentieth century Basotho migrant workers kept investing their wages mostly in cattle, *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development,” Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). Beinart came to a similar conclusion in the case of Pondoland in the first three decades of the century, *The Political Economy of Pondoland*.


163 Some attitudes of African women towards *ilobolo* were described by Mia Brandel in 1958, but she only talked to urban, wage earning women. It is significant, however, that even these women were strongly in favour of the marriage with *ilobolo*. Mia Brandel, “Urban lobolo attitudes: a preliminary report,” *African Studies* XVII (1958), 1: 34-51.

investment in affines and dependents and thus in social security. Ultimately, the pattern of kin
and affines is one of social relationships rather than biological ones and the circulation of cattle
builds and maintains these relationships. Livelihoods cannot just be considered as the way in
which subsistence is guaranteed, the lineage needs to be reproduced as well. The latter could only
be done through the exchange of cattle. As such, a head of cattle is worth more than just its
value in money or milk; it is not subject to formal market logic. Indeed, the aphorism that
‘money has no calves’ not only refers to the fact that cattle as capital is self-reproducing, but also
that it cannot be seen or sisa’d (loaned out). It does thus not fulfil the same social function as
cattle. Migrants reproduced the rural patriarchal homestead through investment in cattle.

Another aspiration of migrant workers, retirement on the land once their sons were old
enough to work, had mostly become an illusion by mid-century. The Reserves could no longer
serve as social security as they once did, yet workers kept returning to their land in their old age
for at least two reasons, even if that retirement now came much later than before. Firstly, they had
no security in the city and very limited possibilities to acquire property, which meant that they

165 Comaroff, “Preface,” in Essays on African Marriage, ed. Krige and Comaroff, xvii; Colin Murray,
(1977), 1: 91.
166 Hunter, “Fathers without amandla: Zulu-speaking men and fatherhood,” in Baba: men and fatherhood in
African Studies VIII (1981), 1, Special Issue on Anthropology and History: 129.
168 According to the substantivist tradition of anthropology an economic logic does not have to be a
universal market logic and economic values can contain social significance that cannot be reduced to a
function of the market. In the formalist tradition economics are universally rational and driven by market
logic, devoid of social values. Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation: The political and economic origins
of our time (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957 [1944]); “The Economy as Instituted Process,” in Trade and
Market in Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory, ed. Karl Polanyi et al. (Glencoe, IL: The Free
Press, 1957), 243-270; Paul Bohannan and George Dalton, eds., Markets in Africa (Evanston, IL:
169 Reader, op. cit., 46.
Cross-Cultural Gerontology XXIII (2008), 2: 165-166.
would need a continued source of cash income to pay rent.\textsuperscript{171} Secondly, there was a general anti-urban feeling among many migrants, which has been a theme in much of the literature on South African labour.\textsuperscript{172} This sentiment was also in evidence in this research, even if less starkly so than in the work by the Mayers. These dock workers were not interested in settling in the city and were generally not interested in urban women, though this did not stop them from enjoying social life in the city while they were there.

**Conclusion**

The rural and the urban were closely connected in the lives of Durban’s dock workers. Their urban labour cannot be understood in isolation from their rural livelihoods. Not only did their livelihoods straddle wage labour and informal enterprise, they also straddled the rural and the urban. Workers desired to become rural homestead heads and to no longer be dependent on urban wage labour. However, this did not mean that they avoided interaction with urban society, as the Mayers suggested for migrants in East London. The previous chapter argued that many workers took advantage of the opportunities their job in the city offered to devise strategies that would allow them to return to living in the countryside.

However, this returning to the countryside did not just involve a return to a household from which the dock worker was missing for the time that he was on the docks. The strategies and domestic relations that have been described in this chapter and the preceding one defy easy identification with traditional rural Zulu *imizi*, Chayanovian\textsuperscript{173} conceptions of peasant

\textsuperscript{171} KCAL, KCAV 183: Interview with M. Ndlovu and J. Ngubese by A. Manson and D. Collins for the Oral History Programme of the University of Natal, Durban, 20 June 1979.

\textsuperscript{172} E.g.: Mayer and Mayer, op. cit.; Harries, op. cit.; Mamdani, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{173} A.V. Chayanov, *The theory of peasant economy* (Homewood, IL: Published for the American Economic Association by R.D. Irwin, 1966).
households, or neoclassical models\textsuperscript{174} of the household. These chapters raise the question of how to define the household.\textsuperscript{175} Who are the household members? Are women who sell pilfered goods in the township and who contribute to the reproduction of the rural \textit{umuzi} part of the dock workers’ household?

These households were not just rural homesteads with one member missing, as the migrant’s urban labour and enterprises were crucial to the reproduction of these households. Neither were these simply proletarian households that were forced by law to reside in the countryside, as the rural economy was crucial to their economic strategies as well. These households cannot be pinned down geographically; they did not exist in one place, but rather in two or three places and changed over time. Moreover, these households were no undifferentiated units of decision-making and income pooling.\textsuperscript{176} Men and women in different places – the Reserves, the Point, and Durban’s townships – made decisions regarding wage labour, agriculture, consumption, and commerce both on their own and in consultation. Income was partly pooled, but could also be kept at least partly out of the hands of the other members of the household. However, each of these spheres was dependent on the others for the reproduction of the household. Even the city women with whom some dock workers entered into commercial partnerships could thus be seen as part of the reproduction of the docker’s household, while forming their own households and having their own strategies.

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\textsuperscript{175} Jane I. Guyer raises such questions in \textit{Household budgets and women’s incomes} (Boston: African Studies Center, Boston University, 1980); and “Household and Community in African Studies,” \textit{African Studies Review} XXIV (1981), 2/3, Special Issue on Social Science and Humanistic Research on Africa: An Assessment: 87-137.
\textsuperscript{176} It is of course never the case that households are undifferentiated decision-making units, but theoretical models of the household as an economic unit often make these assumptions. See: Guyer, \textit{Household budgets}, 1.
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With these remarks in mind, it seems insufficient to question whether the rural household subsidises urban wages or vice-versa. The household cannot be limited in space or by bonds of kinship or marriage. Rather, the household is a socio-economic unit which includes these different and sometimes distant spheres. In the words of Jane Guyer: “households are constituted by a series of implicit or explicit contracts, not by total subsumption of the members into a solidary unit whose internal relationships can be taken as given.” Indeed, we cannot assume that all members of the household have identical interests. While they have a common interest in the reproduction of the household, they also have individual priorities. For example, the husband may want to invest in cattle, but it could be that his wife would rather have direct access to his wages to spend on increased consumption.

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Mvuselelo Cele, or Mvu as he was known, only worked on the docks for a few years.¹ When he came to Durban to find work, he spent his first night under the veranda of shed P at the Point. One of his uncles who worked on the docks slept there every night. The next morning this uncle showed him where to present himself for hiring and talked to one of the izinduna. Mvu was taken on that day and he carried lumber from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. The company wanted some people to do overwork as well, but he opted not to; he was already exhausted. That first day was one full of doubt. The work was heavy and Mvu was unsure whether he could do this every day. He also felt lonely away from his friends and family; he only had his uncle to talk to. However, his family counted on him to earn money. He had the good fortune that his father had enough cattle to pay for his ilobolo, but now it was up to him to bring in some money. He would not let his wife, his mother, or his children go hungry.

That first day he had his dinner at the Native Eating House where many of his new colleagues ate. His uncle warned him, however, that he would have little money to send home if he spent his hard-earned wages in the city. Instead, he should join his uncle in sharing food that was spilled from broken bags and tins. He started picking up such spilled food whenever the opportunity arose. When lugging lumber there was, of course, no such reward, but on other days they would load and unload maize, rice, sugar, beans, etc. Taking small amounts of cargo allowed Mvu to spend very little on food. He also continued to sleep under the verandas, so that he would

¹ Just like the accounts of days in the lives of Sipho Dlamini and Sihle Mthembu, this account of Mvuselelo Cele’s short career in the Port of Durban is fictional, as is Mvuselelo. This account is meant to illustrate what the life of a dock worker with entrepreneurial strategies could have looked like.
not have to spend money on accommodation either. Sleeping outside was uncomfortable at times, but his sacrifice paid off. In his first month Mvu already sent home more money than anyone he knew.

After about a year of sleeping outside, however, Mvu moved to uMkhumbane. He shared the rent of a little one-room shack with one of his colleagues. Now he was sheltered from the weather and police harassment. Another advantage was the more social atmosphere in uMkhumbane. Here, he did not have to be quiet and stay clear of hanging around in groups to avoid attracting attention. The disadvantage was that he now had to get up even earlier, as early as 5.00 a.m., to walk to the Maydon Wharf or to take one of the packed busses from Booth Road. If he worked overtime, he would often miss the last bus, forcing him to walk forty-five minutes.

In uMkhumbane, he could also enjoy female company. At the docks there were no women; there were no female dock workers and women were not allowed in the compounds. The docks were very much a man’s world. Mvu did sometimes long for some female company. It was after living in uMkhumbane for about five months that he met Lindiwe, a single mother of two boys trying to make a living from her little tuck shop. Their bond soon developed beyond occasional sex when he learned that some of the most wanted goods in her shop were exactly those things he could easily pilfer: sugar, salt, beans, tinned fish, rice, and maize. Thus, he supplied the tuck shop with these goods and she gave him part of the proceeds. Since the shop mostly sold very small quantities, a bag of rice or sugar could often last weeks and serve dozens of customers. As he was in good standing with most izinduna, they looked the other way when he took bags home with him. Mvu also moved in with Lindiwe, but he remained committed to his rural homestead. The proceeds from the tuck shop allowed him to send more money to his family than he could ever afford if he only had his wages.
After seeing how well the tuck shop did, Mvu decided to start bringing the same foodstuffs home for his wife Thabisa to sell at their house near iXopo. As in many rural areas in Natal, stores were few and far between and the goods Mvu brought home once or twice per month easily found customers. Since there was little or no competition within a reasonable distance, Thabisa could get good prices for these foodstuffs. Their little rural business quickly became so successful that she started running out of merchandise before his next visits. Luckily, he knew a bus driver on the route to iXopo and he could pay him to deliver goods to his wife on a weekly basis. Thus, their rural business kept growing and customers started asking for more wares. Mvu bought matches, paraffin, cigarettes, candles, and sweets in bulk in Durban and sent them with the bus driver as well. Thabisa sold these items in small quantities, one cigarette at a time, and with significant profits. Within two years, their little enterprise grew to be a rural store with a limited yet profitable range of products.

With their rural business so successful, Mvu could no longer pilfer enough to supply to store without crossing the line from acceptable pilferage to unacceptable theft. However, the store had also become less dependent on free goods, as the price differences between bulk purchases in the city and individual sales in the countryside were sufficient to make the store profitable. Mvu, however, continued working on the docks a few days per week to supply Lindiwe’s tuck shop and bought bulk goods to send home on the other days. In the next two years, however, his relationship with Lindiwe became increasingly difficult. Lindiwe had successfully run her shop for years before she knew Mvu and while she was grateful for the supply of free goods, she did not feel that she owed him more than a share of the profits. Mvu, on the other hand, felt that he should be the one deciding what happened with the profits, as he was the man and the one providing many of the goods she sold. As their rural business grew and became increasingly
successful, he also grew suspicious of how Thabisa used the money it made. As he was not present, he had no control over the running of the business. Above all, he wanted the profits to be invested in cattle, while Thabisa was more concerned about the family’s immediate consumption needs. Being in Durban, he could not know whether his wife was keeping profits behind.

Less than five years after he first arrived in Durban, Mvu quit working on the docks and moved back to iXopo. This way, he could be more involved in the running of the store. By this time, Thabisa had also started serving drinks and snacks to their customers, adding a tearoom to their store. They continued supplying the store from wholesalers in Durban. To do this, they relied on the connections Mvu had made while he was living there. The same bus driver who already delivered their merchandise continued to do so once or twice per week. A colleague from the docks bought the goods for them and gave them to the bus driver. The store and tearoom continued to do well and allowed Mvu to stay at home, no longer having to supplement the household income by working in the city.
Chapter 7: Cleaning the wharves: Pilferage, bribery, and social connections on the Durban docks in the 1950s

It is clear by now that the livelihoods of Durban’s dock workers in the 1950s did not conform very well to either common conceptions of radical, proletarian dock workers, or to the idea of conservative migrant labourers who wanted as little to do with the city as possible. It would, however, be incorrect to discuss dock labour in Durban as completely divorced from dock labour elsewhere. This chapter will discuss two aspects of their work that they did have in common with thousands of dock workers in London or New York, Liverpool or Mombasa, Shanghai or Tanga. Just like labourers in ports all over the world, Durban’s dockers used bribes and social connections to get the best jobs and they pilfered without shame. About half of all interviewees mentioned that they engaged in pilferage, mostly small-scale. However, since no one was explicitly asked about this, half is only a lowest estimate.

Different commentators have considered these activities crimes, acts of resistance, or both. In particular, there is a rich literature on theft and pilferage by labourers as a form of resistance. Friedrich Engels famously discussed crime in the context of the industrial revolution and considered it an early, primitive, and individual form of protest, which was later replaced by more mature, collective forms of resistance, such as trade unionism and political organisation.\(^1\) This assumption of a historical progression of resistance was taken over by Eric Hobsbawm in his *Primitive Rebels*.\(^2\) The ‘social bandits’ of early capitalism, he argued, were often people who were not born into capitalism and were only just starting to learn the rules of the new game. They

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were pre-political people, challenging the enclosure of their ‘commons’, their user rights, but without a revolutionary vision to challenge or reform the capitalist system that was still taking shape.³

This model of social banditry was based on European experience, though Hobsbawm claimed it was a “universal and virtually unchanging phenomenon.”⁴ Yet, Ralph Austen notes that this model is useful in the African context as well, because it forces us to think about the social meaning of crime and to conceptualise crime as an expression of alternatives to dominant social values in a context where pre-capitalist values are still very much alive.⁵ Indeed, in the rapidly changing contexts of both early capitalist Europe and colonial Africa, where proletarianisation was an ongoing project, crime could fruitfully be considered a reaction to dispossession and to the criminalisation of what once were common user rights. What was a property crime to one was a right for the other, for example the collection of fire wood and kindling, ‘poaching’ of small game, the use of grazing lands, and the gleaning of the harvest.⁶

In this chapter, however, I argue that pilferage and bribery in the 1950s were not just opportunistic and reactive acts in response to proletarianisation, but rather elements of conscious livelihood strategies. Dock workers actively strategised and many used the opportunities for pilferage and entrepreneurialism that their employment offered to achieve independence from wage labour. This chapter discusses a situation that existed in the 1950s. While pilferage took

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³ Ibid., 3, 26.
⁴ Ibid., 5.
place before that time, the interviews do not go back further. First the practices of pilferage and bribery, respectively, will be discussed, after which both will be evaluated as forms of informal resistance and as part of workers’ livelihood strategies.

**Pilferage**

Certain user rights, especially within employment relations, have yet to be completely criminalised, even in the West. Everybody gets part of their wages in kind; these are the invisible wages. This can be non-material, for example in the form of work satisfaction, and material through tips, fiddling, perks, and pilferage. Pilferage falls in a grey zone between theft, which is clearly illegal, and a perk. Strictly speaking, pilferage is not a part of the workers’ remuneration and is thus not a right. More often than not, however, it is condoned by employers and supervisors, because it is too difficult and too expensive to police and usually limited to small quantities and values. Many forms of pilferage are considered a right by the workers and, within certain limits, even by the employers: white collar workers can use the office printers and phones for reasonable personal needs, waiters can take home unfinished bottles of wine, and workers in industrial bakeries can often take home a loaf of bread. The catch for the worker is that the employer has the authority to define a certain action as a perk or theft and can do so after the facts.

Pilferage and theft from ships and warehouses has a long history. Patrick Colquhoun documented it in London at the end of the eighteenth century and Gerald Mars wrote a fascinating

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9 Ditton, op. cit., 48-49, 55.

Of course, one does not have to look at London and St. John’s to find evidence of forms of theft that were not considered wrong by the ‘perpetrators’. Young Zulu boys grew up pilfering agricultural produce while herding livestock.\footnote{Paul La Hausse, “‘The Cows of Nongoloza’: Youth, Crime and Amalaita Gangs in Durban, 1900-1936;” *Journal of Southern African Studies* XVI (1990), 1: 88n45.} When these young men went to the cities to work as domestic servants, they would live in the servants’ quarters in the backyards of white households where they entertained their kin and *abakhaya*, gave them food from their employers’ kitchens, and even provided accommodation. European householders denounced this practice as a ‘sponging’ system that thrived on petty theft by ‘kitchen boys’. What was considered thievery by the employers, however, was perfectly normal social mores for the workers, for whom it was unacceptable not to offer this form of hospitality to their *abakhaya*. For them, this was just an urban expression of the idea of ‘ubuntu’.\footnote{Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon Is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993), 124.} Even when food and accommodation were not the items being appropriated, pilferage was still considered perfectly acceptable by the workers and even by supervisors. Harries notes that Africans in the mines stole tools such as iron files, knives,
piping, copper and iron wire, and also pilfered by-products: “[w]hat the mineowners saw as pilfering seems to have been condoned by many Europeans who, only a generation previously, had considered ‘chips’, ‘clippings’, and ‘sweepings’ and other by-products of the work process as a legitimate part of the wage.”

Durban’s dock workers were thus neither the only dock workers nor the only African workers who pilfered and considered this a legitimate part of their compensation, a right rather than a crime. Dockers elsewhere would usually have hidden their loot under layers of clothes and in special pockets in loose-fitting garments, so it would not show. However, in Durban’s subtropical climate this was not so evident. There is no good excuse for any excess clothing, especially not in the hold where temperatures could rise to very uncomfortable levels. But, Durban’s dock workers did pilfer and a newspaper article from 1920 gives some insight in how they could have carried their spoils home. Reporting on the end of a strike, the Natal Witness wrote: “The boys went back to work as if nothing had happened, carrying their sacks on their backs, and singing, as is the custom of the natives.” These sacks could easily have hidden small amounts of swag and workers would seldom get searched. Eric Ryland, a former stevedoring employer, noted that security at the port was not a real concern and that workers were not regularly searched. He thought workers could have used their bags to pilfer small quantities.

Durban’s dockers were most interested in loose foods like salt, sugar, beans, rice, maize meal, and flour. This limited their cash needs for consumption and shielded them from rising food prices, as Doda Ndaweni expressed: “I did not use much [of my wages] for consumption,

17 Interview with Eric Ryland, Durban, 18 December 2009.
because, you see, that time there were plenty broken bags of different foods, like flour, maize meal, beans, sugar, etc. And, if you take it, it was like you were cleaning the wharves.” \(^{18}\) Others confirmed that picking up loose food for consumption was allowed. \(^{19}\) At the Durban offices of the South African Container Stevedores (sacs) there are pictures of a worker picking up spilled sugar in Maputo with as caption “cleaning the docks,” which corroborates the idea that employers accepted this practice in good humour. \(^{20}\)

Indeed, pilferage could actually be useful to port authorities and shippers as it helped in cleaning the holds and wharves, just like gleaning helped cleaning the fields. \(^{21}\) Especially in the case of bagged cargoes, like many food items, a certain amount of spillage was expected. Some bags were expected to break. Shipping insurance covered this risk; shippers and traders considered this loss to be part of the transport costs. Moreover, employers regarded this form of small-scale pilferage as the customers’ problem rather than their own, as long as it remained within certain bounds and did not hurt their reputation. \(^{22}\)

While the loss resulting from this form of ‘crime’ was negligible for employers and customers, the impact of these opportunities on the livelihoods of workers was substantial, especially for those workers who did not stay in one of the company compounds and did not receive free meals. As Doda Ndaweni explains, being able to pilfer food limited the portion of their wages workers had to use for their own consumption in the city. The less money one spent in the city, the more money one could send home. Being able to eat for free made a big

\(^{18}\) Interview with Doda Ndaweni, Gxuha, 28 June 2008. All interviewees were informed that they could remain anonymous. Nobody chose that option, even when things were discussed that were strictly speaking illegal. Seeing that most of the activities described happened in a rather distant past, most of these activities were hardly serious crimes, and none of the interviewees are still working, the references will call the interviewees by name. Exceptions will be made in a few cases where bigger goods and guns were stolen.

\(^{19}\) Interviews with Lungani Xulu, Mkhunya, 13 July 2009; Sicelo Mbokazi, Nhlakuza, 16 July 2009.

\(^{20}\) Sacs in-house museum in Durban, visited on 11 June 2009 on invitation by Yoga Thinnasagren.

\(^{21}\) Cooke Johnson, op. cit., 725.

\(^{22}\) Eric Ryland.
difference, as Zulu Phungula illustrated when he told officials in 1941 that he spent 2s. per day on food and only earned £1 in a regular week, leaving very little money for other urban expenses, let alone to send home. Of course, not everybody could work on ships that carried foodstuffs and sometimes the bags did not break. In the latter event, one could of course always break some on purpose, as at least one interviewee regularly did.

Dock workers certainly did not consider this criminal behaviour and they talked openly about it, despite the fact that we did not explicitly ask about pilferage. Yet, not everybody was unconcerned about the morality of theft. One worker saw it as part of the reason why the docks were corrupt: “They were stealing and swearing at each other.” Yet, even supervisors and employers did not seem too concerned about small-scale theft, as Eric Ryland attested. From his perspective, the worst they could do was perhaps steal a few tools, but the supervisors should just make sure that there were none lying around, or a few kilograms of rice, which no one would really miss. It does not seem that employers or the state were serious about curbing pilferage. Only a few complaints about theft can be found in the archives and these were mostly received in the context of specific crises.

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23 SAB, ARB, vol. 2854, file 1069/70, “Notes of Interview,” 9 May 1941. This does not necessarily mean that Zulu Phungula did not engage in pilferage, as he would not have told this to officials while asking them for a raise to make up for the increased cost of living.

24 Interview with Gcinokwakhe Sobiso, Creighton, 18 June 2009. This, of course, also happened elsewhere. Mars describes how stevedores in St. John’s purposefully let a crate of whisky fall and were ready with their containers to recuperate the spilled liquor; a similar incident is depicted in the movie On the Waterfront. See: Mars, “Dock Pilferage,” 218; Kazan, op. cit.

25 Interview with Mzo Mzongo, Izingolweni North, 30 June 2009.

26 For example, when the Water Police was withdrawn from the harbour area: DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1044, file 264, part II, Secretary of the Natal Chamber of Industries to Town Clerk, 12 April 1929. Another example was during the war blackout, when the lack of light at night would have made pilferage easier: DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/2/11/1/6, Native Administration Committee Minutes, 24 July 1942. The only complaint I found without such a specific context dates from 1898: PAR, NHD, vol. 1/1/21, Natal Harbour Board, Minutes of Meetings, 17 June 1898.
and was thus in the interest of employers.\(^{27}\) This was of course only the case if this pilferage remained within certain bounds.

Cargo theft only made it into the newspapers when larger and more valuable items were stolen, for example when a white railway checker stole twelve cases of whisky, eight drums of white lead, one case of oil, one case of starch, twenty-one drums of creosote, and attempted to take 153 bags of sulphur.\(^{28}\) Indeed, pilferage was not always as ‘innocent’ as just cleaning the wharves. People also stole bigger and more expensive cargoes, without the tacit acceptance of employers. Guns and generators were especially popular among the bigger items. Generators were generally used to water the land and were thus an investment in agriculture. Guns were usually sold at high profits. Eight interviewees said they had stolen a generator and five that they had stolen guns; one had done both.\(^{29}\) While some of these incidents may have happened after 1959, others did take place in the 1950s, as several of these pilferers retired in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

More extensive pilferage required not only a culture of acceptance, but also the cooperation and complicity of people who had the authority to write clearance notes, adjust inventories, or were unlikely to be searched. In practice, this meant that it required the complicity of an \textit{induna} or white supervisor. Supervisors and \textit{izinduna} were frequently so involved in

\(^{27}\) Cf. Ditton, op. cit., 52-53.


\(^{29}\) Generators were stolen by Amos Sibiya, eMpangeni, 10 June 2009; Libho Qoza, Upper uMkomaas, 15 June 2009; Zifo Mzizi, Underberg, 16 June 2009; Sihle Zungu, Highflats, 8 July 2009; Doda Nxele, uMzinto, 11 July 2009; Nelson Ndaba, Nkwezela, 17 July 2009; Cacile Khozana, Lusikisiki, 8 August 2009; Mzo Mzongo. Those who stole guns will not be named.
pilferage that they were often the ones to introduce other workers to the possibility of stealing larger items:30

The other activity that I undertook was stealing cargo. I had access to that when one day the white foreman told me to take a box full of guns and put it in the company bakkie, and we took it to his home. When he opened it, there were twenty-four guns and he gave me three of them and warned me not to tell anyone. That woke me up and I got spoiled. I then did this on my own, with my own connections, and that made me take and sell a lot of things from the ships and earned me a lot of money.

Those higher up in the dock hierarchy often pilfered on a larger scale. Yet, as they were not going to carry the loot to the bakkie themselves, they needed the assistance of a worker they trusted or could bribe on what Gobile Mbhele called a “shut-up base.”31 The involvement of white supervisors made it difficult for the police to catch thieves, as supervisors would not be searched and could write clearance notes.32 Galo Mtolo mentioned: “the foremen also told me to take that there and if the foreman sent you no one would say anything. That was stealing and they gave me these things [the pilfered goods]. I sold them and kept the money.”33

However, as Amos Sibiya makes clear, the initiative did not have to come from the person with authority. When he saw something he liked, he would take it to the supervisor, who would then give it to him. This was only possible if there was a prior relation of trust and complicity between the two. No less than twelve workers mentioned that they gained access to cargoes due to the complicity of white supervisors.34 One foreman was a particularly active

30 He shall remain anonymous because of the nature of the goods stolen. This person retired in the early 1960s.
31 Interview with Gobile Mbhele, Spring, 14 July 2009.
33 Interview with Galo Mtolo, Izingolweni, 30 June 2009.
34 Interviews with Zithulele Chemane, Siphofu, 9 July 2009; Hlolomzi Ngcwangula, Lusikisiki, 29 July 2009; Sonke Zizi, Lusikisiki, 31 July 2009; Takulu Kheswa, Lusikisiki, 1 August 2009; Bhekinkosi Zimu,
pilferer, as he was mentioned by several interviewees; his nick-name was Nkomiyahlaba, 'the
cow that gores'. Moreover, clearance notes written by white supervisors were also doctored for
reuse. As such, their authority could be used without consent. This was of course riskier and one
could face arrest. Yet, only one of the interviewees for this research was ever arrested for
pilferage. He was part of a gang of professional thieves, based in Sikotheni, an area of
uMkhumbane:

The ships were loading and off-loading different cargoes.
Therefore, I started stealing and after a while I made connections
with Sikotheni thieves who taught me to steal cargo and also to
identify it while it was still in the boxes. Therefore, I started
stealing until, luckily, they were caught while I wasn’t there.
But, they said I was with them and then the police came and
arrested me.

It is not surprising that this gang was active in uMkhumbane, which was known as a centre for
the fencing of stolen goods. Yet, the fear of being arrested was enough to scare some workers
away from more extensive pilferage. Cacile Khozana stole one generator and got a fright. He
never engaged in large-scale theft again. Lungani Xulu retired when somebody told the police
where he usually sold dagga. Bhekinkosi Zimu retired when some of his colleagues were arrested
and informed the police about his activities: “Mr. Dlams, you see about stealing cargo: some
other workers got caught doing that and were arrested. They then started pointing out other
thieves. That is when I went into retirement [...].” Lunguza Mbelu and Zitha Xaba stayed away

Elandskop, 22 October 2009; Zakhele Mthembu, Nhlavini, 3 November 2009; Amos Sibiya; Galo Mtolo;
Doda Nxele; Lungani Xulu; Gobile Mbhele; Mzwakhe Sosibo.
35 Zakhele Mthembu; Bhekinkosi Zimu; Mzwakhe Sosibo.
36 Interview Phumla Nyathikazi, Lusikisiki, 1 August 2009.
37 As this is no longer small-scale pilferage, the name of this worker will not be mentioned.
38 “Cause of Durban Crime,” Natal Daily News, 22 January 1943; KCAL, PNAB, KCF 21, file H2/CM,
“Memorandum: re Supply of Goods to Illegal Traders,” undated; KCF 57, file T9, vol. 3, Licensing Officer
to Manager of the Municipal Native Affairs Department, 30 August 1950; handwritten notes in the same
from pilferage completely for fear of arrest.\textsuperscript{39} Under apartheid many Africans in the cities experienced arrest for trivial and administrative offenses. They were thus familiar with the resulting trauma and most did not care to repeat it, even if the fact that so many Africans were arrested meant that imprisonment did not really carry a stigma.\textsuperscript{40}

That dock workers regarded a certain amount of pilferage as acceptable did not mean that everything was tolerated. They did have a sense of right and wrong, but that sense differed from the legal definitions of theft and crime, just like beer brewers, \textit{dagga} sellers, and domestic servants stealing food from their employers broke the law but did not consider what they did to be immoral.\textsuperscript{41} Pilferers did operate within self-imposed limits, which were enforced by the group and a deep-seated moral economy.\textsuperscript{42} The concept of ‘moral economy’ is used here as signifying the continuing influence of pre-capitalist moral norms, social relations, and user rights in a capitalist colonial economy.\textsuperscript{43} This concept has most famously been used in the South African context by

\textsuperscript{39} Interviews with Lunguza Mbelu, uMbumbulu, 14 June 2009; Zitha Xaba, Lusikisiki, 2 August 2009.
\textsuperscript{40} The trauma of arrest and police raids has also been discussed in fiction, see: Peter Abrahams, \textit{Mine Boy} (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 24-25; Alex la Guma, \textit{The Stone Country}, African Writers Series 152 (London: Heinemann, 1974). Wulf Sachs discusses John Chavafambira’s traumatic experience of being arrested and paraded in cuffs through the city, with his wife not knowing what happened to him for two weeks, \textit{Black Hamlet, with a new introduction by Saul Dubow and Jacqueline Rose} (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 142, 203-204.
\textsuperscript{41} Eileen Jensen Krige notes that many of the most respectable women in Marabastad and Bantule, Pretoria, were brewers and that there was no stigma attached to this illegal activity, “Some Social and Economic Facts Revealed in Native Family Budgets,” \textit{Race Relations} I (1934), 4: 96.
\textsuperscript{42} Cf.: Mars, \textit{Cheats at Work}, 4, 105.
\textsuperscript{43} E.P. Thompson was instrumental in the development of this concept. He discusses how it legitimated actions that were strictly speaking illegal, for example food riots: “This was rarely a mere uproar which culminated in the breaking open of barns or the looting of shops. It was legitimized by the assumption of an older moral economy, which taught the immorality of any unfair method of forcing up the price of provisions by profiteering upon the necessities of the people,” \textit{The Making of the English Working Class} (London: Penguin Books, 1991 [1963]), 67-68. In his important 1971 article in \textit{Past and Present}, he further developed this notion of legitimisation of crowd action, criticising explanations of rioting and protest that were based on a “crass economic reductionism” and did not take the cultural context of these riots into account. Food riots were seen by the population as a legitimate reaction to illegitimate hoarding: “It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion. By the notion of legitimisation 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
T. Durban Moodie. He interprets the moral economy “as encompassing mutually acceptable rules for resistance within systems of domination and appropriation. On the mines, the moral economy sorted out those aspects of compound life that dominant and subordinate groups could take for granted as inevitable from those which would be contested by workers, often with fierce outrage, or forbidden by management outright.”\(^{44}\) He uses it as an interactive and contested concept, shaped both top-down and bottom-up.\(^{45}\)

The acceptance of pilferage was part of a similar moral economy. While theft is mostly an individual act, it required a labour culture that both accepted its legitimacy and set limits. There is little evidence for the period under review of attempts at clamping down on pilferage, but there were seemingly mutually accepted limits to the quantities that one could take and there was some self regulation.\(^{46}\) Dockers in Durban made a clear distinction between taking spilled food items and, for example, taking generators. While the majority was engaged in pilfering loose food, only a minority stole guns, generators, and other bigger value items. Interviewees used words that could be translated as ‘theft’ or ‘stealing’ (\textit{ukweba, ukuntshontsha}) when talking about taking big items, but did not generally do so when it was only food that was being taken.\(^{47}\) This


\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) However, I did not find evidence of the same sort of institutionalised limits to pilferage that could be found in other ports. For example, Mars notes that dockers in St. John’s had a formula to calculate how much they could pilfer from a particular ship and that personal goods were off-bounds. See: Mars, “dock pilferage,” 224-225; \textit{Cheats at Work}, 106. While the interviewees did not express such clear guidelines, they also did not mention any personal goods among what they pilfered.

does not imply a monolithic common-value system, but rather a set of commonly accepted norms within a labour culture with roots in rural society.48

One important difference between the moral economy of Durban’s dockers and that of other dock workers around the globe was the recognition that selling pilfered goods was an acceptable practice. In other ports, the selling of these goods was often considered illegitimate. If pilferage was not for personal consumption, it was no longer a right but rather a crime.49 This was not the case in Durban. Interviewees did not appear to regard the selling of pilfered goods as problematic. They talked openly about their little businesses based on the sale of pilfered merchandise. Doda Ndaweni, for example, said: “I ended up selling those loose foods and people were buying it because it was cheap and plenty. That made me end up not using my wages for consumption and sending home good money to buy cattle.” And, Sosha Masikane “was collecting broken bags of sugar, beans, rice, and all that I found there and I sent it home to sell and eat.”50 Bheka Dlaba, who was involved in organising the 1958 strikes, first started selling pilfered goods at uMkhumbane and “my price was small and the quantities were big.” There was a city woman selling for him: “As soon as I saw that the job was proceeding, I spoke to one city girl to sell it for me and paid her with food stuff to raise her children. I avoided making her my girlfriend because I did not like city women.” Later, he also sent loose salt and sugar home for his wife to sell and started selling chickens.51

However, not everyone was as likely to engage in pilferage. All casual workers, except one, mentioned that they pilfered, but only about one-third of all permanent workers mentioned this. Permanent workers usually lived in employer-owned compounds where their lives were

48 Cf.: Atkins, op. cit.; La Hausse, op. cit.
49 Cooke Johnson, op. cit., 722.
50 Interview with Sosha Masikane, Mooi River, 23 October 2009.
51 Interview with Bheka Dlaba, Mooi River, 17 November 2009.
constantly scrutinised, which complicated pilferage, and they received free meals, reducing the need for it. Working most days, they also did not have much time to run a side-business.

However, the casual labour system was abolished in 1959, making pilferage less attractive for former casual labourers who became part of a permanent labour pool.

**Bribery**

To base a business on pilferage, one had to secure predictable access to goods. Also, dockers required some sort of risk management in order to pilfer bigger items or larger quantities. They could do both by making the right connections with complicit *izinduna* and white supervisors, with other pilferers, and even with the police. Having relations with people who could provide access to ‘the good stuff’, items that could easily be sold for a handsome profit, afforded one access to considerable income opportunities. Making and maintaining these connections through bribes, selling *dagga*, and day-to-day social interaction was often an important part of these workers’ livelihood strategies.

Mtukatshelwa Phewa bribed both police and *izinduna* to make his business possible:52

[The police] first disturbed me. Then I thought to sort this out by visiting the police station with something the police wanted and they left me alone after that. Even when some policemen wanted to come to me or to raid the whole area, I was informed by my connection amongst them. Then, I just closed the shop. [...] I knew that *izinduna* and other gangs used to go to the beer-hall after work to drink *utshwala*. Now, I used to buy a lot of beer for them and they became my good friends, like the police. I knew what they loved, like meat and drinking, and that’s what I did to sort someone out.

Later in his life, he also gained access to land through the connections he made as a trader, because the man from whom he rented a *bakkie* to transport his goods arranged this. This man

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52 Interview with Mtukatshelwa Phewa, Izingolweni, 29 May 2009.
was Mdu Jama, who cooperated extensively with Phewa. Jama also made regular visits to the police station to keep them happy and to bribe them. In general, it seems that those with commercial businesses were often well-connected and relied heavily on these networks. For Jama, his car was a major asset in maintaining these useful relationships; it made him into a ‘blue-eyed boy’ among izinduna who had access to goods, but no means of transporting them: “White supervisors did not like me after hearing that I had a car, but izinduna liked me for it. Because, if they had something special to remove from the docks, I was there for them.” Another way in which to make valuable connections was by selling good-quality dagga. Several interviewees had izinduna and white supervisors among their clientele, which resulted in substantial benefits, such as promotions and access to good pilferage opportunities, as discussed in chapter five. Lungani Xulu took care of another practical need by paying bus drivers in kind for transporting pilfered “flour, salt, rice, samp, tins of fish, etc.” to his wife to sell in their tearoom.

Apart from turning a blind eye to and assisting in pilferage, izinduna could also hire certain people before others. As elsewhere, casual hiring in Durban lent itself to nepotism and bribery. This system gave izinduna considerable autonomy in hiring certain people and not hiring others and thus it was important for togt workers to be liked and preferred. It was certainly important to be able to get the job done and thus to be a good worker. Nevertheless, buying beer, selling good dagga, and being well-connected definitely helped, not only for getting hired yourself, but also for people you know. Godidi Msomi mentioned: “I had to do something for the

53 Interview with Mdu Jama, Izingolweni, 30 May 2009.
55 A term used in casual dock work around the world for those men who are preferred by the foremen, here izinduna, and get hired more regularly than others.
56 Interviews with Co Pityana, Mt. Frere, 28 July 2009; Dumile Ndlovu; Doda Nxele; Lungani Xulu.
induna so that he takes my people, the people I know from home and from Lamontville, before taking any boys on the line.” Bribing izinduna was a way to manage the insecurities of casual dock labour.

The difference between using one’s social networks to find jobs and bribery is not always very clear. A bribe was often an extension of the social relations that African – and other – workers had always used to get access to jobs. Buying an induna some beer could be seen as bribing him, but one could also say that such a person is just maintaining his friendly relationship with that induna. As Linda Cooke Johnson notes for dock workers around the world: “Corruption on the docks was fundamentally economic, not necessarily malum in se or in prohibitum. It often began with preferential hiring for family, friends, and reliable workers and then extended to economic kickbacks, theft, increasing corruption, bribery, and extortion.”57

Keletso Atkins describes how Africans found and evaluated work for each other through ‘kitchen associations’ in the nineteenth century and Mphiwa Buxton Mbatha explains how people would arrange for their kin and neighbours to be hired in the 1950s.58 Only a small minority of interviewed dock workers did not get their job through similar contacts: three were recruited at home and a further three had no prior connections on the docks. Fifty-two interviewees found their dock employment through these social networks, through having contacts on the docks. These networks consisted of kin, abakhaya, customers, neighbours in the townships or shack settlements, etc.59 In this context, what was bribery to some may have been maintaining this social network to others. The latter was of course especially important for casual workers.

57 Cooke Johnson, op. cit., 723.
59 These networks were linked both to the rural home areas as to the urban context, and thus resembled the mixed networks described by Peter Harries-Jones more than those described by Philip and Iona Mayer who
Keeping the izinduna happy was not only important in order to get work, but also to get the right jobs. Phumla Nyathikazi has already been quoted in a previous chapter, saying that as casual worker one could present oneself for hiring at those ships that have desirable cargoes. Mzwakhe Sosibo confirmed that “if you are a casual worker, you face to be hired where you know there is cargo that you want to steal.” Of course, the right connections would enable one to be hired on such ships more regularly. Casual labour and bribery thus enabled systematic pilferage, which in turn was for many at the basis of small businesses. Mdu Jama pointed out that the strict regulations for permanent workers and the fact that these labourers could not choose on which ship to work would have inhibited his strategy of systematic pilferage. Two others remarked that casual labour gave them the freedom to work on their side-businesses, which were in turn supplied through pilferage.\textsuperscript{60} There were clear statistical links between casual labour, pilferage, and starting a business. All casual labourers interviewed had a business on the side, compared to less than half of the permanent workers. Two-thirds of dock workers with a business also engaged in pilferage, which was the case for only one-fifth of non-entrepreneurs.

**Crime as resistance**

Many Africanists have written about these ‘crimes’ as informal and everyday forms of resistance. They did so partly to rectify the too-exclusive focus on formal strike action and unionisation by many structural Marxists and labour historians.\textsuperscript{61} For example, in his excellent book on dock

\textsuperscript{60} Mtukatshelwa Phewa; Mdu Jama; Sicelo Mbokazi.

labour in Mombasa, Frederick Cooper does not mention theft, pilferage, or occupational crime, yet these activities likely were prominent in these workers’ lives, as they were in so many other ports. David Hemson does mention informal action, “such as refusing to move into the compounds, slowing the pace of work, a high labour turnover, or theft of cargo,” but only in passing. Rendering these activities as acts of resistance infuses them with a sense of agency for African workers, thus making these actions more than just coping strategies or examples of socially unadjusted behaviour. These acts can of course fruitfully be regarded both as survivalism and as resistance, but the emphasis on one or the other can give these acts completely different meanings, from desperation to empowerment.

Theft and criminal activity could also potentially be a marker of masculinity, as it was for urban youth gangs. An element of bravado was often present in dock pilferage around the world and workers would brag about extraordinary feats of pilferage. However, the dock workers in this research did not place much, if any, emphasis on this meaning of pilferage. They related being a man to having cattle, being married, and building one’s umuzi, but not to pilferage. Their strength, their perseverance, and the collective nature of their work were important too; their

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66 Cooke Johnson, op. cit., 276.
nickname was therefore onyathi, the buffaloes. Most pilferers did not identify with tsotsi gangs and even mentioned these as an important reason for not liking the city.

Like E.P. Thompson and Hobsbawm, who saw theft and pilferage as a reaction to the enclosure of common user rights, Robin Cohen and Bill Freund point out that theft in colonial Africa could similarly be read as a reaction to a still ongoing process of proletarianisation and dispossession. However, Freund departs from Hobsbawm’s concept of ‘social banditry’ in not seeing the same historical evolution in forms of resistance:

Theft [...] can play a major role alongside the more conventionally developed forms of working-class protest; indeed, it can provide an effective vehicle of protest when and where conventional forms fail. Far from being crude or fruitless, theft can be an effective economic response by proletarians to the totalizing surplus demands of corporate capital.

While theft is an individual form of resistance, it does not therefore exclude collective action and a proletarian consciousness. Indeed, despite their pilfering and despite not having the right to unionise, dockers in Durban were also a strike-prone group of workers and were at times well organised. Theft does not have to be pre-political and devoid of consciousness. Freund notes that “the distinction between theft and re-appropriation may be less important than their similarities.” The idea of re-appropriation assumes a conscious resistance to dispossession and

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68 Interviews with Gedla Lukhozi, Polela, 6 June 2009; Doda Nxele.
70 Freund, op. cit., 69.
71 Cf.: Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock workers of Durban” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1979); “In the Eye of the Storm.”
72 Freund, op. cit., 69. Emphasis in original.
surplus-appropriation and thus carries an ideological and political meaning. Zulu Phungula clearly was aware of the injustice of their hard work at low pay: “What increases the number of ships is because we get so little money.” In the same meeting, Willie Khumalo noted that for the same job Africans would get paid less than whites. They fought this inequality as well as low wages and poor working conditions.

What some of this literature on informal resistance did inherit from Hobsbawm and Engels is the conceptualisation of these forms of resistance as essentially reactive. Cohen, in his important essay on hidden forms of resistance, discusses these forms according to the specific aspects of the proletarianisation process against which they were a reaction. As such, theft was for Cohen a reaction to the process of psychological adjustment of the workers. Here, bribing and pilferage were not just reactive; these were also active and strategic acts that were part of a wider livelihood strategy. As Isaacman et al. stress for informal peasant resistance in Mozambique: this was “not a knee-jerk reaction of all peasants. Instead, it was a carefully considered decision [...]”

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73 Examples of this consciousness from around the continent are numerous. Freund notes that Northern Nigerian tin miners considered theft “merely a modest recompensation for the expropriation of land and difficulties faced by Birom farmers; it expresses the belief that wealth has been appropriated unjustly by outsiders,” op. cit., 79. According to Kaijage, Tanga’s dockers viewed pilferage as “an attempt at a justifiable redistribution of resources,” op. cit., 302. Charles Van Onselen writes that pilfering miners in Southern Rhodesia “sought to gain compensation for what they had been denied through the system,” Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933 (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 240.
75 Cohen, op. cit., 12.
76 In a different context, James C. Scott’s seminal Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985) also implicitly assumes the reactive nature of informal resistance. By presenting the peasantry as essentially protesting and resisting new rural social relations, Scott leaves little room for peasants who may not just have been fighting these changes, but were also active participants in this change and were trying to prosper.
Indeed, pilferage and bribery were central to the economic strategies of many workers interviewed for this research. Dock workers in Durban used pilferage as a basis for small-scale enterprises on the side. A large number of the interviewees had some sort of commercial activity as an alternative source of income. Frequently this meant that they pilfered loose food which their wives would sell in the rural areas or which their city girlfriends or female relatives would sell in the townships. Even if their business outgrew what they could realistically pilfer, they had acquired the seed capital for these stores by selling pilfered goods. Pilferage and bribery were thus at the basis of these commercial endeavours. Free merchandise and the lack of overhead costs facilitated the success of such businesses.

For a good number of workers with little businesses on the side, entrepreneurial activities allowed them to become self-employed, withdraw their labour, and retire from the city much earlier than was the norm by the 1950s. There was indeed a strong congruence between having a business on the side and being able to retire early from the docks, as was noted in chapter five. One could thus say that their real act of resistance to proletarianisation was not so much in the actual pilfering and bribing, but rather in the withdrawal of their labour. Hence, pilferage was part of these wider livelihoods, part of a strategy to become independent from wage labour – sometimes consciously planned, sometimes more haphazard, but never purely reactive.

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78 By the 1950s, early retirement in the countryside had mostly become an illusion, by then wage labour was no longer a stint young men had to go through in order to become independent, but rather a lifelong reality. Aran Stuart MacKinnon, “Africans and the Myth of Rural Retirement in South Africa, ca 1900-1950,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* XXIII (2008), 2: 161-179.

79 The difference between having a business and not having one was not always clear cut. Yet, the average career on the docks for twenty-seven unambiguous entrepreneurs, who started on the docks in the 1950s, was less than twenty years; while for sixteen interviewees who had no commercial interests this was thirty-seven years. Only two workers without any business did not work until old age, an accident, or retrenchment forced them into retirement. However, only seven of the twenty-eight who had a commercial strategy worked longer than thirty years, with some retiring from wage labour as quickly as four years after starting work.
These strategies were possible because these labourers worked on the docks and in the holds, where they had access to cargoes. Their workplace was very difficult to police and the system of casual labour, apart from paying relatively well, allowed them the flexibility only to present for hiring at ships carrying desirable cargoes or to chose not to work one day and to spend their time and energy on their business instead. The nature of dock labour enabled these strategies. However, with the institution of a hiring monopoly in 1959 and of containerisation in the 1970s, these opportunities disappeared.

As Bill Freund has noted in the context of Northern Nigeria, it is also useful here to emphasise that individual action by workers does not have to exclude collective action and that there is no clear-cut historical progression from primitive, individual action to mature, collective action. In fact, not only did Durban’s dock workers combine strike action with individual action, for instance in the form of pilferage and the eventual withdrawal of their labour, but some prominent dock leaders from the 1930s and 1940s also showed commercial aspirations and concern for the interests of African traders, as has been noted in chapter four. Similarly, Bheka Dlaba and Dumile Sibiya were actively involved in working class action and were arrested for their role in organising the 1958 dock strikes, but had also used their job on the docks as a basis for a small business and an early retirement from wage labour.

**Conclusion**

Pilferage and bribery were common occurrences among African migrant labourers on Durban’s docks in the 1950s. At least half of the interviewees engaged in small-scale theft of cargo, mostly of food for personal consumption, but also of generators, guns, and goods for resale. This does

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80 Cf. Freund, op. cit.
81 Interviews with Mr. Sibiya, Dumile Sibiya’s son, eShowe, 18 November 2009; Bheka Dlaba.
not seem to have overly irked their employers, most of whom condoned pilferage. Almost all dockers used their social connections to get a job, sometimes giving gifts or bribes to make sure that the *izinduna* remain their friends. This chapter has argued that these ‘crimes’, which dock workers did not recognise as such, were more than opportunistic and primitive reactions to a process of proletarianisation and the insecurities of dock labour, as they have often been described in the literature. For many workers these activities were part of a wider household strategy that involved starting a small informal business, in which they often sold their loot, and could result in independence from wage labour. Several succeeded in becoming self-employed rural entrepreneurs. Pilferage and bribery were strategic acts integral to these livelihood strategies. The individual nature of pilferage, bribery, and entrepreneurialism, however, did not exclude collective action. Even some of the most prominent leaders of this particularly strike-prone group of workers engaged in these activities and defended the rights of African traders.
Chapter 8: Gender and generation

In chapters five and six, it was argued that the wage labour of an African worker was only a part of a more complex web of economic and social linkages, centred around the docks, his urban place of residence, and the rural areas where his family resided. Yet, so far more attention has been paid to the docks and the urban living conditions of the workers themselves. The labour of women and children was, however, integral to the livelihoods discussed here. This chapter focuses on that what happened ‘away in the locations’, to use the phrase William Beinart and Colin Bundy coined.¹

Beinart and Bundy noted correctly that these rural struggles have been largely overlooked in the literature, partly because of the interests of authors, partly because these dynamics are often hard to recover, as they mostly fall outside the historical record.² Similarly, gender and generational struggles within African households have often been ignored, as these equally took place ‘away in the locations’; the wives and children remained in the Reserves while the young men and the homestead heads, the abanumzane, were earning wages in the city or on the goldfields. When women were discussed in the context of labour migration, this was often only as ‘victims’ without agency, as Cherryl Walker noted.³ Others too were sharply critical of the relative absence of female perspectives in the historiography of Southern Africa.⁴

² Ibid., 1-2.
However, since the 1980s this bias has been addressed to some extent. Gender has become a more important focus for many historians and even many authors who do not specifically write about gender have at least acknowledged the importance of household and gender dynamics. Other aspects of gender relations than the man-woman nexus have also gained recognition, such as masculinities and non-heterosexual identities. However, many authors prefer to look at the lives of politically active women or women who moved to the cities, rather than the lives of women toiling in the Reserves, contributing to the livelihoods of their families without engaging in urban wage labour. In the recent volume *Women in South African History*, for example, relatively few of the contributions engage in any significant way with the lives of ordinary African women. More attention is given to women who move to the city and join trade unions or the ANC Women’s League.

The experiences of women who did not break out of the customary order – though they often did challenge it – and remained in the Reserves are some of the hardest to recover. Moreover, their ‘traditionalism’ has sometimes been confused for conservatism. This needs to be qualified in light of the socio-economic interests that these women protected. Defending ‘traditional’ role models is not necessarily a sign of innate conservatism and should be seen in the context of the livelihood of these women. Traditionalism could imply a defence of their family and their access to certain resources, such as the earnings of their migrant husbands and Reserve land. Indeed, women can have strong interests in defending their role as homemakers, but that

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does not have to mean that they accept a strictly patriarchal definition of the family and their role within it.⁷

Indeed, gender and generational inequalities are not timeless and unchanging; they are constantly contested and renegotiated. There is no eternal ‘African patriarchy’.⁸ Sexual relations are constantly being redefined as well. Just as there is no timeless African patriarchy, there is no static ‘Zulu sexuality’, as Mark Hunter points out.⁹ These domestic conflicts intensified as wage labour and urbanisation became more entrenched.¹⁰ Contestations by women and youths who ran away, went to court, or used more subtle methods of opposition are the subject of a number of recent monographs, such as Benedict Carton’s *Blood from Your Children* and Thomas McClendon’s *Genders and Generations Apart*.¹¹ Even without openly rebelling, women had their own ways of dealing with the challenges of the migrant labour system and poverty in the Reserves. Women too strategised and took decisions, both independently from men and in dialogue with them. Women had their own life strategies.¹² They eeked out an income from their

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⁷ Gasa asks pointedly “Why is the defence of the family seen as deeply conservative? Is this taking the context into account?” in “Feminism, motherism, patriarchies and women's voices in the 1950s,” in *Women in South African History*, ed. Gasa, 214. In chapter five in the same volume, “‘Let them build more gaols’,” she also stresses the impact of passes on women’s livelihoods as reason for resisting pass laws; she draws a direct link between political activism and the economic interests of women.

⁸ However, by lack of better terminology the term ‘patriarchy’ will be used throughout this chapter to indicate a social system where unequal access to resources and to rights are organised along lines of gender and generation. It should be kept in mind that this is not used as an ‘ideal type’, but as a reference to a system that is dynamic and changing because of changing context and continual challenges.


¹² Bozzoli uses the concept of ‘life strategies’ to stress that the *Women of Phokeng* were not just passive victims, but rather ‘decision-making existential beings’. Bozzoli with the assistance of Mmantho Nkotsoe,
own spheres of production, based on agriculture and petty trade, in the rural areas and in peri-
urban settlements. These female strategies, however, were often dependent on male wages and 
pilfered goods and were frequently severely curtailed by the many restrictions African women 
faced. Dunbar Moodie labelled this situation ‘male-dependent independence’.\textsuperscript{13} Men, however, 
were also dependent on women to keep their rural household alive and to sell their pilfered goods.

One of the goals of this chapter is to recover some of these female strategies and to look 
at the relations of mutual dependence between the rural and peri-urban female spheres of 
accumulation and the urban livelihood strategies of dockers. Unfortunately, there are limits to the 
extent to which this chapter can recover the women’s perspective. Part of the explanation for this 
lies in the choice of research topic. From the onset, the intention was to study dock labour, which 
resulted in the choice of Sibongo Dlamini as interviewer and research assistant. The choice of a 
fellow former docker was beneficial to this project. The interviewees found common ground with 
Sibongo and as a union-man he had connections that facilitated finding interviewees. To talk to 
wives and daughters of dock workers, it would have been better to work with a female 
interviewer. To get as good an understanding of the perspective of the women as of that of the 
dock workers themselves would have required an additional section to this research, for which 
more time and more resources would have been needed.

Thus, this chapter largely relies on the interviews with male dock workers, as well as 
secondary literature, archival material, and a number of contemporary sources. These sources also 
give insight into the social role of umnumzane that these workers aspired for. How did these 
aspirations define their ideas of manhood, shaping both generational and masculine identities? To

\textit{Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983} (Portsmouth, 
NH: Heinemann, 1991), 236.
\textsuperscript{13} T. Durban Moodie with Vivienne Ndatshe, \textit{Going for Gold: Men, Mines, and Migration} (Berkeley and 
get an insight into these aspects of livelihoods and identities, one has to start by looking at the household dynamics and power struggles within the rural homesteads. To do that, a few general remarks about African households and the homestead economy have to be made first. After discussing the structure of the homestead, migrants’ strategies to buy themselves into this patriarchal system will be discussed and related to conceptions of masculinity. The third section of this chapter will focus on the women in the Reserves and their strategies that could contest the authority of the men. This independence, however, came with significant drawbacks that will also be discussed. The last section will debate how both men and women tried to manage the breakdown of the rural economy, both challenging and strategically appealing to established gendered and generational norms.

The structure of the African homestead

Several authors have noted that labour migration did not just originate because of the needs of capital. The origins of migratory labour can also be found in the internal dynamics of the African homestead. While African traditions have certainly been partly invented and redefined through colonial intervention, the gendered and generational hierarchies that made it into the Natal Code of Native Law were not purely inventions. There were pre-existing divisions within African society that made it possible to source wage labour from homesteads, something that was briefly discussed in chapter two.

Claude Meillassoux outlined patterns of production and reproduction in African households and explained how these processes structured households. He asserted that production and reproduction should be considered on the basis of a life-cycle rather than on a yearly basis. Households will always have unproductive members, such as the elderly, the young, and the

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14 E.g.: Walker, op. cit., 169; Bozzoli, “Marxism,” 146.
infirm, though they may still play a role in the reproduction of the household, for example by raising the children. At the same time a balance needs to be struck between women who can biologically and socially bear children, and the whole group. To maintain these ratios individual households exchanged people; most importantly, they exchanged wives who could perform agricultural and domestic labour, and ensure reproduction. These exchanges took place according to certain patterns of reciprocity and domestic politics. However, not only women were subjected to the needs of the household. Youths as well were subject to household strategies that guarantee inter-generational distribution in favour of the non-productive member of society, notably the elders. As such, the structure of African households was inherently based on gender and generational inequalities.15

This inter-generational exchange and control over women’s reproductive and productive labour was organised through the custom of bridewealth, which determined the movement of women between households and secured the redistribution of resources, in the form of cattle, from the younger to the elder generation.16 These cattle were compensation to the sending household for the loss of the woman’s labour. The payment of ilobolo was not a straightforward ‘purchase’ of a wife, as colonial and missionary reformers argued. It was a process that often happened in instalments, as the bride price was usually too high to be paid at once. This created a

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long-lasting social relation of indebtedness towards the elders. As labour migration became entrenched, elders gained access to the migrant’s earnings through *ilobolo*, which was inflated as a result of increased earning capacities and higher demands by fathers and mothers. Moreover, the continued practice of *ukulobola* contributed to cattle’s lasting importance as a means of investment, as it was needed for the reproduction of the lineage.

In a society where wealth and access to human and other resources are mediated through the ownership of cattle, the exclusion of women from this form of capital put them in a dependent position. Access to land could also usually only be secured through their husbands or elders. In an agricultural economy, the control of female and juvenile labour was essential in the reproduction of the household. Women and children were thus social and economic assets, access to which depended on the exchange of cattle. As such, the relation between a father and a child was not necessarily a biological one; even a non-biological child was an asset. He who paid *ilobolo* had the legitimate claim to fatherhood. Successful men were men with many dependents, many wives and children. Generational divides were another basis on which labour was allocated and extracted within the household. Grandmothers did not work and had

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19 Epprecht, *This matter of women*, 17; Bozzoli, “Marxism,” 150.
22 However, by the early twentieth century polygamy was already on the decline, yet the percentage of polygamous men was the highest in the Natal province. “Third Census of the Population of the Union of South Africa, Enumerated 3rd May, 1921: Report with Summaries and Analysis of the Detailed Tables, Parts I to IX,” U.G. 37-'26, 231.
considerable powers over their daughters-in-law. Children had to work as well; girls helped their mothers with household chores and boys herded cattle. The adult homestead head, on the other hand, did traditionally not perform much labour.

This theoretical framework, however, has been criticised for stripping women and youths of agency. Carton argues that it does not explain why they conformed to patriarchal authority or when and how they resisted it. Nevertheless, this model does identify the fault lines along which conflict could emerge and which were likely to be at the origins of change. Young men, of course, had the prospect of buying into the hierarchy and becoming homestead heads themselves. The elders controlled the resources needed for this, namely land, labour, and cattle. Mothers and wives were often concerned enough with family security to conform to a relatively stable patriarchal system. Young, unmarried women worked hard in the household and had little to look forward to apart from more domestic drudgery. They were the more likely candidates to abandon their homesteads. Yet, young men ran away as well. As rural poverty increased, the promises of land and cattle became tenuous. And, on white farms there was nothing to inherit. The African homestead relied on children’s labour, but the future reward was growing thin.

28 Carton, op. cit., 72.
Building an *umuzi* and becoming an *umnumzane*, however, remained the goal of many young men. Certainly, male migrants initially regarded labour migration to be in their own interest; Moodie described it as the “seizing of booty to maintain their desired ideal existence.”

Earning *ilobolo* and the necessary capital to build one’s *umuzi* were indeed often the main reasons for which migrants engaged in wage labour. They could migrate because these societies had the capacity to subordinate the agricultural and domestic labour of women that was needed for the daily survival of the homestead. It was their control over the productive and reproductive capacities of women that allowed labourers to avoid proletarianisation and to achieve the status of *umnumzane*.

It has been argued, for example by Martin Legassick and Harold Wolpe, that continued agricultural and pastoral production in the Reserves subsidised cheap urban labour. However, at the same time urban wages also subsidised the rural economy, which was dependent on these remittances. By making remittances, urban workers not only ensured the reproduction of cheap labour, they also reproduced the gendered and generational relations of a patriarchal society that could no longer exist without urban wages. This was the “desired ideal existence” Moodie mentioned. Rather than urban wages subsidising the rural homestead or the Reserve economy subsidising urban wages, this should be seen as the reproduction of the household (and with that: cheap labour and rural patriarchy). This reproduction takes place in separate but dependent spheres: the rural, the docks, and sometimes the townships.

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31 Walker, op. cit., 179.
Buying back into rural society

Most interviewees moved to Durban in the 1950s “to be a rural man.” They were adamant that they were not interested in settling in the city and none of them did. The responses to the question whether they would consider permanently moving to the city reflected their emotional connection to home: “No, my mind was at home all the time”; “My mind was at home and with my mother”; “No, that would cause back luck, I had to look after my father’s home only.”

Nelson Ndaba added that he had no interest in city women because “my ancestors would leave me if I did that.” Their connection to the land was strong because “you are nothing without land and you can’t make your own home.” Livestock symbolised the rural life these men were trying to achieve: “livestock is the life of a man and that is what I wanted to have when I came to Durban.”

These dock workers did not just long for a rural idyll, they took up their role in a patriarchal system in which they could become an umnumzane. They aspired to become patriarchs and to reproduce their households together with the gendered and generational relations that defined the rural homestead. As such, some took several wives despite the general decline of polygamy. Amos Sibiya even had five wives, thirty-five sons, and ten daughters. He considered

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33 Interview with Mtukatshelwa Phewa, Izingolweni, 29 May 2009.
34 This was one of the questions with the most unanimous responses, with many saying “No, no, no,” or “Woo, not me.” However, those who did have a house or shack in the city, or had access to one, did want to retain access to it. The asset of an urban dwelling in which their children could stay when they came to Durban for schooling or work was greatly appreciated, even if they did not consider moving there permanently. See: interviews with Sipho Gazu, iXopo, 27 May 2009; Mtukatshelwa Phewa.
36 Interview with respectively Zithulele Chemane, Siphofu, 9 July 2009.
37 Interview with Mzenkosi Duma, Mkhunya North, 13 November 2009.
himself to be “strengthening the Sibiya nation.” Traditionally, the father would pay *ilobolo* for the first wives of his sons, though the stress on the rural economy meant that many fathers could no longer meet this social obligation. Therefore, it had become usual to go to the city to work for one’s own *ilobolo*. Several interviewees did indeed mention that they earned their own bridewealth on the docks. Some, however, stressed that they themselves did fulfil their obligations and provided the cattle for their sons to marry.

Through marriage and the establishment of an *umuzi* male migrants bought themselves into rural society and its gendered norms. The cattle earned in the city were used for *ilobolo* and the homestead was built with money earned in the city. Cattle were central in the reproduction of both patriarchal homesteads and migrant labour. This was more than a purely material action; by building a homestead they established their social role as husband, father, and homestead head. They gained respect and moral standing as a ‘stay-at-home’. Through these actions they secured their place in rural society and staked their claim to becoming an *umnumzane*. During the first half of the twentieth century, migrancy became part of the process of homestead reproduction and a normal phase in the life cycle of an African man. However, as the Reserve

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39 Interview with Amos Sibiya, eMpangeni, 10 June 2009. See also: interviews with Godidi Msomi, uMkomaas, 21 May 2009; Takulu Kheswa, Lusikisiki, 1 August 2009; Siphehile Dladla, Sweetwater, 24 October 2009.
41 Interviews with Sipho Zondi, Pietermaritzburg, 7 May 2009; Thembinkosi Miya, iXopo, 26 May 2009; Mandla Xaba, Bulwer, 28 May 2009; Velile Goba, Riverside, 17 June 2009; Zolile Khumalo; and others.
42 Zolile Khumalo; Thembinkosi Miya.
43 Mager explains the gendered nature of resistance to rural rehabilitation schemes in the Ciskei through reference to the attempts to limit livestock numbers, which would strain the practice of *ukulobola* and undermine male supremacy. Mager, op. cit., 74-80.
The economy became less viable, homestead heads had to continue working and wages became essential for the continued survival and development of the homestead.\textsuperscript{45}

The migrants’ commitment to rural society was not limited to marriage and the establishment of an \textit{umuzi}. Before establishing their own homestead, sons would help in the development of their father’s homestead. Moreover, most interviewees continued investing in their land and herds after the establishment of their \textit{umuzi}. They mentioned these things as an important use of their wages.\textsuperscript{46} These young men conformed to the roles they were expected to fulfil and obeyed the homestead head. They also often supported their mother’s house. Five interviewees came to Durban to find a job after the \textit{umnumzane} made that decision for them.\textsuperscript{47}

Even more workers mentioned that they came to Durban to support their mother (or, in one case his aunt and in another his grandmother).\textsuperscript{48}

Labour migration became an expectation for an eighteen year-old man. Several interviewees mentioned that they came to the city because it was expected when they turned eighteen.\textsuperscript{49} A stint of urban labour, just like mine labour, became an alternative initiation for

\textsuperscript{45} Beinart wrote the following: “Migrancy now became incorporated in the process of homestead segmentation and reproduction. Workers would migrate to earn bridewealth. After marrying and establishing their own homesteads, many continued to work in order to build their herds, purchase agricultural implements and accumulate other commodities.” Beinart, \textit{Political Economy}, 98.


\textsuperscript{47} Interviews Xolani Ngema, Kranskop, 9 June 2009; Mpho Jaca, Hlabeni, 10 July 2009; Sipho Zondi; Vela Mtolo; Amos Sibiya.

\textsuperscript{48} Interviews with Lalani Dumakude, Impendle, 7 June 2009; Zolile Khumalo; Mandla Xaba; Bongeka Faku; Galo Mtolo; Zandile Mbile; Xoliile Jaca; Co Pityana.

\textsuperscript{49} Interviews with Gcinokwakhe Sobiso, Creighton, 18 June 2009; Sihle Zungu, Highflats, 8 July 2009; Gampu Ngcamu, Sinadini, 25 October 2009; Velile Goba; Sihle Zungu; Sofia Nkomo.
young men. New forms of male socialisation developed in the cities. From the early twentieth century, Durban's amalaita gangs of young male domestic servants fulfilled the socialising function rural youth associations once did. Similarly, songs reminded young Sotho miners on the Rand that they were now adults with household responsibilities. The maturity that labour migration symbolised also implied an independence from their father's resources. Sons wanted to be independent. Velile Goba "had to go to work and not depend on [his] father's things." Labour migration did not just bring in much-needed cash, but was also a marker of masculinity; it made boys into men with duties to the household. Robert Zulu, the main character in R.R.R. Dhlomo’s novel An African Tragedy, went to work because "for a young, educated man to die having not seen and enjoyed town life was a deplorable tragedy." Zulu, however, was torn between the temptations of urban pleasures and his responsibilities towards his rural kin. A 'soft, warning voice' in his heart told him not to give in to temptation: "Do not! You will be ruined! Think of your duty to God. Think of those you left behind you. Be a man!" Dhlomo’s novel acted as a warning for respectable, Christian young men to remain committed to their rural families.

52 Moodie, op. cit., 14.
53 Lungani Xulu; Sonke Zizi; Zitha Xaba.
54 See also: Philip and Iona Mayer came to a similar conclusion in Townsmen or Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanization in a South African City (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1961), 91.
56 Ibid., 3.
Buying back into rural society was mostly done through cattle; livestock were an important form of capital that was essential for ceremonies and fulfilling social obligations. One needs cattle to pay *ilobolo*. Although some monetisation of bridewealth was taking place, especially in the cities, most interviewees paid at least part of the *ilobolo* for their first wife in cattle.\(^{57}\) If they wanted to marry more than one wife, they needed to accumulate more cattle.\(^{58}\) The wealth and prosperity of a homestead was also measured by the size of its herd and some interviewees were rather proud that they had more than eighty or even one hundred heads of cattle.\(^{59}\) These cattle could be used to gain dependents and clients, not only through marriage, but also through *ukusisa*, the practice of loaning out cattle.\(^{60}\) Prestige, social standing, and the reproduction of the household were inextricable from ownership of livestock.

Thus, almost all interviewees invested at least part of their wages in livestock. More than thirty of the forty-eight interviewees in the first cycle of interviews mentioned explicitly that they used their wages to buy cattle. Only one said that he did not buy cattle, as his father had left him enough livestock.\(^{61}\) While these dock workers also made investments in agriculture and while wives struggled to maintain production, cattle herding gained in importance compared to agriculture, which further marginalised women within the household.\(^{62}\) Moreover, by investing their money in cattle men could limit female access to these resources and thus their

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\(^{57}\) Some noted that they paid for their second wives in cash only, e.g. Godidi Msomi. See also: Mia Brandel, “Urban lobolo attitudes: a preliminary report,” *African Studies* XVII (1958), 1: 34-51. Murray also noted that by the mid-1970s no actual cattle was usually exchanged in the particularly badly overgrazed mountain kingdom of Lesotho, but the language of cattle remained: Murray, “Marital strategy,” 100.

\(^{58}\) *Illobolo* for a second or later wife would have to be paid by the husband himself, the father normally only pays for the first wife.

\(^{59}\) Interviews with respectively Lihlo Shange, Sizamenjane, 20 October 2009; Mr. Sibiya, Dumile Sibiya’s son, eShowe, 18 November 2009.


\(^{61}\) Interview with Mdu Jama, Izingolweni, 30 May 2009.

\(^{62}\) Mager, op. cit., 87.
independence. Women had no access to this cattle and it could not simply be exchanged for their cash value. Thus, these resources were kept out of the wives’ economic sphere.63

Becoming a homestead head and a rural man of stature came with social obligations. Moodie explains: “ubudoda, the essence of manhood, had to do with competent and benevolent management of the umzi, aiding in homestead decision-making, settling disputes, and generous sharing of homestead resources with guests and visitors.”64 The interviewees were conscious of these expectations and tried to fulfil them. They invested in their land, though this mostly remained limited to fencing and pilfering generators and hoses. However, one man bought a tractor and another one hired an experienced farmer to teach his wife.65 Thoko Mlaba, the only woman among the interviewees, mostly used her land to ensure continued access to it; that way she could pass it on to her son.66 Some dockers also supported mothers, aunts, grandparents, or siblings.67 Lihlo Budu, for example, not only paid for the schooling of his own children, but also for his three younger brothers and two sisters. Many sons were particularly concerned with the

63 Cattle should be seen as a special-purpose money, as described by Karl Polanyi and other substantivist anthropologists. This is a form of money that can only serve specific money-uses and can only be used by certain people, as opposed to general-purpose money that can serve all money-uses for anyone. The economic value of cattle cannot be divorced from its social value and can as such not be subjected to a formalist market logic. In other words, a wife cannot just exchange cattle for its market-value to get access to these resources. Karl Polanyi, “The Economy as Instituted Process,” in Trade and Market in Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory, ed. Karl Polanyi et al. (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957), 243-270; Paul Bohannan and George Dalton, eds., Markets in Africa (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1962). Ferguson makes a similar argument about the role of cattle in Lesotho in The Anti-Politics Machine, 149-151.

64 Moodie, op. cit., 38.

65 Interviews with respectively Libho Qoza, Upper uMkomaas, 15 June 2009; Xolila Jaca.

66 Interview with Thoko Mlaba, New Hanover, 8 June 2009.

67 Interviews with Lihlo Budu, Izingolweni, 29 June 2009; Zolile Khumalo; Mandla Xaba; Lalani Dumakude; Bongeka Faku; Galo Mtolo; Zandile Mbile; Xolile Jaca.
well-being of their mother, especially if their father was polygamous or otherwise unable to give their mothers the support they deserved.68

Men were not the only ones on whom expectations rested. Obedience was expected from wives. As they were the ones running the homestead in the absence of their men, they did have some autonomy. However, many husbands insisted on their decision-making prerogative.69 A mixed picture emerged from the interviews regarding decisions on cultivation and other aspects of the rural economy, such as the selling of produce. A number of men acknowledged the initiative of their wives, while others insisted that they took all decisions. Some said they took decisions in consultation; others left decisions to their father or mother. However, when cash investments were involved, for example to buy wire for fencing, they left little scope for female initiative.70 Only one docker acknowledged that his wife took the initiative to fence their land.71 One dock worker even considered the fact that his wives sold produce without his consent a form of theft, especially since they used that money for themselves and did not give it to him.72

Women’s independent access to economic resources could be seen as a threat, which was another reason to invest in cattle. A wife should also not be lazy. She should work the fields, run the household, and make beer.73

Young men could thus achieve _ubudoda_ by migrating to the city or the mines and earning wages. The irony was that one could become a man and gain respect as _umnumzane_ by going

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68 Zolile Khumalo’s father had died and the mothers of Galo Mtolo and Zandile Mbile were each one of three wives in the homestead.
70 See also chapters five and six.
71 Zitha Xaba.
72 Takulu Kheswa.
73 Three interviewees thought their wives to be lazy. See: interviews with Phumla Nyathikazi, Lusikisiki, 1 August 2009; Mabhalane Dlamini, Hebuhebu, 22 October 2009; Gampu Ngcamu.
through the humiliating experience of wage labour in a racist context, as ‘boys’. To claim their spot at the top of the rural gender hierarchy, African men had to accept a position at the bottom of the urban racial hierarchy. In Natal, the kitchen suits domestic servants had to wear, marking them as ‘kitchen boys’, were the strongest expression of that irony, which Mxolisi Mchunu explains well.74

[...] these suits came to be worn by men who were respected in their families and communities as homestead heads and breadwinners, yet they were called “boys” or “piccanins” while they wore these suits in service. [...] the kitchen suit became a paradoxical symbol, which stood for the pride of employment and the humiliation of servanthood.

Urban employment was at the same time a source of humiliation and of pride.75 The Durban docks, like any other workplace in South Africa, were organised by race, even if dockers did not have to wear a kitchen suit. The city and South African society at large were profoundly shaped by racism, something Zulu Phungula clearly was aware of when he claimed entitlement to the same wages as European workers. He realised how the racial segmentation of work kept wages low: “winches are now being driven by Natives and the white man drives the cranes. Later the cranes will be driven by Natives without any increase in wages.”76 Racism was not the only problem dock workers encountered. Dock work, like mining, is a difficult and dangerous job, as discussed in chapter six. Moodie and Keith Breckenridge both note the high levels of

interpersonal violence on the goldfields. The interviews did not indicate particularly high levels of physical violence on the docks. Some people did, however, bring up verbal abuse at the hands of izinduna: “izinduna were shouting – you know, to ensure their dignity.”

The indignities of living in the city became increasingly difficult to escape. As the impoverishment of the Reserves continued and accelerated after the mid-1950s, it became ever more difficult or impossible to just ‘seize a booty’ to establish a homestead and then retreat into the role of rural homestead head. Migratory labour for many Africans became a lifelong reality. Increasingly Africans saw their labour in the urban centres not as a phase to go through for a future reward in gaining manhood at home, but rather a lasting and alienating reality. In 1948, Phungula expressed the sense of personal failure as a provider and homestead head that was shared by many: “Now we bring our wives and children to the towns with the view to work collectively for children and clothing.”

Wives in the Reserves

While African men invested in the patriarchal societies they grew up in and endeavoured to become abanumzane, their absence from the rural areas led to a second irony. Their absence enabled them to become patriarchs, but also opened up spaces for female initiative and independence. Mothers and wives were in charge of the day-to-day running of the households. Several authors note that this de facto role strengthened the female position within the domestic

78 Nhlanhla Sokhela. See also: interviews with Zifo Mzizi, Underberg, 16 June 2009; Mzo Mzongo, Izingolweni North, 30 June 2009.
80 Moodie, op. cit., 177; Hunter, “Fathers without amandla,” 100.
sphere. Indeed, while some men insisted that women could not take decisions, others acknowledged that their wives were in charge of cultivation and the household by virtue of the fact that they were there, but also because they had more skills and experience in domestic and agricultural affairs.

Moreover, women did not just stick to their expected roles. They did not just run the household and do agricultural chores, waiting for remittances to make up the income deficit. Many women took the initiative to sell produce whenever they had some surplus. They also advised each other in their commercial strategies. Most sold to neighbours with less land and less produce, but some also sold in the rural towns or to rural stores. Galo Mtolo explained:

My wife started selling to the neighbours and later also to some stores in the area, and that money was kept for developing the land, but also for planting and helping here and there, you know.

Sicelo Mbokazi’s wife was so successful in her little business that she had to hire agricultural labour. Husbands acknowledged that this initiative helped their households to survive. It also gave some independent access to cash to women who could otherwise only get cash from their husbands. This could explain the hostility of Takulu Kheswa to such initiatives from his wives.

Men invested their wages in cattle in part to keep it out of the hands of their wives, but women

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83 Being there: interviews with Gedla Lukhozi, Polela, 6 June 2009; Bongeka Faku; Lihlo Budu; more skills and experience: Doda Nxele; Zitha Xaba.
84 Sihle Zungu; Nelson Ndaba.
86 Interview with Sicelo Mbokazi, Nhlakazu, 16 July 2009.
87 Nhlanhla Sokhela; Galo Mtolo; Sihle Zungu; Doda Nxele; Sofa Nkomo; Sicelo Mbokazi; Nelson Ndaba; Siphesihle Dladla.
had their own ways to get access to some extra money. Rural commerce was the female sphere and absent men had few ways to control how much money women earned or how they spent that money.

Women too could have ubudoda. In their de facto running of the homestead they could show the qualities that are expected from an umnumzane and that define ubudoda. Especially older women could gain such respect and status. When a man gets married, the new wife would move in with her in-laws until the couple can build their own umuzi. In this living arrangement, which was often fraught with conflict, the mother-in-law assumed a position of control over her son’s wife. She was the expert and deserved the respect for age. For the daughter-in-law this was often a very difficult time. Several interviewees mentioned that their mothers were the ones taking decisions about domestic affairs.

This relative independence, however, came with some significant problems. Firstly, it could be dangerous to be a successful woman, as it could be perceived as a challenge to male dominance in the household and invite a male reaction. Secondly, while there were some rural opportunities for women, the female economic sphere underwent a gradual marginalisation throughout the period under discussion. It has been noted that by the 1950s livestock farming, which was the male economic sphere and less labour intensive, had gained in importance compared to Reserve agriculture. Meanwhile, women were excluded more completely from access to livestock. When ilobolo was paid in cattle one beast was reserved for the bride, so she had access to milk, and one for the mother. The monetisation of bridewealth eliminated these

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88 Vilakazi, loc. cit.
89 Kark, “Health Implications,” 212-213; see also: Reyher, op. cit., 42.
90 Zolile Khumalo; Godidi Msomi; Thembinkosi Miya; Mandla Xaba; Zifo Mzizi; Nelson Ndaba; Mpho Jaca.
91 Epprecht, This matter of women, 7; Mager, op. cit., 99.
forms of access to cattle. Moreover, the individualisation of marriage left kin out of the picture. Thus, no bonds of mutual obligation were established through the exchange of cattle and women lost access to the kinship networks that provided security.\textsuperscript{92}

Thirdly, life in the rural areas could be harsh and insecure. While women gained some autonomy, they remained dependent on men’s remittances. By the 1950s, the Reserves were impoverished areas that were heavily dependent on the continued influx of migrant wages.\textsuperscript{93} If a man stopped sending money, which happened frequently, the consequences for the rural household could be disastrous. Liz Clarke and Jane Ngobese observed:\textsuperscript{94}

\begin{quote}
Everything about the migrant worker’s life in the city tears him from his rural family – his money and his time are easily absorbed and as the months go by the amounts he can spare for his home decline. Migrant workers are also very accident prone. The families’ hope, the breadwinner, may disappear temporarily or permanently. He may fall victim to one of the numerous statutory [sic] crimes which makes the life of African townspeople so torturous or he may be assaulted, robbed or even murdered by the thugs who terrorise the townships. Many women who come to the hospital report that they have lost all trace of their husbands who left them to work in the city.
\end{quote}

Of course, men could also be torn away from their rural family by urban women. Moreover, women’s options to earn extra income were limited. Influx controls and customary restrictions on their mobility excluded them from all but the least desirable jobs. They often ended up working on white farms where the pay was low, the conditions poor, and the work hard. They did this on top of their labour in the homestead. Men avoided the farms and often prided themselves that they

\begin{flushright}
93 Bozzoli, “Marxism,” 162.
\end{flushright}
never worked there. Consequently, farmers turned to women, children, and the elderly, people excluded from better jobs, as alternative supplies of labour.95

Finally, the enforced separation from their men caused significant anxieties and stress. The women were put in a position where they had to make decisions in the absence of their husbands, but they did not always have the social standing and authority that was needed for this. There were always fears that the husband would disagree with the decision or see their initiative as a threat. Many men insisted on their prerogative to take decisions, even when they were not around. Indecision and stress were frequently the result for wives.96 Life without their husbands could also be lonely and it was often difficult to hold off the advances of other men. Late marriage, gender imbalances, and the urges of returning migrants often made it hard for women to balance their own sexual needs, expectations of virtue, and men’s advances.97

Moreover, inflated bridewealth resulted in long periods before ilobolo was completely paid and long-lasting insecurity about marital status; this was yet another cause for stress and unhappy ancestral spirits.98 A social medicine team at Polela in the 1950s noted that certain psychological disorders, especially among recently married women, were directly related to the stress and anxieties of labour migration.99 The team also noted other health problems caused by the migratory labour system, such as the spread of contagious and venereal diseases, particularly tuberculosis and syphilis.100

96 Epprecht, This matter of women, 59; Kark, “Health Implications,” 210.
100 Kark, “Migrant Labour and Family Health,” in A Practice of Social Medicine, ed. Kark and Steuart, 194, 201.
Dealing with the challenges of the migratory labour system

Though women were struggling in the Reserves, neither the state nor African patriarchs would allow them to look for a new future in the cities. There was a double need to limit women’s movements. To maintain agricultural production and the ‘Reserve subsidy’, women, who did the bulk of the agricultural work, had to be kept in their place, both geographically and socially. If homestead production declined, the pace of proletarianisation would pick up, undermining the system of cheap migratory labour.101 Moreover, restricting the movement of women also helped to ensure that young men would return to the rural areas to find a wife.102 Of course, women also had an interest in maintaining access to Reserve land and to the remittances of migrants. Many had families to feed and economic opportunities for single women in the city were sparse.103

Rural poverty, however, did slowly erode rural patriarchal controls. By the 1950s, the homestead economy could no longer guarantee the stability and security for women and children that it once did. Prospects of a different future were offered by mission schools and urban employment, though that was certainly not always a more secure or easier future.104 While the city offered limited possibilities to escape rural patriarchy, this new environment also locked them in another gendered and racialised hierarchy. Moreover, their legal residence in the city usually depended on their husbands, putting them in renewed relations of dependence.105

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102 Marks, “Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity,” 226.
103 These avenues diminished further in the 1950s with the institution of influx control laws, which were an assault on the livelihoods of many women engaged in the informal sector. See: Deborah Posel, The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 206.
104 Ibid., 227.
Labour migrants, away in the cities, had anxieties about what their women were up to as well. As such, there was a broad section of society (African men, young and old, and white officials) in support of tightening restrictions of female autonomy. The 1887 Natal Code of Native Law was already stricter, less flexible, and less open for contestation than older traditions. By the 1930s, the legal status of women was further reduced to that of perpetual minor, without independent rights to own property. Urban authorities did their part by trying to keep women out of the towns and clamping down on activities that generated income for urban women, such as petty trading, beer brewing, and prostitution. The presence of women who earned money independently was deemed undesirable, as it could enable African family life and lasting urbanisation as an alternative to oscillating labour migration. Indeed, Rebekah Lee notes that: “The very presence of African women in the city was, to the apartheid administrators, a worrying indicator of the growing urbanization of the African populace as a whole.”

Yet, women would not just accept these rigid, inflexible interpretations of custom. In fact, they frequently used the Native Commissioner’s Courts to seek a divorce from oppressive husbands and to challenge conservative readings of tradition. Conversely, women could also appeal to more conservative mores when sons or husbands failed to return or send remittances. In such cases, they would appeal to the Native Commissioner to have the NAD track down the absconder and bring him back. However, many within the NAD were committed to a conservative and rigid interpretation of customary law. Even in certain cases where almost every

107 Marks, “Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity,” 226; McClendon, Genders and Generations Apart, 175; Walker, op. cit., 182.
108 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 125.
109 Lee, op. cit., 17.
111 McClendon, Gender and Generations Apart, 68.
witness contradicted the Natal Code, Native Commissioners still used the Code’s interpretation of customary law.\textsuperscript{112} Men also used appeals to tradition and the courts to reinforce their control over wives and youth.\textsuperscript{113}

Women did not only challenge the status-quo in court, they also used strategies of household formation to deal with a system that was not generally in their advantage. Women whose men left them or otherwise disappeared from the picture would often form female-linked families to deal with the contingencies and insecurities of their lives.\textsuperscript{114} The structure of households, especially in the cities, became more fluid to adjust to the often quickly changing livelihoods.\textsuperscript{115} Migrants also sometimes deviated from the ideal behaviour that was expected from them. Most interviewees wanted to have nothing to do with city women, often calling them izifebe,\textsuperscript{116} bitches, or rubbish.\textsuperscript{117} Urban women were considered to be after workers’ money and sexually too assertive. Velile Goba spoke about “city-style sex,” which was “for animals,” according to Mzo Mzongo; Xhegu Ntozakhe added that “they even climb over a man; they are too naughty.” Gugulethu Pityana had the following experience: “one day [a city woman] just cornered me and kissed me, telling me I should have sex with her. I ran away.” Men were warned, before they came to the city, not to socialise with any urban women.\textsuperscript{118} However, some did have affairs with city women and quickly came to the conclusion that they should not

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} McClendon, “Generating Change,” 286-287.
\item \textsuperscript{113} McClendon discusses both cases where wives file for divorce and where husbands do. See: \textit{Genders and Generations Apart}, chapter five.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Lee, op. cit., 47.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Sing. \textit{izifebe}: prostitute or adulterer/adulteress.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Interviews with Gugulethu Pityana, Mt. Frere, 25 July 2009; Makhele Gxokwana, Lusikisiki, 7 August 2009; Bhekinkosi Zimu, Elandskop, 22 October 2009; Xhegu Ntozakhe.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Interviews with Kotozi Memela, Deepdale, 20 October 2009; Bongeka Faku; Lihlo Budu; Sihle Zungu; Co Pityana.
\end{itemize}
continue seeing them.\textsuperscript{119} Others had more serious relations with city women.\textsuperscript{120} Lalani Dumakude met his later wife in Durban and Siphesihle Dladla and Godidi Msomi married their urban girlfriends as second wives. Eileen Jensen Krige noted in 1936 that the rural wives and urban girlfriends often knew about each other and even met.\textsuperscript{121} For at least three interviewees this was indeed the case.\textsuperscript{122} Mpho Jaca even had a child with a woman he met in town.

Whether there were any homosexual partnerships similar to mine marriages is unclear. It did not come up in the interviews and employers and officials did not seem particularly concerned about possible same-sex intercourse in the compounds.\textsuperscript{123} It is possible – though not certain – that there was no equivalent of mine marriages on Durban’s docks to any great extent, as at least some of the context was different. Many men went home more often than miners did and the ‘incapsulation’ of migrants, which plays an important role in Moodie’s somewhat functionalist explanation of same-sex intercourse on the mines, was less outspoken among Durban’s dock workers.\textsuperscript{124} This does not mean that there was no same-sex desire among African

\textsuperscript{119} Libho Qoza; Mabhalane Dlamini; Galo Mtolo; Mzo Mzongo; Sipho Zondi; Gedla Lukhozi.
\textsuperscript{120} Interviews with Doda Ndaweni, Gxuha, 28 June 2009; Dumile Ndlovu; Godidi Msomi; Vela Mtolo; Lalani Dumakude; Zandile Mbile; Mpho Jaca; Doda Nxele; Siphesihle Dladla.
\textsuperscript{121} Krige, “Changing Conditions,” 21.
\textsuperscript{122} Dumile Ndlovu; Doda Ndaweni; Mpho Jaca.
\textsuperscript{123} One mention of “spreading the vice of sodomy,” which was supposed to be “formerly unknown among the Zulu,” was encountered in the archives of the Town Clerk of Durban: DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/216, file 45, part 3, Mayor’s Minute for the year ending 31 July 1917, 7.
\textsuperscript{124} Several authors have explained the presence of men having sex with men in compounds as a rational act of resistance to proletarianisation and a form of ‘encapsulation’, in which senior men protected their homestead by not spending money on prostitutes and not risking venereal diseases. They took young boys in the compounds as their ‘wives’ with whom they had thigh-sex. For the boys, this was an equally rational choice consistent with a customary gerontocratic ethic, which came with gifts and socialised them into a system that would allow them to ‘graduate’ from their role as wives and to become husbands. See: Moodie, op. cit.; Patrick Harries, \textit{Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa}, c. 1860-1910 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994); Harries, “Symbols and Sexuality: Culture and Identity on the Early Witwatersrand Gold Mines,” \textit{Gender and History} II (1990), 3: 318-336. These views have been criticised for ignoring the violence in these relationships and for being too functionalist, downplaying the role of desire for men as men. As such, these authors accept the myth of the essentially heterosexual African male at face value. See: Epprecht, \textit{Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa} (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004).
migrants in Durban, as Ronald Louw and Iain Edwards illustrate in their respective accounts of homosexual subcultures and same-sex weddings in uMkhumbane in the 1940s and 1950s, but it may have been unrelated to the phenomenon of encapsulation.  

Of course, there were in fact African women in the cities, despite influx controls. Plagued by endemic poverty in the Reserves, many women did move to the city. Others would come to look for their absconding husband and never return home. Without access to formal housing in cities where they had no legal rights to reside, they often ended up in shack areas like uMkumbane. In this peri-urban world that escaped both rural patriarchal controls and the strict bye-laws and pass laws of the city, women could achieve some autonomy, especially if they brewed beer. Women often engaged in informal activities, as the sexual and racial division of labour in Durban excluded women from most formal jobs other than domestic service, which was a particularly undesirable occupation with long hours, low pay, and few opportunities for socialising. Most formal jobs would also drag women away from their children.

While there were thriving ‘Shebeen Queens’ in South Africa’s cities, the reality for many women was one of poverty and constant fears of being ‘endorsed out’. The report of the

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127 Walker, op. cit., 302.

128 Walker, op. cit., 190.

129 ‘Shebeen queens’ or ‘skokiaan queens’ were women who were successful brewers and sellers of illicit liquor, beer, and a stronger concoction known as skokiaan. Leah in the 1946 novel Mine Boy was such a skokiaan queen. See: Peter Abrahams, Mine Boy (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 142.
1942 Smit Committee called attention to and detailed the poverty of urban Africans.\(^{130}\) It also explained the negative impact this poverty had on family life, as both men and women needed to work outside the house to survive. Thus, children were left on their own, which was considered bad for discipline.\(^{131}\) Of course, what this report failed to mention was that the nuclear family was not the dominant urban African household to begin with. Many women would, however, send their children home to be raised by their parents or in-laws, partly because they did not consider the city as a suitable environment for children.\(^{132}\)

Many urban women had to gain access to men’s earnings in order to survive. This could mean that they ended up in dependent relationships with migrant men and had to count on their generosity, often while having occasional sex with other men who would also offer some financial support.\(^{133}\) In later decades, this phenomenon gave rise to transactional sex as described by Mark Hunter.\(^{134}\) There were, however, also more mutually beneficial, if not necessarily equal, relationships between interviewed dock workers and their urban partners. This was the case when a docker and his girlfriend, or in one case an aunt, teamed up to engage in commercial activities.\(^{135}\) In these examples, women did not directly get access to their wages, but rather to pilfered goods to sell or a client base of the man’s colleagues. Men could also provide start-up funds from their wages.\(^{136}\)


\(^{131}\) Ibid., 2.


\(^{133}\) Moodie, op. cit., 151.


\(^{135}\) Interviews with Mzwakhe Sosibo, Ngwagwane, 25 October 2009; Bheka Dlaba, Mooi River, 17 November; Godidi Msomi; Mandla Xaba; Mtukatshelwa Phewa; Doda Ndaweni; Sihle Zungu.

\(^{136}\) Lee makes similar remarks about African women with informal businesses in Cape Town in the 1950s and 1960s, op. cit., 52.
How the proceeds of these businesses were shared is unclear and seems to have differed. Mandla Xaba claimed he “made good money selling food,” but it was his girlfriend who did the actual selling. However, she must have gotten something out of it to continue doing it and when he left the city he gave her a good sum of money. Two others paid their commercial partners in kind and in cash to feed their children.137 Two more took their girlfriends as second wives.138 As the women were usually the ones actually running the business, it is entirely possible that the men did not know exactly how much they earned. Xaba could thus assume he was the one making good money, but she may have pocketed her fair share without him knowing. These different spheres of accumulation may have been dependent on each other, but they were still separate. Such co-operations did not imply identical interests or a unified strategy. Township women wanted to feed their family, while dock workers generally wanted to send money to their rural homestead and buy cattle. These urban girlfriends played a role in the reproduction of the dock workers’ households, but did so while ensuring the sustainability of their own households.

The informal retail trade was not the most profitable sector of unlicensed trading. Women could make more money brewing and selling beer. Brewing, however, was not without risks. It was illegal in Durban, as in most Southern African cities, and an important preoccupation of the authorities. In fact, Durban’s Town Council considered illicit brewing one of the main problems for the MNAD to deal with.139 Yet, the brewing prohibition was evaded on large scale and the perpetrators did not look upon their offence as a social crime.140 Women managed their risks by cooperating and having someone on the lookout while others were brewing.141

137 Mzwakhe Sosibo; Bheka Dlaba.
138 Godidi Msomi; Doda Ndaweni.
140 Statistics from 1937 indicate that 44.44 per thousand Africans were convicted of possession of 'kaffir beer': DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/3/493, file 91, part II, “Official Figures,” no date. In the 1940s, uMkumbane
Another risk was the variability of income. While some brewers did relatively well, many struggled to bring in substantial amounts of money on a regular basis. Having regular customers could create some predictability; these regulars were often friends of her partner or abakhaya. Husbands would bring their friends or colleagues over for a drink and thus provide a client base.\footnote{142} Despite the risks and often uncertain returns, brewing was for many urban women the only way to make end meet, short of prostitution.\footnote{143} But, women would not only brew for the revenue. If they had a man in the city, he would often expect it from her, just as he would in the rural areas.\footnote{144} A wife who did not brew would be seen as a bad wife.\footnote{145}

These activities were constantly being undermined by the state’s offensives against unlicensed traders and beer-brewers, and by the endorsing out of women from the cities. Already in the 1920s, when the Durban Municipality wanted to extend their beer monopoly into the fringes of the city by erecting a municipal beer hall in the Sydenham area, female brewers were at the forefront of the protest against this, both in Durban – side-by-side with the dock workers –

\footnote{141} Hellmann, *Rooiyard*, 46-47.
\footnote{142} Hellmann, “The importance of beer-brewing in an urban native yard,” *Bantu Studies* VIII (1934): 44.
\footnote{143} Hellmann, *Rooiyard*, 14, 49.
\footnote{144} Hellmann, “The importance of beer-brewing,” 41.
\footnote{145} This was the case with Maggie, the wife of John Chavafambira, who was the informant of Ellen Hellmann and the subject of Wulf Sachs’ *Black Hamlet*. This psychoanalytical study of an African urban man was originally published in 1937 and republished in the US as *Black Anger*. Sachs, *Black Hamlet, with a new introduction by Saul Dubow and Jacqueline Rose* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 188; Hellmann, “The importance of beer-brewing,” 44.
and in rural towns in Natal as the protests spread.146 Women too protected their livelihoods and protested when government action threatened these livelihoods. Deborah Posel argues that the threat to their livelihoods was a central reason for women to oppose the extension of pass laws in the 1950s.147

Not only women challenged and negotiated gender roles. Men negotiated gendered expectation as well and could at times bend them in their favour. Most men did not consider urban women as potential wives, because they had a reputation of being riddled with venereal diseases and were too independent, especially if they had their own source of income.148 However, some did have relations with city women when these women could help them further their rural goals. As such, several urban women who cooperated in business ventures with dock workers helped these workers return home more quickly by making their commercial success possible. Sometimes this was even done without any romantic or sexual relationship between them.149 Of course, these women gained advantages for themselves and their households out of these partnerships as well.

Dock workers also used gendered language in claiming entitlement to higher wages in discussions with officials and employers. Just like Nigerian coal miners, discussed by Carolyn Brown, who stressed that they were dignified men with family responsibilities and should thus receive wages that allow them to fulfil this role of father and husband, Phungula used the

147 Posel, op. cit.; Gasa makes a similar argument for earlier pass protests, “‘Let them build more gaols’,” 129-150.
148 Mbatha, op. cit., 176; Zolile Khumalo claimed – probably somewhat optimistically – that you knew that the young, unmarried women in the rural areas were virgins.
149 Mandla Xaba, Sihle Zungu; Mzwakhe Sosibo; Bheka Dlaba.
language of responsibility as father and husband to lament their inadequate wages.\textsuperscript{150} In 1948, he explained the indignity of having to bring their wives and children to the city because of their low wages. There, wives had to brew and children became pick-pockets. Men could not fulfil their role as provider, as umnumzane.\textsuperscript{151} In making this argument, he manipulated official fears about a lack of discipline among urban African youth.\textsuperscript{152} Emphasising their responsibility as fathers was not just a rhetorical trick; dock workers did care about the schooling of their children and they considered education a vehicle for social and economic mobility. Many interviewees stressed that they paid for the schooling of their children and that they paid ilobolo for their sons, indicating that they took responsibility for their children, as a good umnumzane. Having schooled their children was by many seen as one of the markers of manhood and having achieved the goals for which they migrated in the first place.\textsuperscript{153}

Dock leaders did not only claim entitlement to living wages as fathers, but also as loyal ‘children’ of the white government, with respect for authority. Phungula hijacked the government’s racial and paternalist discourse in which the government is the father and Africans the children who can count on generosity and just care in return for loyalty and obedience. He used this language to claim that the government was failing in its role as father and provider. “We thought that our father would not be against our being given 8/- a day,” he said in a meeting with the Secretary for Labour and a number of other officials in 1942. In the same meeting, he

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{153} For example: Nhlanhla Sokhela; Sipho Gazu; Thoko Mlaba; Amos Sibiya; Lihlo Budu.
\end{itemize}
continued using the language of fatherly responsibility: “It is a shame that there are some of your children and you do not like to see them properly fed. It is a shame for a parent not to see that his child is properly clothed. It is clear that the Government is not giving us money according to what the Government gets from the Shipping people. The Government only gives us an empty dish to lick.”154

Conclusion
In a society where authority and access to resources was determined by age and gender, women and young men bore the brunt of the labour responsibilities. For the young men, however, there was the promise that they could one day make it to the top of this hierarchy, even if the rewards for their patience became progressively less tangible. The interviewed dock workers did buy their way back into this rural hierarchy. They invested their wages in cattle for ilobolo and used their earnings to establish their umuzi. Through these actions they could become respected men with ubudoda at home. With this status came responsibility and dock workers prided themselves in living up to these expectations, providing ilobolo for their sons, paying for the education of their children, etc. By making remittances they also kept the rural homestead alive and thus reproduced the gendered and generational relationships of a patriarchal society.

To achieve this status, however, these men had to go through the frequently humiliating experience of doing lowly paid manual labour in a racial context. It was often in the cities that African workers experienced some of the worst indignities of segregation and apartheid. The unpleasant experience of working in Durban, however, was what allowed these men to be valued as abanumzane at home. Workers also realised that they could use the paternalist racism of the

white government and employers to their advantage and strategically appealed to ideas of a benevolent white father and obedient black children.

Women made strategic appeals to gendered norms as well and their relative acceptance of a patriarchal order was not just a sign of innate conservatism or false consciousness. Conforming to what was expected from a woman could in fact have concrete advantages in the form of remittances, access to land, and a network of kin to fall back on. Especially to women with children and other dependants this could be a major benefit. However, this did not mean that women conformed perfectly to the expectations of patriarchs. Women eked out their own spheres of production and accumulation both in the rural and peri-urban areas. Some gained access to cash independently from their husbands by selling some of the crops they grew. Others engaged in small-scale commercial enterprises in co-operation with the dock workers, selling the pilfered goods at home or in the shack settlements.

Access to pilfered goods and male wages made these strategies possible and in many ways this was a partnership between the man and the woman. However, while some men insisted that they called the shots, they would have had little insight in the day-to-day running of these businesses and often no way of knowing how much money the women actually made. Separate but dependent circuits of accumulation operated in the rural areas, the peri-urban areas, and on the docks. Many dock workers could not be *abanumzane* without the agricultural and commercial proceeds from women in the Reserves or peri-urban areas. At the same time, the rural households and small-scale businesses were equally dependent on wages and pilfered goods from the dock workers. As noted in chapter six, this cannot be conceptualised as the homestead in the Reserve subsidising urban wage labour or as wage labourers subsidising the rural economy. Rather, this should be seen as the reproduction of the homestead which exists in different locales and cannot
be reduced to a unitary decision-making unit. Different members of the household took different decisions in discrete and separate spheres, though these spheres were dependent on each other. While each member had the reproduction of the household as common interest, they also had their own interests. For example, men could be more interested in investing in cattle as a mainstay of rural patriarchy while wives may be more interested in improving the level of household consumption. Township women could play a significant role in the reproduction of the dock worker’s household, but her interest would have rested with her own household. Both men and women may have tried to keep some of their proceeds out of the hands of their partners, while pooling the rest. Women could have spent the cash their crops and businesses fetched on their own needs without the men knowing. Men could have used investment in cattle to keep their resources safe from female and household demands.
Chapter 9: Buffaloes on Noah’s Ark: Industrial action on the Durban docks

Dock workers around the world have a reputation of being radicals. The classic explanation for this radicalism was offered by Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel in the 1950s. They argued that, like miners, sailors, and loggers, dock workers often form an isolated and tight-knit community that lacks differentiation and ‘neutral’ elements that can act as mediators and break-up broad based solidarity.¹ While this explanation is very useful, it is also insufficient. It is true that dockers often form their own communities with strong solidarity, but they can also often have very intimate interconnections with other sections of the working class. Especially in the colonised world, Frederick Cooper notes, dock workers were often much less isolated from other workers than in Europe or North America.²

David Hemson argued that Durban’s dock workers were so radical because they had a strong working class consciousness. In doing so, he took issue with the idea that labour migrancy was an “insuperable obstacle to class consciousness”³ among African workers. The “unvarnished nature of exploitation in the docks”⁴ guaranteed that workers were conscious of their exploitation. Informal leadership and a collective memory of class action in turn made a continuous history of

⁴ Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock workers of Durban” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1979), 712.
strikes and protests possible.\footnote{Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm,” 146; Hemson, “Beyond the Frontier of Control? Trade Unionism and the Labour Market in the Durban Docks,” \textit{Transformations} 30 (1996): 85.} Hemson argued against a scholarly tradition that emphasised race and culture over class and denied Africans working class agency; he highlighted the proletarian nature of dock workers’ consciousness and provided ample evidence for this.

Hemson and others rightly disputed the idea that the South African state was only an instrument of racial oppression and neutral in regards to class relations. For these radical scholars, racism was not just a problem of an irrational aberration to the rationality of capitalism. Racism was functional to capital and the racism of segregation and apartheid was thus inherently linked to capitalism. The focus on race relations had to be replaced by a focus on class to show that Africans were being exploited as workers. However, these revisionist scholars have in turn come under criticism. In their eagerness to affirm African workers as a working class whose consciousness was not inhibited by their cultural background and ties to the land, they ignored elements of worker’s consciousness that were more ambiguous. Authors like T. Dunbar Moodie and Patrick Harries also wrote about African workers, but stressed moral economies and rural aspirations over a more straightforward proletarian consciousness.\footnote{Cf.: T. Dunbar Moodie with Vivienne Ndatshe, \textit{Going for Gold: Men, Mines, and Migration} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Patrick Harries, \textit{Work, Culture, And Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910} (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994).} However, Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, commenting on the tensions between rural and proletarian consciousness in older debates in South African historiography, point out that it is a curiously mechanical, Eurocentric view which would deny these migrants the appellation ‘working class’ because their consciousness was still partially formed and informed by their very recent experience of contracting rural options, the onslaught
on African peasant production and social and political decay in
the countryside.

There is little doubt that Durban’s dock workers have regularly stood up for their interests as
workers. Already in 1874, togt workers left Durban en masse to protest the imposition of togt
regulations, which were designed to limit the bargaining power of casual labourers.8 This new
law required togt workers to register, pay a registration fee, and accept work at a pre-determined
rate. On the day these regulations took effect, there were scarcely any workers to be found in the
port.9 In the late 1870s and the early 1880s, dock workers walked off the job several times.
Labour shortages caused by the Anglo-Zulu War made such strategies more effective.10 They
struck at least once more before the end of the nineteenth century. In 1895, stevedores
unsuccessfully demanded 6s. per day instead of 4s.11

The scarcity of labour caused by the Anglo-Boer War allowed workers to demand better
pay, but apart from some smaller actions between 1918 and 1920, significant militancy would
only return to the Durban docks in the late 1920s with the spread of the ICU. The depression of
the 1930s brought industrial peace, but in the late 1930s this silence was broken several times
before the Second World War brought a new period of intense conflict and increased government
intervention. The second half of the 1950s brought a last wave of strikes before decasualisation
and monopoly hiring muted militancy again. During these different periods of militancy,
Durban’s dock workers organised themselves with little or no outside assistance and often in the
face of government oppression. They defended their pay and work conditions in an often radical
manner, despite their rural and commercial interests which have been discussed in other chapters.

Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993), 133-134.
10 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 32.
11 Ibid., 63.
At other times, however, their radicalism was checked by a moral economy and above all by fluctuations in the labour supply. This chapter discusses how they could organise these actions and how they related to the African elites and the rest of the working class. Most importantly, it argues that dock workers did indeed organise as workers, despite their rural and entrepreneurial aspirations. However, their consciousness and actions were also more ambiguous than Hemson make them seem. The chapter takes a mostly chronological approach and provides the different episodes of militancy with their economic and political context.

The beginning of the century

Durban was an important transport node for the imperial troops fighting in the Anglo-Boer War (1899 - 1902). The war created both opportunities and problems for the African workers of Natal. Dockers realised that they were the ones who made goods and troops move and that this gave them leverage.12 Even without wars, ports were central to colonial economies: they were central to the infrastructure of transport and trade.13 The war increased dock employment and pushed up wages, as the army needed troops and goods transported. The resulting labour shortage strengthened the bargaining position of dock and other labourers and, to get the most out of this advantageous situation, workers moved from monthly contracts into togo labour. This allowed them to use their power in the labour market on a daily basis.14 However, the war also brought hardship and destruction, especially to Northern Natal, and accelerated proletarianisation.

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14 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 61.
demands for food for the troops pushed up grain prices throughout the colony, bringing good profits to the few, but causing stratification, hunger, and dependence on wages for the masses.15

With their labour in high demand and their dependence on wages heightened, African workers took to industrial action to improve their remuneration. Their inspiration may have come from a number of strikes by white workers in 1903. However, Africans soon found out that the rules were not the same for them: “Last week Sunday we showed readers of Ilanga newspaper that the oppressors were on strike in Durban. We notified the people today and the Black people tried to go on strike in Pinetown and they were arrested.”16 Indeed, a number of short strikes ended with arrests and fines.17

However, the favourable conditions for labourers quickly disappeared. By 1904, the labour shortage had disappeared and the colony had entered the post-war depression.18 This presented African workers with a triple squeeze. Firstly, the labour market contracted, causing more labourers to opt for safer, but less well paid monthly contracts.19 Secondly, now that war, responsible government, and recurrent droughts had undermined rural self-sufficiency lower wages hurt them more than before.20 Thirdly, colonial authorities shifted the fiscal burden of the depression onto the politically powerless Africans by increasing the rents on Crown Lands and introducing a poll tax.21 This last measure was an immediate cause for the 1906 Bhambatha

15 Ibid., 47-48.
rebellion. Many dock workers came from Durban to fight in this revolt, but the brutal repression only hastened their dispossession.\textsuperscript{22} The momentum of overt protest, both in the form of industrial action and rebellion, was squashed by the depression and official repression. The 1913 Natives Land Act brought further dispossession, although it “was not immediately decisive, but [it] did provide the statutory framework within which future struggle and coercion could take place [...].”\textsuperscript{23}

The First World War, however, brought inflation and an increased demand for African labour. The conditions for industrial action were once again favourable.\textsuperscript{24} Throughout the war, dock workers demanded increases, as did other workers in Durban. In June 1918, a deputation of \textit{togt} workers approached J.S. Marwick, the manager of the MNAD. They had talked to the employers first, but these referred them to the authorities, as they did frequently throughout the period under review. Employers liked to present wage rates as a legal matter for which they had no responsibility. Marwick was decidedly averse to the demand of 5s. per day and 10s. for a night shift. He considered these rates outrageous and feared they would push up African wages throughout the city. He considered it to be his job to preserve the cheapness of African labour. Rather than showing sympathy for the \textit{togt} labourers, who were mostly dock workers, he held a conference with employers to coordinate a counter-offensive. He stressed that employers should under no circumstances give in, as this was not just about wages, but about control: “The question

\textsuperscript{24} Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 162, 167.
they were considering that day was not so much as to whether they should give a native a certain rate of pay as to how those natives were to be controlled.\textsuperscript{25}

John L. Dube called a mass meeting on 27 July to demand more money for African workers.\textsuperscript{26} War-time inflation was the main reason for this meeting: “The crux of the matter is that those who have businesses demand a price many times in excess of that previously prevailing, but they are very loathe to allow the Natives to participate in any of the large mouthfulls [sic] which they should enjoy in these days of the War.”\textsuperscript{27} At this meeting, which was attended by about eight hundred people, Dube advised workers not to strike, as that would cause unnecessary hardship. Instead, the meeting chose to have chiefs advocate for higher wages.\textsuperscript{28} Despite Dube’s success in averting a strike, on which dock workers had their minds set, Marwick saw him as a dangerous agitator.\textsuperscript{29}

In 1919, some more small conflicts took place. In mid-July, some six hundred dock workers employed on a monthly basis by the S.A.R. & H. struck briefly for 4s. 6d.\textsuperscript{30} Their action was unsuccessful, but in early August dockers showed their discontent once more when the municipality distributed meat for the peace celebrations. The workers refused these gifts and threw them to the ground stating: “we don’t want your meat, we want more money.”\textsuperscript{31} The workers regarded this gesture of charity as an insufficient substitute for a wage increase and

\textsuperscript{25} DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1138, file 315E, part I, Mayor Nicolson to General Botha, Reports of two meetings with employers, 9 August 1918.
\textsuperscript{26} DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1138, file 315E, part I, “Sifuna Imali,” no date [1918].
\textsuperscript{29} DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1138, file 315E, part I, Mayor Nicolson to General Botha, Reports of two meetings with employers, 9 August 1918.
\textsuperscript{31} PAR, CNC, vol. 353, file 1919/1555, Chief Magistrate, Durban, to Chief Native Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg, 8 August 1919.
refused it, repeating their demand for better wages. When about 250 coaling workers struck just a few days later, the chief magistrate was convinced that outside agitators must have been involved, as the dominant racial logic did not attribute independent initiative or organisational capacities to Africans. He suspected Rev. B.L. Sigamoney of the International Socialist League, but the Criminal Investigations Department found no evidence.32

In March 1920, one thousand striking togt dock workers once more caused speculation about outside agitators. This time, the Industrial Workers of the World were thought to be the culprits.33 The number of strikers does indicate that there probably was some sort of organisation, most likely originating at the Bell Street Barracks. These compounds would be the epicentre of many more strikes. The strike was brought to an end by using convicts as strike breakers and threatening to evict strikers from the compounds.34 While wages were an important demand, money was not the strikers’ only concern. One newspaper reported that “[t]heir demands varied from 10s. a day for togt labour to £5 for monthly labour, with more ‘skoff’ [food] and the other advantages they already possess.”35 Another newspaper reported that some four hundred togt workers from the same compound had walked out earlier in the week, “their trouble being that they were not allowed to have mahewe in their compound.”36 The same prohibition caused another conflict in June 1929.

At first sight, this emphasis on food may seem contradictory, considering the refusal of a gift of meat a year earlier. However, accommodation and rations were a part of the compensation

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32 Ibid.
36 “Native Strike At Durban,” Natal Witness, 6 March 1920, 1.
for their labour and thus very different from gifts. Demanding more food was a form of fighting for better remuneration. The paternalist approach of housing and feeding one’s employees also brought living conditions and food within the realm of employment relations. This made these concerns potential causes for strikes, which they would be several more times throughout these decades. Employers and officials, however, did not always see this as legitimate reasons for industrial action.

Strikes about accommodation and rations could be interpreted as actions in defence of mutually understood and unwritten expectations resting on the employer. These included the provision of a certain standard of housing and nutrition. When these expectations were unfulfilled, workers considered it legitimate to take action. This allows for a reading of strikes as proof of something else than a pure working class consciousness; these strikes merely defended the status-quo. Moodie explains this as being part of a moral economy. However, these other sources of consciousness, such as rural attachments and moral economies, should not obfuscate the fact that these dockers took action for better wages and working conditions as a working class. It might be more useful to emphasise the diversity of workers’ consciousness. For example, several episodes of industrial action seem to indicate a job rather than class consciousness. In June 1903, stevedores refused to do the less attractive work of coaling

37 This was not only the case in Durban. Vivian Bickford-Smith notes that many conflicts in Cape Town’s harbour in the early twentieth century were also related to the conditions in the living quarters. Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), 181.
38 Cf.: Moodie, *Going for Gold*.
labourers. They argued that they were hired to load cargo, not coal. This action was not inspired by a working class unity, but was rather an attempt at protecting their privileged position within the labour market.

The 1920s and the depression

The 1920s started in an atmosphere of militancy. The more than one thousand dock workers who walked out in March 1920 were not the only ones to strike that year. In Durban, white municipal workers struck in January and African policemen in February. Later that month, more than seventy thousand African mine workers on the Rand showed organisation and discipline in a strike for wage increases of one to four hundred per cent. Several other labour conflicts broke out on the Rand and in Port Elizabeth. However, the momentum quickly turned. Durban’s dockers lacked organisational backing and the support of the African petty bourgeoisie, which did not generally approve of strike action and preferred to petition the authorities on behalf of the workers. Mounting rural pressures complicated working class organisation even further. White farmers increased their areas under cultivation, reducing the amount of land available to African tenants outside of the Reserves. The 1913 Natives Land Act also made it easier to expel tenants. A heightened dependence on wage labour made a strike a difficult decision for workers who could not afford to go without pay and made victimisation more effective.

However, the lack of overt action did not imply passive acceptance of their exploitation. Within the limits imposed by the law and economic realities, dock workers did resist through

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41 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 188.
42 Ibid., 191.
everyday actions. Resistance was informal where overt resistance had been successfully repressed.\textsuperscript{44} This could include theft and the withdrawal of labour. The withdrawal of one’s labour could be effective when there was a labour shortage, forcing employers to improve conditions in order to hold on to workers.\textsuperscript{45} However, in case of a labour surplus, this strategy would only be useful if labour was withdrawn from the market completely, which would end the worker’s dependence on wages and lower the surplus. Otherwise, the worker would have to find a new job in a difficult market, while the employer has plenty of choice to replace him.

Workers could also fight for greater control over the labour process.\textsuperscript{46} In the hard-to-police workplace of dock workers, and stevedores in particular, they already had some control. Supervision on the wharves and on the ships was notably inefficient and the relation of mutual dependence between workers and izinduna gave dockers some leverage.\textsuperscript{47} The pace of work was especially difficult for the employer to control. Workers set their own rhythm by resting on the job, slacking, and go-slows. Go-slows could be a form of collective action, as occurred at least twice in 1933. These were organised by the Seamen and Harbour Workers Union (SHWU) and the CPSA. Gangs united to systematically slow down the pace of work and did less than a third of the regular work in their shifts.\textsuperscript{48} A go-slow could also have a more limited scope, for example as retaliation against an unfair induna or supervisor. One of Tina Sideris’ informants explained: “This happened especially when a white foreman quarrelled [sic] a lot. [...] The workers didn’t

\textsuperscript{45} Bickford-Smith, \textit{Ethnic Pride}, 184.
\textsuperscript{46} Cohen, op. cit., 17.
\textsuperscript{47} SAB, ARB, vol. 174, file COM 1/9/1, “Notes of Meeting held at Durban with the Stevedores’ Association,” 3 August 1942.
\textsuperscript{48} Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 281.
like working with a foreman who fought with them. So they decided to work very slowly. They made the work go slower if he made too much noise.”

Togt labourers and employers had different conceptions of time. For jobbers their shift was finished when the ship was finished, even if that was before the regular end of the day. Thus, when they finished a ship they would demand their pay and refuse to continue working elsewhere. For employers, the end of the day was at 5 pm, even if the job for which the workers were hired was done earlier. A newspaper article from 1925 mentioned that workers were regularly charged with insubordination for refusing to continue work on such occasions.

Workers did eventually get their way and by 1958 employers mentioned that it was usual for workers to be let off and still paid for the whole day if the job was done early.

In the second half of the 1920s, the rise of the ICU and a growing number of rural evictions brought renewed militancy to Natal. In June 1927, these mostly political protests spilled over into the docks when the first big harbour strike since 1920 broke out. Some 1,500 dock workers employed by the S.A.R. & H. protested the arrest of twenty colleagues who had not paid their poll tax. The Railway administration adopted a firm attitude and the Harbour Manager informed the workers that “if they chose to strike they would be paid off and locked out of their compounds.” One hour later, all labourers were back at work. For the media the lesson learned was that being firm with Africans could save a lot of trouble. They failed to see, however, that

51 SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part II, Natal Employers' Association to the Chairman of the Wage Board, 13 January 1958; Native Labour Officer to Divisional Inspector of Labour, “Dispute: Jack Storm (PTY) Ltd. Stevedoring: Point,” no date [October 1958].
53 Ibid.
in a labour market where racial divisions mirrored political exclusion industrial relations were never separate from politics.

While workers lacked support from the African middle class in the beginning of the decade, the Pact government that came into power in 1924 changed this dynamic. A new government supported by the white petty bourgeoisie and skilled workers put the screws tightly on the aspiring African petty bourgeoisie, closing off avenues of clerical and skilled employment as well as commercial enterprise. Their sense of vulnerability at the hands of the authorities facilitated downward identification.54 The middle class leadership of the ICU thus found common ground with Durban’s workers. However, the ICU failed to create an organisational basis and did not pursue wage and political demands beyond mass meetings and legal action. These failures, combined with financial irregularities and official repression, led to the near collapse of the union by the end of 1927.55

Nonetheless, the ICU and its leader, ‘arch agitator’56 A.W.G. Champion, would still play a prominent role in the June 1929 beer boycott before their willingness to be co-opted into the new advisory boards and the speed with which they subsequently dropped their support for popular demands further discredited them.57 The origins of these riots have been discussed in chapter four. It should suffice to repeat that two groups advocated for this boycott: female brewers who were protesting the expansion of the beer monopoly and dock workers who

protested the breach of the moral economy of the Bell Street Barracks. Although a municipal monopoly putting small-scale African entrepreneurs out of business was a fitting target for the ICU’s middle class leadership, they did not take the lead, but were rather led by the dock workers and brewers. This boycott and the subsequent riot were inherently political actions; the boycott was an attack on a monopoly that was central to the control of urban African labour and the riot was a challenge of the capacity and legitimacy of the authorities to rule.

The boycott started at the Point, but the protest quickly spread. The relatively undifferentiated nature of the African working class probably facilitated this. Pay scales were very similar, labourers from many different sectors and even the lower middle class lived in the same areas and municipal compounds and went to the same beer halls, and workers often moved in and out of different jobs. The African working class in Durban was not highly segmented and the grievances of one group quickly spread to others. Moreover, the harbour was a source of gossip and information, which made the news of the boycott and riot spread through the city as wildfire. After the major riots were over, the boycott of the beer halls remained cohesive. This

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59 La Hausse, “The Message of the Warriors,” 36. See also chapter four.
60 Nuttall, op. cit., 50.
63 About the harbour as centre of gossip in Durban, see: Iain Edwards, “Swing the Assegai Peacefully?: ‘New Africa’, Mkhumbane, the Co-operative Movement and Attempts to Transform Durban Society in the Late Nineteen-Forties,” in *Holding Their Ground*, ed. Bonner et al., 64. Ports are often centres of dissemination of information about revolutions and strikes. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker discuss this role of harbours and sailors – as ‘vectors of revolution’ – in *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 241. Cooper also remarks on how news travelled from Durban to other ports, noting that a strike broke out in Mombasa after the news spread that dock workers in Durban had received an increase: *On the African Waterfront*, 79.
was more than a spontaneous and ‘primitive’ outburst of rage; it was a reasoned and informally organised boycott with political motives. The boycotts originated at the Bell Street Togt Barracks, which was once again at the centre of the action, and it seems reasonable to assume that the organisational effort behind the continued defiance also came from there. It was at the Point that the authority of the police was continually challenged, even after the riots, and that Police Patrols were attacked. The Police thus focused its attempt at breaking this culture of defiance on this compound.

After the riots in June and after the November raids, the momentum of the ICU was finally broken. Its representatives gained some respectability by being selected for the new Native Advisory Board. Indeed, Champion seemed quite eager to join this Board, which had no formal authority, but co-opted African elites into the structures of the municipality. This willingness to join the NAB and the ICU’s increasingly ambiguous position towards the workers, however, cost them credibility in the eyes of dissatisfied workers. Thus, in 1930 the CPSA took over the role of organiser of Durban’s working class. At the centre of these efforts was the young charismatic

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64 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 223.
66 “Massed Police At Point Road Barracks,” Natal Witness, 15 November 1929, 8.
67 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 220-221. Initially, labourers were willing to work with the NAB, but on their own terms. As such, the dock workers at the Bell Street Barracks forced out their appointed representative and replaced him with one they elected themselves: DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1147, file 323A, part I, Togt workers at the Bell Street Barracks to the Durban Borough Advisory Board of Europeans and Natives, 21 November 1930; file 323A, part II, Dick Mate, A. Gumede and William G. Sibiya to the NAB, 26 July 1931.
68 La Hausse, “The Message of the Warriors,” 48. Of course, the twelve month banishment of Champion in September 1930 seems to tell a different story and could suggest that authorities were still concerned that he could instigate labour unrest. However, the police reported in June 1930 that Champion had lost his influence on the African masses in Durban. Marks argues that his overtures to the Zulu royal family was what worried the authorities and led to his banishment. Marks, The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), 108-9. See also chapter four.
Johannes Nkosi. Once again it was the political machinery of domination rather than actual wages and working conditions that was the object of these protests. The pass system was seen as the mechanism by which African workers were kept down and that was what had to be challenged.

On ‘Dingaan’s Day’ (16 December), the CPSA called upon all African workers to burn their passes. The response was nowhere as enthusiastic as among Durban’s dock workers. Yet, not even on the docks was the support for this action uniform. Some older dock workers asked Nkosi “if his parents knew what he was doing?” Clearly, there was generational dimension to this militancy. Others were fearful of renewed violent repression after the 1929 riots. Indeed, the police used brute force in ‘dispersing’ the hundreds of protestors that had turned up on the Cartwright Flats. They killed four protestors, among them Nkosi, and charged thirty with ‘public violence’.

Two episodes of violent repression were not the only factors in the turning tide of militancy. The onset of the depression in South Africa led to an over-supply of labour, which is often the best weapon against worker militancy, as it weakens the position of the labourers. This was exactly what the depression did. Dock workers were among the first to feel the decline in employment and many only worked two days per week in the early 1930s. The volume of cargo handled fell by forty per cent between 1929 and 1932. Moreover, in an attempt to reinvigorate the economy the state lowered transport costs, shifting the burden of the depression onto dock and

70 Marks, Ambiguities of Dependence, 85.
74 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 270.
railway workers. To deal with insecurity, workers agreed to longer contracts. It was at this unfortunate juncture that the CPSA decided to try its hand at industrial organising by founding the SHWU. Its call for a strike on May Day 1931 was overwhelmingly ignored.

Strikes were difficult to organise during the depression, but workers still attempted to do something. In 1931 Dick Mate, the representative of the Bell Street Barracks, made representations to the NAB. The Chairman argued that there was little that the municipality could do and that wages were a matter of relations between employers and labourers. Mate, however, bounced the ball back and pointed out that the Town Council did have a large say in setting wages through togt and other bye-laws, through direct intervention in industrial conflict, and by coordinating employers’ responses to wage demands. Wages were a matter of politics. Eventually, the Chairman agreed to “make personal representations to the Port Manager.” When the S.A.R. & H. increased hours and cut wages by more than thirty-five per cent in 1932, a spontaneous strike erupted. On 2 April, more than one thousand dock workers walked off the job. The press, always concerned with the fortunes of shipping, was not too worried. They had the soothing knowledge that there were ample unemployed labourers to act as strike breakers under the protection of the police. Strikers were laid off and easily replaced; disruptions were said to be minor. As the strike breakers were paid 3s. 6d., many strikers were deceived and joined them. However, as soon as the strike was over, the pay reverted to 1s. 7d.

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75 Ibid., 272-273.  
76 Ibid., 267-268.  
77 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1139, file 315E, part IV, extract from the Minutes of the NAB, 9 December 1931.  
78 Ibid.  
79 “1,000 Dockers On Strike,” Natal Mercury, 4 April 1932, 20.  
80 “Point Strike All Over,” Natal Mercury, 5 April 1932, 18.  
The re-emergence of militancy

In the second half of the 1930s dock militancy re-emerged in Durban. The first big action took place in August 1935. Although there was still an over-supply of labour, dock workers spontaneously refused to load meat destined for the Italian troops in Ethiopia. This strike was not about wages or working conditions, but about international politics. The issue emerged when the ‘Perla’ docked in Durban to take in frozen meat. The workers were clearly well informed, not only about politics, but also about the destination of the cargo. The newspapers ran stories about these shipments and anti-fascist organisations condemned them.82 The Italian aggression was the main subject of conversation at the Point and one dock worker expressed what ‘civilisation’ meant for the colonised: “It would be civilisation for the financial gain of Italy at the expense of the Native, [...] and you can be sure that the Native would get a very small look in in anything which was being done for the apparent benefit of the country.”83

The police intervened and the strikers had to leave their picket. By 10 am the ship was again being loaded.84 A few days later, Cape Town’s dockers attempted a similar boycott of the ‘Sabbia’, but they had the organisational support of the CTSDWU.85 In Cape Town the boycott was more successful and spread to other Italian ships.86 The ‘Sabbia’ then left for Durban, where there was no trade union to support such a boycott and where employers were confident that the labour surplus would make any strike attempt futile: “[...] native labour is abundant. I happen to know that if 1,000 natives walked out of their jobs in the harbour area now we should have all

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86 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 288.
places filled before this evening." The destination of the meat did not greatly trouble the employers; they argued that Durban could only lose the traffic to Lourenço Marques.

Spontaneous action without organisational backing proved insufficient to sustain this political boycott. The moral support of the CPSA and multiple other anti-fascist white organisations and a special issue of ‘Umsebenzi’ could not overcome the effects of a labour surplus. It did illustrate, however, how well informed labourers at the Point were about international politics and about their strategic position in the infrastructure of empire. Such an action inspired by international politics was not unique. Only a few months earlier American dock workers had boycotted a German ship. Dock workers have frequently used boycotts to express their outrage at international injustice, for example to oppose undemocratic regimes in South Africa, Chile, and El Salvador in the 1980s, to protest Mugabe’s government in Zimbabwe in 2008, or to condemn Israel’s attack on an international aid flotilla for Gaza in 2010.

However, conditions for working class action improved in the next few years. In 1937 the tonnage handled approached that of 1930 and the next year a new record of over six million tons was set. Thus, new wage demands emerged. These were no radical demands, but rather attempts at undoing the cuts experienced during the depression. The first group to reinforce their demands

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by striking were *togt* stevedores. At least five hundred stopped work in April 1937, claiming a full day’s pay for half-day Saturdays, a concession they had lost during the depression.\(^93\) The strike only lasted a day and was successful. This strike was successful through self-organisation, as there was no support from a formal union.\(^94\) The ‘Natal Mercury’ noted that “[n]o spokesman was appointed,”\(^95\) presumably to avoid victimisation, which was a strategy that would be used again by dock workers.\(^96\) The disruption of shipping was limited, but a newspaper noted that if the strike had come a few months later, during the fruit packing season, the delays would have been far more serious.\(^97\)

*Togt* labourers working for the S.A.R. & H. realised the advantage of striking at a busy time and went on strike in August that year, causing unprecedented congestion in the harbour. Six hundred casual labourers demanded the same pay as *togt* stevedores, 4s. per day.\(^98\) The strike erupted spontaneously among dock workers living in the Bell Street Barracks, putting these once again at the centre of the action.\(^99\) This strike did not end as quickly as the stevedoring strike, as the S.A.R. & H. were unwilling to compromise. Work only returned to normal by the end of the month.\(^100\) The employer brought in strike breakers under police protection and hired more

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93 According to the ‘Natal Witness’, however, there were as many as 3,000 strikers: “More Pay For Togt Labour At Point,” *Natal Witness*, 27 April 1937, 7; “Strike of Native Point Labourers,” *Natal Mercury*, 26 April 1937, 27.
94 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 294.
95 “Strike of Native Point Labourers,” *Natal Mercury*, 26 April 1937, 27.
96 Sideris, op. cit., 15. The interviewees for this research also mentioned the use of nicknames to avoid victimisation: interviews with Lihlo Shange, Sizamenjane, 20 October 2009; Mabhalane Dlamini, Hebuhebu, 22 October 2009; Mzwakhe Sobiso, Ngwagwane, 25 October 2009; Mzenkosi Duma, Mkhunya North, 13 November 2009; Zodwa Tenza, Hlokozi, 15 November 2009.
permanent workers to be less dependent on casual labour.\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Togt} workers, refusing to work at 3s., meanwhile found stevedoring work while shipping was busy.\textsuperscript{102}

Once the rush was over and the strikers lost their stevedoring jobs, they were forced to accept the old rate at the S.A.R. & H. The administration did promise to ‘look into their demands’, a classic strategy to buy time without making commitments.\textsuperscript{103} Significantly, at the end of this strike, the pattern of employment had changed. The S.A.R. & H. had taken on more than two hundred new permanent workers, limiting their dependence on casual labour and decreasing the number of available jobs for \textit{togt} workers. At this time, Champion also re-emerged on the political stage and called a mass meeting of African labourers. His solution to low wages was not to strike, but to make representations to the MNAD and the Chamber of Commerce. The meeting had the support of white liberal Edgar Brookes and was attended by much of the African elite, such as Dube, Rev. A.S. Mtimkulu, and L.R. Maphumulo, the secretary of the Catholic African Union.\textsuperscript{104} Brookes was the principal of Adams College, where many of Natal’s African elite were educated, and became a senator representing Africans that year.\textsuperscript{105} Despite high profile support, these representations did not make a difference.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Togt} labourers struck a third time in 1937. In late August, three hundred timber workers at Maydon Wharf went on strike. They wanted a raise of 1s. from their very low 2s. 6d. per day. The employer passed the demand on to a meeting to be held at some point in the future.\textsuperscript{107} The striking \textit{togt} workers were paid off and this company would only hire permanent labourers in the

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\textsuperscript{101} “Shipping Delayed By Strike,” \textit{Natal Mercury}, 16 August 1937, 18.
\textsuperscript{106} Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 302.
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The willingness of the police to protect strike breakers was notable in these strikes. This was something the SAP would do frequently in the 1940s and 1950s as well, not only in Durban.

They certainly had plenty of opportunity to do so in the 1940s, a decade of intense struggle. The Second World War brought increased employment opportunities and war-time inflation made dependence on wages even more tangible. Thus, the 1940s caused a rush to town, but the increased demand for labour meant that the additional supply did not crush militancy. This far-reaching demographic shift forced authorities to rethink their policies towards African workers. Both the 1942 Smit report and the 1948 Fagan report accepted the reality of African urbanisation and suggested limited reforms to African urban employment and residence policies. These reports suggested a combination of agricultural development to limit influx and social welfare and labour stabilisation in the city. Nevertheless, neither report suggested freedom of movement for Africans. The electoral victory of the National Party in 1948

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109 E.g.: “Shipping Delayed By Strike,” Natal Mercury, 16 August 1937, 18. One of the interviewees, Mzwakhe Sobiso, was first hired as a strike breaker, of which he was not aware. When he found out that he was replacing striking dock workers, he was strong-armed into joining the strike.
110 E.g.: in Port Elizabeth: SAB, SAP, vol. 386, file 15/5/46, Chief-Inspector of the SAP, commanding Cape Eastern Division, to Commissioner SAP, 26 January 1946; in Durban: SAB, SAP, vol. 353, file 1/102/43, Quartermaster-General of the Union Defence Force to the Secretary of Labour, 6 October 1943; vol. 474, file 35/3/49, District Commandant to Deputy Commissioner of the SAP, 26 July 1954.
112 Between 1939 and 1946, an additional 134,000 Africans entered industrial employment and the number of Africans working in manufacturing approached the number working on the mines. The permanence of this townward drift was illustrated by the large number of African women among the new urbanites. See: O’Meara, op. cit., 24.
on a program of ‘Apartheid’ limited the scope for these reforms, even if apartheid’s policies were often not that different from those before.\textsuperscript{115}

The high levels of employment and inflation enabled a surge in working class action in the first half of the 1940s. Moreover, the war-time increase in shipping and work pace made dock work even more exhausting, as one of Sideris’ informants explains: “There was not a day when there were not ships stretched far out to sea waiting to come in. The dockworkers were working day and night.”\textsuperscript{116} Some of the actions that took place on the docks have already been discussed in chapter four, but this discussion will focus on the person of Zulu Phungula and the significance of these actions in the longer history of dock workers’ strife. Phungula is part of the collective memory of dock workers in Durban and Hemson attributes a very prominent role to him.

The rise of Phungula as the pre-eminent dock leader of the 1940s brought a change in the contents of industrial action. Where earlier actions were often in defence of living conditions and their customary rights in the compounds (such as the beer boycott in 1929), political (such as the boycott of two Italian ships), or just for small gains (such as the strikes in 1937), the protests under Phungula’s leadership were often more forceful and demanded such substantial increases that they effectively challenged the racial division of labour.\textsuperscript{117} Under his leadership some significant nominal gains were made, but because of high inflation real wages probably still

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{116} Sideris, op. cit., 8.
\textsuperscript{117} In 1942, Zulu Phungula and Willie Khumalo stressed to the Native Commissioner and other officials that they ultimately want the same pay as white dock workers: SAB, ARB, vol. 174, COM 1/9/1, “Meeting at Native Commissioner’s Office,” 11 March 1942. His demands in the 1949 strike, shortly after the riots, were considered ridiculous by other labour organisations: SAB, SAP, vol. 474, file 35/3/49, Divisional Inspector, Natal, to the Commissioner of the SAP, 2 May 1949.
declined significantly. Because of his radicalism the authorities responded at times ferociously. Phungula was banned from Durban twice and at one point he was arrested and ordered to urge strikers to go back to work. However, he was prepared to make personal sacrifices. Wilson Cele wrote that “Mr. Phungula told the public that he was prepared to go to jail and that the strike should continue.”

The response of the authorities went beyond intimidation and victimisation of the leaders. Ivan Walker, the Controller of Industrial Manpower, declared stevedoring a Controlled Industry after the first war-time strike, as it was crucial to the war effort. This implicated the government even more in industrial relations and officials from Pretoria were to deal directly with conflict at the Point during the war. Moreover, the emergency regulations were not retracted after the war and continued to make organising difficult. The government kept a close watch on labour relations in the port of Durban, even after the war. Officials also threatened to bring in strike breakers.

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118 Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm,” 156.
122 The files of the Department of Labour show how closely Pretoria was involved in the management of Durban’s dock workers from this point onwards. Relatively little information on dock workers in Durban could be found before 1941 in the ARB (Department of Labour) volumes at the National Archives, yet after that date these files become some of the richest sources for this topic.
123 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 347.
124 “You have already been told by the Chief Native Commissioner that the work you have been doing at the Port is of equal importance to that of a soldier in the fighting line. Such being the case the government has no option but to provide other labour to do the work at the Port. You still have an opportunity to return to work, and I want this made very clear and to be taken very seriously by the natives that the government has decided that those natives who do not return to work will be sent out of Durban.” SAB, ARB, vol. 174, COM 1/9/1, Address by Col. White to strikers representatives, 31 July 1942.
Phungula’s radicalism\textsuperscript{125} could also alienate potential allies. After the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the CPSA changed its focus from anti-imperialism to support for the war effort as part of the anti-fascist popular front.\textsuperscript{126} The party was ambivalent about dock strikes. While it supported the right of dock workers to be paid fairly, it was also concerned about strikes in such a vital industry. Party officials felt that the workers were undisciplined and would strike ‘at the drop of a hat’\textsuperscript{127}. In 1948, Phungula also failed to gather support beyond his immediate following of dock workers for a proposed general strike. Christopher Mbonambi of the African National Workers’ Federation called the demand for £1 per day too revolutionary and impossible.\textsuperscript{128}

However, despite sometimes being seen as too radical, Phungula and his committee could be very patient and disciplined: they explored all other avenues before embarking on a strike, but without compromising on their demands.\textsuperscript{129} In May 1941, before they struck in August, they approached their employers, who referred them to the authorities. Madela Cebekulu, one of the representatives of the togt labourers at a meeting with the Native Commissioner, stressed:\textsuperscript{130}

\begin{quote}
Today the Zulu people have taken the right to speak, by not going on strike and leaving the work and instead discussing their complaint and bringing them forward. [...] We used to go on strike when we wanted more wages, but when we did so we did not even have money in our pockets.
\end{quote}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
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\bibitem{125} Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm,” 158.
\bibitem{126} Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 320.
\bibitem{128} Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 349-350.
\bibitem{129} Nuttall, op. cit., 188.
\bibitem{130} SAB, ARB, vol. 2854, file 1069/70, “Notes of Interview,” 9 May 1941.
\end{thebibliography}
The next year, Phungula was also willing to give constitutional and conciliatory trade unionism a chance and accepted the role of organiser for the CTSDWU in Durban.¹³¹ This new branch became the ‘Durban Stevedoring Union’ and its secretary, Abel M.S. Mhlongo, wrote to the Divisional Inspector of Labour in September: “It is hoped that from henceforth grievances will be settled on constitutional lines, [...]. We will assure you, sir, that as Stevedores we shall do all in our power to expedite the war effort and to establish good relations between your office and ourselves.”¹³² In February 1942 the Native Commissioner also noted that Phungula was advocating for the formation of co-operative societies.¹³³ Maybe Phungula’s actions and consciousness were not as unambiguously radical as Hemson suggests.

The transcript of a meeting between workers and officials also gives a glimpse into how strikers managed to survive in the city without receiving any wages. Though some would go home when a strike broke out or stay home if they were already there, others did not.¹³⁴ The conversation was not about strikes, but one of the workers explained that he received help from home when he was ill. Similar assistance from kin at home could also have helped strikers cope.¹³⁵ Others would of course find temporary or permanent employment elsewhere, as the striking S.A.R. & H. togt labourers did in August 1937.¹³⁶

The end of the war eased the demand for labour and brought industrial peace. Moreover, the African and inter-racial trade union movement was in disarray after the failure of the 1942-3

¹³¹ Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 334.
¹³² SAB, ARB, vol. 174, file COM 1/9/1, Abel M.S. Mhlongo to the Divisional Inspector of Labour, 10 September 1942.
Dunlop strike, where Africans replaced Indian strikers.137 The quiescence, however, did not last long. In 1948, a big strike broke out among permanent S.A.R. & H. workers. While togt workers may generally have been more prone to strike and more able to do so without losing their jobs or being criminally liable, permanent workers too have been on strike many times. This conflict broke out when new regulations about absenteeism were announced, which equated unauthorised leave or returning late from leave to a resignation.138 Moreover, workers could be penalised for starting late or stopping work to meet relatives who came to town and leaves of more than three months would result in dismissal.139 The employer wanted to force its employees in a more regular and predictable pattern of work and increase its control over the labour process.

This new pattern, however, could conflict with the workers’ other commitments, especially their rural commitments, as such regulations limited their ability to go back home. These new rules also violated the workers’ understanding of acceptable leave practices. The workers protested this attempt of management to increase control over the worker’s life and work pattern. They refused to appoint a delegation to prevent victimisation and insisted that the new regulations should just be withdrawn completely and immediately.140 They resumed work after management promised that they would reconsider.141

That same year, Zulu Phungula returned from exile. He immediately started organising again. On 20 September 1948, he wrote a report decrying rural impoverishment, the lack of jobs in the cities, and low wages. He did not ask for a rural solution in the form of more land or

139 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 348.
141 KCAL, Bourquin papers, News clippings book 22, “2,000 Native Dockers Meet In Protest At Point,” unidentified newspaper, undated.
agricultural development, but rather for wages on which a family could live in the city. He
demanded minimum wages of £1 5s. per day or £32 10s. per month, several times more than even
the highest African wages at that time.¹⁴² David Hemson characterised these radical demands “not
peasant but working class action.”¹⁴³ Phungula tried to organise a general strike and as a dock
worker he was probably aware of strikes in other African port cities in 1947 and 1948.¹⁴⁴
Nevertheless, in the above-mentioned meeting this proposal was defeated.¹⁴⁵

Phungula did not give up on the idea of a general strike and kept pushing the demands in
his report. He did not just call for an indefinite general strike starting on May Day 1949, but also
for a boycott of municipal beerhalls and buses.¹⁴⁶ He requested the municipality not to replace the
Indian bus services, which were disrupted after the race riots in January, with municipal buses, so
that African workers could form co-operative bus services.¹⁴⁷ He also asked workers to contribute
to a co-operative bus scheme.¹⁴⁸ Phungula combined industrial action with political protest
against the racial division of labour and the oppressive state which supported this division. The
day before the May Day strike Phungula was arrested and eventually banished from Durban once
more, this time for ten years.¹⁴⁹

The strike was a limited success, as only dock workers and a number of whaling workers
heeded the strike call. According to the newspapers, only about half of the stevedores struck and

September 1948.
¹⁴³ Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 349.
¹⁴⁴ Cf.: note 63 in this chapter.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 350.
¹⁴⁶ “Natives Told To Demand £32 10s. a Month,” Natal Witness, 29 April 1949, 1.
¹⁴⁸ Nuttall, op. cit., 316.

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none of the S.A.R. & H. workers seem to have done so.\footnote{SAB, SAP, vol. 474, file 35/3/49, article from the Sunday Express titled “Tension In Durban: Police Stand By,” 1 May 1949; “Half Durban Stevedores Strike: Ships Delayed,” \textit{Natal Witness}, 3 May 1949, 1; “Natives’ Strike May Spread,” 3 May 1949, 9.} Once more, it seems that the Bell Street Togt Barracks were at the centre of this strike. Most workers who continued striking on the second day lived there.\footnote{SAB, SAP, vol. 474, file 35/3/49, Divisional Inspector, Natal Division, R.V. Somers, to the Commissioner of the SAP, 2 May 1949.} By the third day, however, most workers had returned to work and whaling was the only sector to which the strike had spread.\footnote{“Native Stevedores’ Strike Broken In Durban,” \textit{Natal Witness}, 4 May 1949, 1; SAB, SAP, vol. 474, file 35/3/49, Chief Inspector Somers, “Dock Strike – Durban,” 2 May 1949.} Phungula’s radical style did not resonate well outside the docks. While protests that started on the dock could sometimes spread to the rest of Durban’s working class, as in 1929, dock workers’ actions could also fail to get traction among other workers. The Cato Manor bus boycott was more successful and forced the authorities to deliver eleven certificates to African operators, who were all established entrepreneurs with links to the NAB.\footnote{Nuttall, op. cit., 317.}

The 1950s

After the second banishment of Zulu Phungula, working class organisation on the docks was driven underground.\footnote{Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 358.} One of the few significant actions during the early 1950s was the strike by six hundred ‘Native, Coloured and Indian’ chippers, painters, and boiler cleaners in June 1952. This strike did not significantly hinder shipping, as ships could just have the work done elsewhere.\footnote{“Strikers Want 15s. A Day,” \textit{Natal Mercury}, 4 June 1952, 6.} More worrisome for employers and authorities was the stevedoring strike that broke out two years later. On 1 July 1954, thousands of \textit{togt} stevedores and hundreds of permanent workers walked off the job in demand of 15s. per day, up from 10s. 3d.\footnote{“Stevedore Firms Offer Togt Dock Strikers Pay Increase,” \textit{Natal Mercury}, 2 July 1954, 2.} They had learned from
their experience and did not appoint spokesmen after the victimisation of Phungula: “The man we want back to speak for us has been taken away. We are still looking for him. We won’t have spokesmen.”157 Workers did have a collective and organisational memory of their actions and organising took place informally. Officials once again looked for a scapegoat and found one in the ANC, which was rapidly becoming the main African political organisation after the defiance campaign of 1952 that protested the imposition of influx controls.158 The District Commandant of the SAP did not provide any evidence, but claimed that “there is little doubt that this organisation had much to do with bringing about the stoppage of work.”159 There seems to be little evidence for this beyond a letter of support from the ANC and eleven other organisations.160

According to the ‘Natal Mercury’ there had been an undercurrent of restlessness among the three thousand harbour togt workers for a long time. Workers had already been agitating for better wages for six months.161 The employers offered a non-negotiable 9d. increase, which was rejected.162 An amicable solution was not on the cards, especially when S.D. Mentz, the chairman of the Central Native Labour Board (CNLB), became involved. Mentz was unwilling to compromise and believed that “there should be a show down.”163 In meetings with the employers, he expressed his firm conviction that when you give an African worker a finger, he will take an arm. He was angered by the 9d. offer the companies had made, as he was concerned that a

157 Quoted in Sideris, op. cit., 15.
160 “Strikers Agree To ‘Go Back’,” Natal Mercury, 8 July 1954, 1.
163 SAB, ARB, vol. 1212, file 1042/989, “Record of Discussions,” 1-7 July 1954, 6. In the same meeting, he was also asked: “So you refuse to settle the dispute.” He responded: “Yes.”
successful strike among stevedores would spur S.A.R. & H. workers to make similar demands.  He also considered this strike the first test of the new Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, which was meant to eliminate African trade unionism.

However, as casual workers could not technically strike, they did not do anything illegal and could not be dealt with by the police and the court system. Togt workers were thus also radical because they could walk off the job without risking more than one day’s income and were not subject to the same repressive legislation as permanent workers. Mentz noted that “die stakers blykbaar met goeie regsadvisie bedien was daar dit, na samensprekings van die Senior Aanklaer, gebleek het dat geen wetsoortreding deur die naturelle begaan was nie.” Therefore, they had to look for other ways to force the stevedores back to work. The CNLB and the employers pointed to the conditions of the workers’ stay in the compounds, which stated that workers had to be on first call for the company which houses them. Thus, they threatened them with eviction. While this paternalist system of housing did benefit the workers by limiting the need to spend their wages in the city, it also afforded the employers greater leverage over their workers. However, there was some substantial juridical doubt whether the strikers could be evicted from the compounds.

Not only the employers and the CNLB played hardball, the workers did as well. They turned down offers for 9d. and 1s. 9d. increases and threatened to go back home if their demands

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165 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 359-360.
166 Own translation: “[... ] the strikers apparently had good legal advice, as it became clear after a discussion with the Senior Prosecutor that the Natives had not committed any offence.” SAB, ARB, vol. 1212, file 1042/989, “Record of Discussions,” 1-7 July 1954.
168 SAB, ARB, vol. 1212, file 1042/989, Chief Clerk of the C division of the Department of Labour to the Under-Secretary of Labour, 6 July 1954.
were not met. This was an interesting departure from Zulu Phungula’s earlier claims that the
government could not send them home, as Durban was their home, a passage that Hemson sees as
proof of Phungula’s proletarian consciousness. Indeed, by 7 July an estimated two hundred
workers had already left the city. Officials and employers were not worried. Convinced that
stevedoring is unschooled and unskilled labour, they thought they could easily replace those
workers who left. However, most workers eventually returned when the deadline for ejection
from the compounds came. This was not the end of this struggle. One month later, the workers
claimed that they had returned to work on the understanding that they had to do so to be able to
negotiate. The workers assured a journalist from ‘Advance’ that they would not be satisfied until
they receive 15s., the same as stevedores in the other main South African ports. Consequently,
1954 turned out to be only the beginning of an upsurge in working class action on the Durban
docks that would last till 1959.

There was also a generational dimension to this strike. An older dock worker and
representative of the togt labourer, Amos Lokosi, admitted that “they had done wrong [in
striking],” but “the majority of the workers were young and irresponsible. The older men had
tried to keep them on the right road but it was a difficult task. [...] The older responsible men had
pleaded with the other workers.” Nevertheless, the only person to be charged with ‘incitement’

170 SAB, ARB, vol. 174, file COM 1/9/1, “Meeting Held at Native Commissioner’s Office, Durban,” 11
March 1942.
173 “Strikers Agree To ‘Go Back’,” Natal Mercury, 8 July 1954, 1.
174 SAB, ARB, vol. 1212, file 1042/989, newspaper cutting “Durban Dockers Double-Crossed - They
was not a young man, but a forty year old induna.\textsuperscript{176} In late July 1956, in an episode Hemson does not mention, three older stevedores managed to stave off a strike and convinced their colleagues to instead “make representations through the correct channels.” Signalling more generational differences, they mentioned to the authorities that “[d]uring the last few days young men in Compounds were forming little companies and discussing a strike. That is something that we as older members must try and prevent. [...] We are tired of warning these young men.”\textsuperscript{177} As older workers often had more dependents and thus household responsibilities, they could ill-afford to lose pay. Since those labourers with a business on the side usually retired earlier than those only working on the docks, older workers were also more likely to be the ones who are dependent on their wages alone.\textsuperscript{178} These remarks also shed some light on how strikes were organised. The representations were a success and starting from 30 July they received 12s. 6d. for a regular shift and 1s. 9d. per hour for overtime. Mentz of the CNLB stressed that “they must realise that never in their experience had they had such a quick response and that the reason was that they had been obedient [...]. They had stayed within the law and if they continued to do so he would remain their father.”\textsuperscript{179}

However, this raise was not enough to prevent a strike. The discontent in the compound of the Consolidated Company was not just related to wages, but also to a new compound manager

\textsuperscript{177} SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part I, “Notes from meetings and annexures from previous report in English and isiZulu,” 15 August 1956.
\textsuperscript{178} Moreover, Atkins notes for the late nineteenth century that traditional age-based hierarchies were recreated in the urban labour market. It is not unreasonable to assume that similar generational hierarchies played a role here and that older men felt that they were entitled to the obedience and respect of the younger men. The statements of these older stevedores do indeed suggest that they felt that it was their role and right to decide on such actions (“something we as older members must try and prevent”), and that they were frustrated at the lack of respect and obedience from the young stevedores (“We are tired of warning these young men”). Cf.: Atkins, op. cit., 56-61.
\textsuperscript{179} SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part I, “Notes from meetings and annexures from previous report in English and isiZulu,” 15 August 1956.
who had cracked down on customary activities. The new manager breached the moral economy
of the compound by disallowing a ritual that brought outsiders in the compound. On 14 August,
250 stevedores went on strike to demand the dismissal of both the compound manager and his
\textit{induna}. The workers were warned that nothing stopped them from working on the ships, as
their grievances were related to the compound. Government officials helped recruiting labour to
break the strike, effectively acting as labour brokers.

The next large strike took place in November when five hundred workers struck at Brock
and Co. Although the conflict remained limited to one company and only lasted one day, it did
disrupt shipping. This strike is noteworthy because officials saw it as a plot against attempts to
phase out \textit{togt} labour. The strike started when seventeen workers who had just become monthly
labourers complained that they received less money per day than as casual workers. They wanted
the same pay as before and about five hundred \textit{togt} labourers struck in solidarity. When they were
threatened with dismissal and eviction, however, they insisted that they were not on strike, but
rather awaiting an explanation. There were significant advantages to permanent labour for the
workers, above all the security of employment, but not everyone was willing to give up the liberty
and better pay of \textit{togt} labour. According to the employer “the workers failed to appreciate […] the
security which the new conditions gave them.”

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\footnote{SAB, ARB, vol. 1239, file 1042/1214, Divisional Inspector of Labour to Secretary for Labour,
“Stoppage of work,” 16 August 1956.}
\footnote{SAB, ARB, vol. 1239, file 1042/1214, telegram dated 14 August 1956.}
\footnote{SAB, ARB, vol. 1239, file 1042/1214, Divisional Inspector of Labour to Secretary for Labour,
“Stoppage of work,” 16 August 1956.}
\footnote{“500 Natives Stop Work At Docks,” \textit{Natal Mercury}, 2 November 1956, 7; SAB, ARB, vol. 1240, file
1042/989, telegram dated 2 November 1956.}
\footnote{SAB, ARB, vol. 1240, file 1042/989, Divisional Inspector of Labour, Natal, to Secretary for Labour, 6
November 1956.}
\footnote{“500 Natives Stop Work At Docks,” \textit{Natal Mercury}, 2 November 1956, 7.}
\end{footnotes}
Employers and officials increasingly regarded togt labour as a problem. Many workers also considered casual labour a burden rather than a boon; especially the unpredictability of earnings was a problem. In a report from 1957 on the conditions of stevedoring work in Durban, it was calculated that a togt worker was employed for 3.15 days per week on average. Others, however, defended the casual labour system. As discussed in chapter five, the flexibility and liberty of togt labour was for many a source of agency. It is probable that those who defended togt were more likely to be workers with businesses on the side than those who only depended on their wages. The unpredictability of shipping would have been a bigger problem for the latter group and a more regular work pattern would have seemed more attractive to them. Moreover, by defending casual labour, stevedores were also trying to maintain a level of workplace control, as the S.A.R. & H. workers had done in 1948. The authors of the report from 1957 argued that the only reason togt was still so important was that the workers preferred it.

For the employers, the evils of togt were that these workers were relatively expensive and very prone to striking. They could not easily be disciplined, as the ‘sanction of the sack’ had little effect on them. After 1959, when casual labour had been phased out, statements by some izinduna confirmed that the Bell Street Togt Barracks, one of the main compounds where togt labourers

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186 E.g. the togt representatives who met with the CNLB, employers and other officials during the July 1954 strike complained that they could not work the whole week (James Dhlomo) and “sometimes only worked 2 days during a fortnight” (Willem Mpanza): SAB, ARB, vol. 1212, file 1042/989, “Record of Discussions,” 1-7 July 1954, 17. One of the informants for the SAIRR oral history project commented: “There were days when we did not work because there was no work for us although our wish was that we should work daily.” University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 45, interview with Absolom Ngema, 17 November 1982.


188 KCAL, Bourquin papers, News clippings book 22, “2,000 Native Dockers Meet In Protest At Point,” unidentified newspaper, undated.

lived, were almost always the place from where strikes were organised. 190 When there was a strike, casual labour and the lack of a trade union also made it difficult to negotiate. 191 Casual labourers were not under contract and could thus withhold their labour without officially striking and being subject to the state’s repressive labour legislation. As such, the word ‘strike’ was often a misnomer for casual workers withdrawing their labour and a concept that assumes more permanent employment. The togt system also had its advantages for the employers, however, as it shifted the burden of unpredictability onto the labourers.

There was another reason why officials and politicians wanted to get rid of casual labour. Togt offered opportunities to the ‘riffraff’ of the city to survive without having to engage in permanent labour and without being subject to many of the pass law restrictions. Because of dock labour there were Africans living at a stone’s throw from downtown, who did not work daily and of whom officials did not necessarily know where they lived. Just as in Cape Town, East London, or Mombasa, this group was seen as a dangerous mass over which the authorities had limited powers and who would strike or riot at the drop of a hat. 192 The presence in the city of large numbers of Africans who were not in permanent employment was unacceptable to the apartheid government. In the second half of the 1950s, the pressure on the stevedoring companies to eliminate casual labour increased. 193 Hendrik Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs, announced in 1957 that most of the stevedoring compounds at the Point would have to be closed and the workers moved to the new and distant township of KwaMashu. 194 The employers

190 SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part II, statements by Frans Goba, Sihlehele Mbando, and Sergeant Ngcobo, 5 and 6 October 1961.
192 Cf. Minkley, op. cit., 199.
194 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 360.
objected that the distance would make efficient work impossible in this unpredictable business that relied extensively on overtime.\footnote{\textit{Kwa Mashu: Point Employers Worried,}} \textit{Natal Mercury}, 6 March 1958, 2.

Beyond the borders of South Africa, similar debates about casual labour were taking place. Since the nineteenth century casualism was associated in Britain with dangerous cities of radicals, criminals, and migrants.\footnote{Gareth Stedman Jones, \textit{Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society} (Harmondsworth, Eng: Penguin Books, 1976).} In the twentieth century casual labour also came to be seen as the ‘most brutal feature’\footnote{In his foreword to Eric Taplin’s \textit{The Dockers’ Union}, former dock worker and unionist Jack Jones wrote: “[i]n a brutal age dock work was rough and hard but its most brutal feature was casual employment.” Jones, foreword to \textit{The Dockers’ Union: A study of the National Union of Dock Labourers, 1889-1922}, by Taplin (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985), xiii.} of dock work and as capitalism in its most exploitative form, making the workers bear the burden of the volatility of shipping. The shape-up system of daily hiring allowed for cut-throat competition among workers, as well as favouritism, kickbacks, and bribes. Technological change also hastened the end of casual labour,\footnote{Andrew Parnaby, \textit{Citizen Docker: Making a New Deal on the Vancouver Waterfront, 1919-1922} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 19; Taplin, op. cit., 1-2.} though decasualisation in Durban took place before the greatest of these changes, containerisation.\footnote{The first container terminal in Durban was opened in 1977, almost twenty years after the institution of monopoly hiring. Trevor Jones, “The Port of Durban: Lynchpin of the Local Economy?,” in \textit{(D)urban Vortex: South African City in Transition}, ed. Bill Freund and Vishnu Padayachee (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 75.} In Durban, the 1959 strikes brought an end to casual labour. After the strikes in February, the employers decided to lay off everyone, re-engage only permanent workers, and establish a labour pool.\footnote{SAB, ARB, vol. 1229, file 1042/15/1959, Arbeid Pretoria to Arbeid Cape Town, 26 February 1959.}

These strikes did not come out of nowhere. The years 1958 and 1959 were tumultuous years on the Durban docks.\footnote{One Native Affairs official even called the city a “strategic centre for subversive elements [in Natal]” in a document that contains four pages of incidents of ‘native unrest’ in the city between 1958 and 1960. KCAL, Bourquin papers, KCM 55228, “Native unrest in Durban 1958-1960,” 15 February 1961.} These are the years for which interviews are available and these strikes can thus be discussed in more detail. A number of interviewees were involved as

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\textit{\footnote{\textit{Kwa Mashu: Point Employers Worried,}} \textit{Natal Mercury}, 6 March 1958, 2.}
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\textit{\footnote{One Native Affairs official even called the city a “strategic centre for subversive elements [in Natal]” in a document that contains four pages of incidents of ‘native unrest’ in the city between 1958 and 1960. KCAL, Bourquin papers, KCM 55228, “Native unrest in Durban 1958-1960,” 15 February 1961.}}
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organisers or as strikers and others were around at these times. First, however, a brief overview of
the events will be offered to frame the following discussion. In April 1958, a strike and overtime
ban, the latter not organised by the ANC or SACTU, coincided with the 1958 Stay-At-Home,
which was part of the ‘£1 a day’ campaign. The authorities in Durban had gone above and
beyond to try to dissuade Africans from participating in the general strike. They had assistance
from A.W.G. Champion who urged the workers not to strike, as he had done so many times
before. Overall, the Stay-At-Home was a mixed success at best and the ANC called it off after
one day. However, Durban’s dock workers did respond well to the strike call, with most shipping
being suspended. At the end of the first day they decided to boycott overtime until they received
£1 per day. The workers exploited the industry’s reliance on overtime and could not be
prosecuted, as overtime was voluntary. The ban had some success, as they received a moderate
raise of 1s. 6d. to 14s., up from only 8s. 6d. in 1952.

The next strike was the one that finally tipped the balance in favour of decasualisation.
This strike in February 1959 was based on a claim to equality and started after a Wage
Determination awarded a raise to izinduna, but not to regular stevedores. The strike started
with about two hundred workers at one company, but quickly labourers at other concerns walked
off in solidarity. By the end of the day, between 1,000 and 1,500 stevedores were on strike, which
illustrates that news travelled quickly on the docks. According to the SAP the strike was

204 Cited in Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 361.
205 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 361; “Native Stevedores Refuse To Work Overtime,” Natal Mercury,
19 April 1958, 3.
206 Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 365.
spontaneous and the spokesmen refused to tell their names. In response, stevedoring companies decided to hire people on monthly contract with weekly pay only; they did away with togt labour. All strikers were dismissed, but the majority was re-engaged under the new permanent labour scheme, which guaranteed workers a weekly wage of £3 regardless of fluctuations in shipping. In March, a last conflict for a decade broke out over compensation for injuries during overtime. Workers once more engaged in an overtime ban during a busy period. This convinced employers that their current workers were strike prone and that the problem could only be solved by replacing the entire labour force. In their conviction that stevedoring is an unskilled job, the employers were confident that “the new stevedores will be as capable as the old gangs within four or five days.” The experience of a similar mass dismissal in 1969, when the pace dropped and the number of injuries increased, negates this claim.

Several dock strikes were about workplace control. One aspect of such conflict was job description: how much work should be done in one shift? By the late 1950s, the workers had earned the concession that they were not expected to start a second job if they finished the job for which they were hired before the end of the shift. They also discussed ‘tonnage’ with

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212 SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part II, Divisional Inspector to Secretary for Labour, 28 March 1959.
214 Dubbeld, op. cit., 72. Between 1959 and 1969 the technology of cargo handling did not change much, as containerisation only came to the docks in the 1970s and other advances had minimal impact on the work regime. Such changes can thus not explain the importance of skill and experience that speaks from this episode.
management. Now they knew how much cargo they had to handle in one shift and could thus finish earlier or even earn overtime pay within the regular hours. Mabhalane Dlamini explains: “we started to count how many ropes we do in eight hours. If we finished early, we could leave and if we added some more ropes, we would get paid for twelve hours.” In other words, they counted the number of crane loads per shift:

[...] we were informed that we should work this much tonnage in an eight hour shift. For example, a rope carries forty eight bags; now, tonnage works as how many ropes a gang should do in eight hours. After that, we found that we were doubling the job, so those who worked fast finished the job in three to four hours.

Of course, money was also a prominent issue, as discussed by several interviewees. Sergeant Ngcobo, an induna, thought that togt workers used to strike because they wanted to earn enough to only have to work three days per week. Ship crews helped dock workers find out whether they were working too much. They found out from crews how much dockers worked in other ports in the region and thus whether they were being ‘robbed in tonnage’. According to Lihlo Shange, demands came after their leaders learned that dock workers in Durban were working more than elsewhere. Ship crews thus retained their role in the spread of activism and resistance, a role they have had for many

215 Interviews with Khethewakhe Zondo, KwaMbonambi, 6 May 2009; Sipho Zondi, Pietermaritzburg, 7 May 2009; Dumile Ndlovu, Port Shepstone, 20 May 2009; Thembinkosi Miya, iXopo, 26 May 2009; Gedla Lukhozi, Polela, 6 June 2009; Velile Goba, Riverside, 17 June 2009; Sofia Nkomo, Dumisa, 12 July 2009; Kotozi Memela, Deepdale, 20 October 2009; Sipho Mkhize, Sweetwater, 24 October 2009; Lihlo Shange; Mabhalane Dlamini; Sipho Mkhize; Mzenkosi Duma; Siduma Chiliza; Bheka Dlaba.

216 Mabhalane Dlamini.

217 Dumile Ndlovu.

218 Kotozi Memela; Mzenkosi Duma; Siduma Chiliza; Bheka Dlaba; See also: University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 50, interview with Mr. Xulu and Mr. Mkhwanazi, 25 November 1982.


220 Sipho Zondi; Dumile Ndlovu; Lihlo Shange; Mabhalane Dlamini; Bheka Dlaba.

221 Dumile Ndlovu.
centuries. Zulu Phungula also referred to soldiers and foreigners who were astounded by the poverty of Durban’s dock workers to claim international solidarity and to express the injustice of their situation. However, this solidarity was not absolute and crews have occasionally been known to act as strike breakers, to load or unload cargoes when stevedores are on strike.

The interviews also offered an important corrective to the view that dock workers would strike ‘at the drop of a hat’. Several interviewees mentioned that there were talks and negotiations with management before strike action was undertaken. There are several documented meetings where stevedores said explicitly that they chose to make representations instead of striking. In many cases these talks were enough to avoid a strike. Moreover, some did not consider it striking to not work while there were negotiations going on. Mabhalane Dlamini, for example, noted that their leaders were in talks with management and that “therefore they don’t want anyone to do their job until that is solved.”

As opposed to the leaders from the 1940s, the leaders from the late-1950s have not been clearly identified in the archives. The foremost leader in the 1940s was of course Zulu Phungula, who was exiled for another ten years in 1949. The attempted general strike that year was, as far as we know, his last political appearance. After that time he never appeared in the newspapers or

222 Linebaugh and Rediker, loc. cit.
226 Khethekwakhe Zondo; Dumile Ndlovu; Gedla Lukhozi; Velile Goba; Sofa Nkomo; Kotozi Memela; Mabhalane Dlamini; Mzwakhe Sobiso.
227 For example: in May 1941, Zulu Phungula and a number of other togt stevedores had a meeting with officials: SAB, ARB, vol. 2854, file 1069/70, “Notes of Interview,” 9 May 1941. And, in late-July 1956, three workers from the Consolidated company came to “make representations through the correct channels”: SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part I, “Notes from meetings and annexures from previous report in English and isiZulu,” 15 August 1956.
228 Khethekwakhe Zondo; Dumile Ndlovu; Gedla Lukhozi; Velile Goba; Sofa Nkomo; Kotozi Memela.
229 Nuttall, op. cit., 316.
archives again. However, some interviewees claimed that Phungula was the leader of at least one of the strikes in 1958 or 1959, but they knew him under his real name, Mzamo Phungula. Sipho Mkhize was familiar with him because he was from the same area, as was Mzenkosi Duma. Duma knew that Phungula was an organiser known under different nicknames. Others added that Phungula was a good and experienced docker, respected by the izinduna and the other workers. He had a sharp mind and was trusted by the workers.230 Eventually, Zulu Phungula, Zodwa Tenza, Bheka Dlaba, and Dumile Sibiya were arrested for organising these strikes and released after the workers collected money to pay the fine.231

This account is remarkably similar to the story about a dock leader with the nickname Mkhumbikanowa, ‘Noah’s Ark’, who was mentioned by other interviewees.232 Lihlo Shange mentions that Mkhumbikanowa was the most prominent dock leader in the conflicts in 1958-9 and that he was arrested with a few other organisers and released when workers had collected money to pay the fine. Mzwakhe Sobiso told essentially the same story and added that ‘Mkhumbi’ was from the South Coast.233 These two groups of interviewees talked about the same issues, the same timeframe, and likely about the same arrests. It is possible that the general strike of 1949 may not have been Zulu Phungula’s last political appearance. Sobiso also knew that Mkhumbikanowa continued working on the docks afterwards, despite being banned. It must have been possible to work on the docks without necessarily being known to be there, which could explain how Phungula possibly could organise without drawing the attention of the authorities

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230 Siduma Chiliza; Zodwa Tenza; Bheka Dlaba.
231 Zodwa Tenza.
232 Lihlo Shange; Mabhalane Dlamini; Siphesihle Dladla; Mzwakhe Sobiso.
233 Hlokozi, where Zulu Phungula was from, is somewhat inland from the South Coast.
and the media. He could have kept low-key, since those interviewees who knew him were mostly from his area or fellow-organisers.

Nicknames were important to avoid victimisation and arrest. Often, strikers would not identify spokesmen for this reason. And, victimisation did happen: “Yes, it used to happen [...]. It used to happen when these strikes occurred, when we chose people to represent us, we would then hear that they are detained.” In the context of apartheid, a strike was not just a conflict between the employer and the workers. It was a challenge of the racial order and something to be repressed in the eyes of the authorities. Zithulele Chemane explained that he did not engage in any strikes, because “you would be arrested if you are against the white people.” The February 1959 strike did not have spokesmen, although there were organisers. Both the police and Mr. Sikhane, who was interviewed by SAIRR, commented on the lack of spokespeople. The interviewees also mentioned that “they had nicknames to avoid being identified and arrested. So, I only knew the organiser as Mkhumbikanowa.” ‘Zulu’ Phungula was also a nickname, which he got for greeting the crowds with the word Zulu.

The interviewees who had organised and participated in strikes gave some insight in organisation in the absence of trade unions. Lihlo Shange said that there was a worker who was

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234 Similarly, Anne Mager and Gary Minkley note that the amatsotsi who were deported from East London after the 1952 riots “surreptitiously made their way back to town.” See: Mager and Minkley, “Reaping the Whirlwind: The East London Riots of 1952,” in Apartheid’s Genesis, 1935-1962, ed. Philip Bonner et al. (Braamfontein and Johannesburg: Ravan Press and Witwatersrand University Press), 244.
235 Sideris, op. cit., 15.
236 Quote by Mr. Mkhwanazi: University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 50, interview with Mr. Xulu and Mr. Mkhwanazi, 25 November 1982.
237 Interview with Zithulele Chemane, Siphofu, 9 July 2009.
238 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 54, interview with Mr. Zulu, Mr. Gumbi, and Mr. Sikhane, no date; SAB, SAP, vol. 474, file 35/3/49, “Notes of Meeting with 1,200-1,400 strikers,” 25 February 1959
239 Lihlo Shange. The use of nicknames was also mentioned by Mabhalane Dlamini, Mzwakhe Sobiso, and Mzenkosi Duma.
240 Zodwa Tenza.
“announcing from Q shed to M shed and one from M wharf one to fifteen before the start of the shift that there was something going on and that the dock workers should be ready to drop their tools [...]” However, most people would not have heard the day itself, as they would already have heard rumours or attended meetings. Sipho Mkhize found out through meetings and talking to colleagues. Sidumo Chiliza noted that “Phungula and a few of us went to talk to colleagues and also organised meetings with workers.” These meetings would mostly have taken place at Bell Street.241 Mr. Xulu remembered talking about it among other workers: “how did you go on strike? ... (We did not go to work) Who said you shouldn't go? (We talked among ourselves that we shouldn't go to work).”242 About the actual strike, Mzenkosi Duma recalled just gathering at the employer’s offices and singing.

Of course, these strikes invited a strong response from the employers. As noted before, the institution of monopoly hiring took away much of the leverage these workers had in industrial relations. Moreover, after the March 1959 strike, all stevedores were fired and replaced by new workers, believed to be untainted by militant ideas.243 However, if all stevedores were replaced it would have been impossible for the interviewees, except those who worked for the S.A.R. & H., to have worked on the docks both before and after 1959, which was the case for most. Indeed, Mr. Xulu was fired in 1959, but did get hired again, and even Mkhumbikanowa who was specifically banned from the docks managed to continue working.244 Durban’s dock employers did not know enough about their labour force to enforce such a measure. Up until the formation

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242 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 50, interview with Mr. Xulu and Mr. Mkhwanazi, 25 November 1982.
244 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, AD 1722, SAIRR Oral History Project, Tape 50, interview with Mr. Xulu and Mr. Mkhwanazi, 25 November 1982; Mzwakhe Sobiso.
of the DSLSC, hiring was done by izinduna. The administrative control that was needed to keep out these workers did not yet exist.

Decasualisation in Durban was of course a specific and unique process, which did not go hand-in-hand with unionisation as it did in so many other ports.\textsuperscript{245} However, it did use the same principles as elsewhere: the supply of labour was restricted, centralised hiring was introduced, and predetermined selection patterns were laid out, taking away the power of izinduna to choose their own gangs.\textsuperscript{246} The end of casual labour and the institution of monopoly hiring ended the period of strong activism on the docks.\textsuperscript{247} This phase of industrial peace lasted a decade, until it was broken by the strike of 1969 and the 1972-3 strike wave in Durban.\textsuperscript{248}

**Conclusion**

There is little doubt that Durban’s dock workers had a strong tradition of working class action. Dock workers defended their interests as workers; they fought for better wages and for control over the labour process. Their militancy goes a long way towards explaining their consistently above-average wages for African unschooled workers. While the evidence for a strong working class consciousness among Durban’s dock workers is strong, it also needs to be stressed that their outlook was not always unambiguously proletarian and that they were not always uncompromisingly radical. Often, the workers would show considerable restraint before undertaking action. Moreover, they did not only take action on wages and the labour process.

\textsuperscript{245} This is one of the important arguments made in Dubbeld, “Breaking the Buffalo: The Transformation of Stevedoring Work in Durban Between 1970 and 1990,” *International Review of Social History* 48 (2003): 97-122.


\textsuperscript{247} SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part II, statements by Frans Goba, Sihlelele Mbando, and Sergeant Ngcobo, 5 and 6 October 1961; Horwood, op. cit., 78, 83.

They could also protest political issues, which were never separate from their oppression as workers, or breaches of what they understood to be their customary rights within the moral economy of the workplace and the compound, such as the right to pilfer. Furthermore, they had a job consciousness and an awareness of their strategic position; they knew that no goods would move without them and that this gave them confidence in their agency. Their actions were thus not necessarily inspired by working class solidarity; they could also be motivated by their privileged position within the working class.

Likewise, this evidence of a proletarian outlook does not have to conflict with the emphasis in other chapters on entrepreneurialism and individual resistance, or with a commitment to rural life. Indeed, the consciousness of these workers contained many elements that are not purely proletarian, but that does not mean that we should deny these workers working class status and agency, as Marks and Rathbone note. Peter Alexander is correct to assert that we cannot think about workers’ consciousness as something singular, but should rather emphasise ‘a diversity of identities’, beginning with: rural, Zulu, entrepreneurial, working class, masculine, old, young, and dock worker.

Decisions about working class action should be seen within the context of their wider livelihoods and cannot be reduced to either expressions of proletarian radicalism or entrepreneurial individualism. Indeed, to the extent that the opportunities that dock work offered were central to their commercial strategies, these workers with side-businesses could have strong incentives to defend and improve on their relatively good wages, their right to pilfer, and the flexibility of *to*gt. Moreover, as mostly casual labourers they had less to lose in a strike. On the other hand, those workers who just relied on doing extra shifts may have been less tempted to

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engage in working class action, despite being more invested in wage labour, as they could ill-afford to lose pay. Indeed, permanent workers, who were less likely to engage in a business, were also less likely to strike. As permanent workers they were not only more susceptible to the sanction of the sack, they were also more dependent on their wages.
Chapter 10: Conclusion: Straddling on the Durban docks

From their first strikes in the 1870s to their refusal in 2008 to handle a shipment of weapons for the Mugabe regime, Durban’s dock workers have frequently engaged in forceful industrial action. Indeed, like so many dockers around the world, dock workers in Durban have a strong and longstanding reputation of being strike-prone radicals. Many of their protests have been leaderless and without formal organisation. However, one dock leader did leave a strong legacy. Zulu Phungula was still remembered by some of the dockers interviewed in 2009. As we have seen, he has been hailed as a ‘proletarian hero’ by scholars and by David Hemson in particular. Hemson credits Phungula with a radical style, uncompromising militancy, and with being impossible to co-opt, which made him the type of leader dock workers gravitated towards.

Part of the characterisation of Zulu Phungula as a radical and uncompromising labour leader rested on an argument that these workers were in fact proletarians, rather than migrant workers with one foot in the rural economy. In making this argument, Hemson and other radical scholars took issue with the liberal idea of ‘men of two worlds’, who could never form a real working class because of their continued investment in and focus on the ‘traditional’ rural economy, only engaging in wage labour to supplement their income.¹ In this account, African workers could not organise as workers or develop their industrial skills, as wage labour was not where their interests lay. Not class, but race formed the faultline of South African history for liberal scholars. Capitalist relations were not the source of African oppression, they argued, but

irrational racism was. To counter this discourse, leftist academics turned their gaze towards the African workers and argued that these were in fact proletarians suffering from class oppression. As such, Hemson stresses the proletarian tendencies in Phungula’s thinking and the working-class actions of dock workers. He argues that the workers rejected the idea of a rural subsidy and instead demanded to be “accepted as full proletarians [...] and to be paid a wage which would enable workers and their families to live under urban conditions [...].”² He attaches special importance to an episode in 1942 where dock workers were threatened with being sent home to the rural areas if they continued their strike. Phungula countered by saying that their homes were in Durban, thus claiming urban and proletarian status. Even when Phungula focused on rural impoverishment, Hemson argues, he opted “not [for] peasant but working class action”³ in the form of a general strike and a demand for £1 5s. per day.

In his dissertation, which is still one of the strongest works on Durban’s labour history, Hemson gives ample evidence for the idea that these dock workers had a radical proletarian consciousness and acted accordingly. However, the findings of this thesis force us to qualify this emphasis on the proletarian character of Durban’s dock workers. The evidence established that dock workers could not just be characterised as pure proletarians or as conservative, rurally-oriented migrant workers. While these workers did espouse a strong rural attachment, most did not eschew urban society and ‘incapsulate’ themselves in the same way as the Mayers argued for African workers in East London. Instead, many used the opportunities their urban employment and lives afforded them to accelerate their return to their rural homes. These opportunities, as discussed in chapters five and six, were their urban means to their rural goal. These urban

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² David Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock workers of Durban” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1979), 329.
³ Ibid., 349.
livelihoods, however, consisted of a peculiar and seemingly contradictory mix of collective working class action and individual entrepreneurial strategies. More than half of the former dock workers interviewed had small informal enterprises on the side, often enabled by pilferage. Many sold pilfered goods in the townships or at home, or rather let their wives or girlfriends do so. Others sold cigarettes and sweets on the docks or dagga in the city. Even for those who did not engage in commercial activities pilferage could be important, allowing them to eat for free and thus cheapening the cost of living in the city. However, despite their entrepreneurial interests these workers did come together as workers and could show acute awareness of their class position, as was argued in chapter nine.

This argument was largely based on interviews with dock workers who started working in Durban in the 1950s. Therefore, these livelihoods have only really been discussed for that decade. It was, of course, exceedingly difficult to find former dock workers in 2009 who were active in the 1940s or earlier. Moreover, the type of sources that we do have access to for the first half of the twentieth century do not lend themselves very well to the kind of analysis that was used in this dissertation. This conclusion, however, argues that it is reasonable to assume that this idiosyncratic mix of working class action and individual entrepreneurialism had a history that preceded the 1950s. To do this, it will first discuss the very limited sources available about three of the dock leaders from the 1930s and 1940s that are known by name, respectively Dick Mate, Amos Gumede, and Zulu Phungula. These were fierce industrial activists, but to see them as straightforward proletarian leaders with a working-class consciousness may be denying them a level of complexity. They often stood up for the interests of African traders as much as for those of African workers. The second part of this chapter will argue that taking up this seemingly contradictory mix of traders’ and workers’ interests makes more sense when seen in the context
of household strategies that straddle wage labour and informal trade, as well as the rural and the urban. In conclusion, an argument will also be made that these mixed livelihoods persisted after 1959 despite measures to stamp out the informal economy.

Three dock leaders from their own ranks
Dick Mate and Amos Gumede were formally elected as subsequent representatives of the Bell Street Togt Barracks at the Point. They represented these workers in the Native Advisory Board (NAB), which had – as its name suggests – only an advisory function. This Board, consisting of four white councillors and ten Africans, was established in 1930 as a response to the beer hall boycotts and riots the year before. It was supposed to offer an outlet for grievances and act as a buffer between the masses and the authorities. Durban’s prominent Africans, among them A.W.G. Champion, quickly embraced this Board; workers too initially regarded the Board as a first step towards municipal representation.

It was to this Board that Mate was elected, but this did not happen without a struggle. When the Board was first established, Magcekeni Matsoni represented the togt dock workers living in Bell Street. He was not elected, but appointed by the MNAD. Very soon the inhabitants of the Barracks expressed their displeasure with Matsoni. In November 1930, they petitioned the Board to replace him with an elected representative. However, the MNAD’s manager re-appointed Matsoni. The workers explained that they did not know Matsoni, that they never voted for him, and that he refused to meet with them. He would not give them any account of his

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activities on the Board either. Instead they suggested Amos Gumede and Simon Ngcono as their representatives, stating that these were the “men whom we trust to place our grievances before you and any other body.” The Board did not replace Matsoni and thus the workers took the initiative. On 26 July 1931 they wrote a letter to the Board stating that they had elected Dick Mate to represent them. The Native Welfare Officer made it clear that the Board was not bound by this vote as the representatives were not supposed to be elected, but subsequent records of these meetings indicate that Mate did in fact replace Matsoni.

In the next two years, Mate advocated for the rights of both togt workers and African traders at the Bell Street Barracks and Native Eating House. On 3 November 1931 he wrote a letter to the Town Council because the assistant of a butcher at the Native Market was arrested for delivering meat to a European. A new bye-law prohibited trade between Europeans and Africans, but Mate insisted that this decision had not yet been made. It is unclear whether the complaint was dropped, but the traders did find somebody in Mate who listened to their concerns. It is interesting to note that he did not complain about the decision to segregate urban trading, but only about the fact that people were punished before the decision had been finalised. In August 1932 he again complained on behalf of traders and dock workers about a European planning to open a Native Eating House across the street from the Barracks. He stated that this European “would compete with the [African] table and stall holders.”

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7 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1147, file 323A, part I, Togt workers at the Bell Street Barracks to the Durban Borough Advisory Board of Europeans and Natives, 21 November 1930.
10 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1054, file 369, part VIII, Dick Mate to Town Clerk, 3 November 1931.
11 DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1054, file 369, part VIII, Dick Mate to Town Clerk, 6 August 1932.
Wages were also on his agenda, especially when a rumour went around in late 1931 that the authorities would reduce *togt* rates. This was an especially troubling prospect for casual workers who did not receive rations from their employers.\(^{12}\) Indeed, the S.A.R. & H. had already cut wages by twenty per cent and dock workers at Bell Street feared that they could be the next victims of the Depression.\(^{13}\) At the next meeting of the Board the issue of casual wages was discussed. The white Chairman pointed out that nobody earned less than the minimum of 2s. that was set by the bye-laws. This was no real comfort, as the minimum wage, which had not increased since the turn of the century, was by 1931 only just over half of the regular rate and thus no guarantee against significant pay cuts. The chairman denied that the Board or the municipality had any influence over wages, but Mate bounced back the ball:\(^{14}\)

> Mr. Mate in seeking further information expressed the view that as togt labourers were more or less under the control of the Corporation, certain representations should be made to the Government on their behalf in connection with such reduction to wages, more especially as he understood that the Corporation had itself not reduced the wages of its employees.

While most *togt* workers did not work for the Corporation, Mate correctly pointed out that the municipality did have significant influence over their pay and work conditions through the *togt* bye-laws and other regulations. He exposed the hypocrisy of this denial of responsibility. The chairman consequently agreed to make informal representations to the employers ‘as guardian of the Natives’. Mate left one more trace in the archives in December 1932 when he applied, somewhat prematurely, for a licence to open a store in the yet to be established uMlazi Glebeland township. Clearly, being a *togt* worker and fighting for increased wages did not exclude entrepreneurial ambitions and an intent to become independent from wage labour.

\(^{12}\) DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1139, file 315E, part IV, Dick Mate to Town Clerk, 8 November 1931.
\(^{13}\) DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1139, file 315E, part IV, Minutes of the NAB, 23 October 1931.
\(^{14}\) DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 4/1/2/1139, file 315E, part IV, Minutes of the NAB, 9 December 1931.
On 30 July 1933, the Togt Barracks elected Amos Gumede as Mate’s successor. In June 1936, he was re-elected unopposed. The grievances Gumede brought to the Board (and that were preserved in the archives) dealt with issues of both traders and togt labourers living in the compound. In 1934, he brought up the poor quality of the sleeping bunks and complaints about Indian hawkers hanging around outside the Barracks. These hawkers were “detrimentally affecting the Native traders within that institution,” since African traders could only sell to the Bell Street inmates.\(^{15}\) When the police complained in 1936 about togt workers congregating at the corner of Bell and Prince Streets, inconveniencing white pedestrians on their way to South Beach, Gumede also defended their right to assemble there. If togt workers failed to find a job in the morning, he explained, they would hang around to wait for more jobs to become available later in the day. Once more, the representative of this radical group of workers was receptive both to the needs and interests of African traders and those of the actual workers.

We know very little about Dick Mate and Amos Gumede, but Zulu Phungula left a much bigger imprint on dockers’ memories, the archives, and the literature. The archival sources we have on Zulu Phungula are somewhat scarce, but in combination with other sources they do allow us to get a much better sense of who he was. Chapters four and nine have already discussed his actions extensively, but here some important characteristics of his militancy will be recapitulated. Like most dock workers, he was from the rural areas of Natal, more specifically the Highflats area in the iXopo district. These rural origins have been linked to his style of activism: a former Communist Party activist called him “stubborn like a peasant.”\(^{16}\) Hemson phrased this more positively as a ‘peasant-like independence’. However, Phungula did not have much security on

\(^{15}\) DAR, 3/DBN, vol. 1/2/12/1/2, Minutes of NAB, 10 October 1934.
the land, which leads Hemson to the conclusion that he, with other migrant workers with insufficient returns from the rural economy, struggled “to force open the possibility of becoming part of the urban proletariat.”

Zulu Phungula did signal a shift to more radical working class action with a strong political undertone. Under this “very brave and strong organiser,” as Sidumo Chiliza characterised him, Durban’s dock workers went through one of their most militant phases, but after 1949 he did not turn up in the archives, newspapers, or literature. However, several interviewees claimed that he did return in the late 1950s and organised strikes, using nicknames to avoid detection. The details they recounted about the life of this organiser make it credible that this was in fact Zulu Phungula. If that was the case, he would once more have been involved in some of the most significant strikes of that decade.

Moreover, Phungula is not only memorable for the strikes and other actions he, and others with him, organised. In discussions with authorities he also made radical demands and uncovered the political nature of their struggles. Dock workers demanded 8s. per day in 1941-2, which was a one hundred per cent increase, but Phungula asserted that they ultimately wanted 25s., the same as white employees. He repeated this claim for 25s. in 1948. While these demands were rooted in a strong economism, Phungula was not just looking for gradual increases, but also challenged the structure of African wages in Durban. He did not only argue that their wages were insufficient, but also claimed equality and equal pay with white employees. Rejecting the idea of a rural wage subsidy and free social security in the Reserves, he also demanded provisions for old

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18 Interview with Sidumo Chiliza, Springs, 14 November 2009.
age and illness. He expressed his sense of injustice and claimed that “[t]he government and the employers agree among themselves that Natives should not be paid and yet we the natives have helped to build up the British Empire far above the Kingdom of Heaven” and that Africans “should also have a share in the milk and honey that abound in this country.”19 The political nature of their struggle was even clearer when he accused the government of withholding the wage increase employers had promised on the condition that the government would prescribe it. Here, the employers were not the ones being challenged, but rather the state for not legislating these higher wages. Moreover, he showed an awareness of the connection between low African wages and the increase in shipping.

One of the claims that Hemson considered particularly significant was Phungula’s insistence that the government could not send them home for striking, as their homes were in Durban. This assertion of full proletarian status was indeed important, as it challenged the premise of the migratory labour system and its cheap African labour. Recognising the proletarian nature of dock labour would have undermined the structure of wages and transport costs in Durban. Phungula’s choice for forceful working class action instead of peasant action was once again very clear in his calls for a general strike in 1948-9. In his 1948 ‘report of our workers in Natal’ he smartly linked increasing urban crime and illicit brewing to African poverty and decried the shortage of Reserve land. In this report he shows both a working class and peasant consciousness, but its demands are for significantly higher minimum wages, not for more land or agricultural assistance. Phungula’s first call for a general strike in support of a minimum daily wage of more than £1 was unsuccessful, despite certain enthusiasm among the workers. This

demand was considered so radical that other labour organisations refused to support it. However, he was not ready to give up on a general strike and asked African workers in Durban to stay home on May Day 1949. This strike was fairly successful on the docks, where Phungula had a strong influence, much more successful than the six to eight hundred strikers that the newspapers reported. Especially Bell Street togt workers walked out in great numbers. There was, however, no significant disruption of work beyond the harbour area.\(^{20}\)

The SAP concluded that Phungula was to blame for agitating the workers by making excessive wage demands. He was expelled once more, this time for ten years, which he probably knew could happen. Hemson points out that he had always shown himself “prepared to make sacrifices, to suffer the consequences of his actions, and to return to battle again.”\(^{21}\) However, his exile did not end resistance on the docks. While the first half of the 1950s did bring a slump in labour activism, it did re-emerge without his leadership. For Hemson, the leaderless nature of their continued resistance was an indication of an advanced consciousness and proof that informal forms of organisation survived the onslaught on their formal leaders. Workers’ organisation was driven underground, but did not disappear. Of course, Phungula was not the only organiser; the July 1942 strike was organised by a ten-member committee. Thus, even after removing the most charismatic of these leaders, some organisational memory would have remained. The memory of Phungula himself also remained and one of the demands of strikers in 1954 was for his return.\(^{22}\) He may in fact have returned to the city and have been part of the committee organising in 1958, according to some of our interviewees.


\(^{21}\) Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm,” 158.

\(^{22}\) Hemson, “Class Consciousness,” 359.
A clear proletarian radicalism is in evidence in this brief overview of Phungula’s activities as a dock leader. However, Hemson may not have given enough attention to some elements of his thinking that did not fit the picture of an uncompromising labour leader. Apart from a working class consciousness, he also espoused a strong appeal to Zulu identity and a distinct anti-Indian discourse. In fact, his nickname ‘Zulu’ came from his tendency to address people with the word ‘Zulu’ when making speeches. Moreover, Hemson notes that Phungula appropriated much of the language and imagery of Usuthu, the Zulu royal house. However, Hemson attributes the 1949 race riots, which Phungula supported, merely to the failure of the strategy of a general strike. In this conception, racial violence was no more than a surrogate for frustrated working class action. However, we need to take Phungula’s economic nationalism and his appeal to Zulu identity more seriously. As Bill Freund notes:

Phungula, who was a supporter of the 1949 violence against Indians to some extent, was able to combine an antagonism to the bosses, demands for a place in the city for black workers with a concept of Zuluness. It is not only among individuals such as Champion, who liked to write about the resuscitation of the ‘Zulu nation’ that this sort of concept prevailed but also among the most revolutionary.

While there were important differences between the political ideas of Phungula and those of A.W.G. Champion, for example Champion had a much more elitist conception of politics and often spoke out against working class action, there were also distinct parallels. Both believed in a form of economic segregation where Africans would buy from African traders rather than whites or Indians, as did Dick Mate. They saw co-operative societies as a route to economic

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23 Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm,” 156.
independence and as a source of opportunities for African entrepreneurs. This economic nationalism also contained an anti-Indian rhetoric.

Just as Champion urged Africans in the 1930s to ‘smash Indian traders’ and to become ‘trustees of their own wealth’, arguing in favour of segregation so that only Africans would be allowed to trade with Africans,25 so did Phungula stress to the commission appointed to investigate the 1949 race riots that Indians did not have any claim to this country. He accused the National Party of not living up to their promise to send Indians back and to bring more complete segregation.26 Both advocated African self-reliance through co-operative societies. Champion was inspired by Garveyist ideas of self-help and the ICU yase Natal organised the All-African co-operative society. Champion also profited personally from calls to support African businesses, as he was an entrepreneur himself. He established two businesses that benefitted from their association with the ICU and that may even have been funded from union dues.

Whether Phungula was familiar with the ideas of Marcus Garvey is unclear, but he did try to establish a co-operative movement among African workers in 1941-2. Moreover, after the 1949 riots he petitioned the Town Council not to replace the disrupted Indian bus services with municipal service. Such replacement service would prevent African workers from purchasing buses themselves and running the service as a co-operative business, a venture for which Phungula also collected money. Furthermore, the ICU yase Natal leadership were not the only ones who shared an interest in co-operative societies and economic segregation with Phungula. In the 1940s a similar ethnically chauvinist and segregationist discourse, centred on a vision of a

‘New Africa’, emerged in uMkhumbane, the entrepreneurs’ paradise. This millenarian idea of a rejuvenated African society had a strong anti-Indian component to it. If this shack settlement were to become ‘New Africa’, Indian landownership would have to disappear; the land would have to be expropriated.

Pushing out Indians would of course also mean that the competition of Indian traders would disappear, leaving this market exclusively for African traders. Moreover, Africans were hardly the only ones advocating economic segregation in the interest of their own petty entrepreneurs. Afrikaners made similar appeals to customers to support Afrikaner businesses and for these businesses to deal with Afrikaners only. The co-operative movement in uMkhumbane equally encouraged economic segregation. While urging acceptance of the industrial order, this movement argued that the African proletariat had to unite to protect their economic interests. They had to unite not so much to engage in industrial or political action, but rather to escape commercial exploitation at the hands of Indian and white traders and to support African businesses instead. S.S.L. Mtolo, quoted by Iain Edwards, expressed these ideas:27

> It swept through people so quickly. It was so obvious. People needed to live together so that they could help each other. That’s self-help. Everyone always knew that they were being cheated in the city. No-one needed to tell them that. But how to stop that ... that had always been something people did not even think about. You just tried to live along. But the co-operatives changed all that.

Just like the co-operatives that were run by the ICU, however, these societies turned out to be more in the interest of African traders than in that of the broader African proletariat. The appeal for racial unity did not stop petty entrepreneurs from taking advantage from their involvement in these societies. Idealism made place for greed by 1950 and co-operatives had proven to be

interested in little else than profits. While this movement reached its peak in the late 1940s, it is reasonable to assume that there was already an appetite for co-operative societies earlier that decade. This movement may have inspired Phungula’s attempts at establishing a co-operative society in the early 1940s and his enthusiasm for co-operatively owned and operated African bus services in 1949, and vice-versa. After all, Africans in uMkhumbane relied extensively on the harbour as their source of gossip and information and some would take up stevedoring shifts from time to time. Moreover, it is possible that Phungula actually lived in this settlement, as at least for some time in his career he did not live at the Point. Living in one of the townships or informal settlements, he would have been familiar with this discourse of economic segregation and the concerns of traders. Indeed, his remarks to the 1949 riots commission illustrated this concern for advancing the interests of African traders over these of Indian traders.

**Contradictory interests?**

The combination of militant working class action and concern for the interests of small-scale African entrepreneurs may seem contradictory and even insincere. After all, Champion’s concern for the rights of African workers seemed to disappear quickly after he was co-opted into the NAB and became an establishment figure. Moreover, he used the union to provide customers and possibly even funds for his own petty capitalist enterprises. The co-operative movement in uMkhumbane, meanwhile, advocated acceptance of the industrial order. Edwards argues that the African shacklords and small-scale entrepreneurs who formed the political leadership of uMkhumbane in the late 1940s and 1950s avowed radical politics, yet betrayed the interests of the ordinary Africans in return for the municipality’s recognition of their leadership and control over
housing. They talked the talk, but did not follow up with actions. The classless discourse of African unity suited African elites who stood to gain from economic segregation and the leadership roles to which they could lay claim.

Indeed, it can be hard to imagine how these commercial aspirations and concerns for the interests of African traders can be combined with collective industrial action. However, as opposed to the leadership of uMkhumbane or the ICU yase Natal, Mate, Gumede, and Phungula did fight for and with the workers. Both Mate and Gumede defended the interests of Durban’s dock workers in the NAB. Their association with the powerless Advisory Board could be interpreted as selling out, but compared to other African members they did stick up for their constituency fairly consistently. How involved they were in strikes and other working class action during this period is less clear, but that Phungula was at the forefront of these is well-documented. Dumile Sibiya and Bheka Dlaba, two leaders of the 1958 strikes, also engaged in small-scale businesses. As such, they may have been receptive to traders’ interests as well.

The radical politics of these leaders cannot be seen as a smokescreen. Their actions give little reason to doubt the sincerity of their commitment to workers’ concerns, despite also campaigning for and even having entrepreneurial interests. They did not just appeal to the workers to gain a popular following, increase their profile in the eyes of the authorities, and secure their positions. Even in the case of these petty entrepreneurs and shack lords, one needs to remember that they often were as poor as many workers and encountered the same indignities as

29 Especially Champion adopted a more ambivalent position vis-à-vis the labouring poor once he took up a seat on this Board. The ideas of Champion and the ICU yase Natal after 1929 are illustrated by the resolutions of the union’s 1934 Annual General Conference, which dealt with many grievances and were written in a language of respect for white authority. However, few of the resolutions dealt with workplace and industrial issues. See: PAR, CNC, vol. 93A, file 64/19, “Resolutions,” 15-17 December 1934.
other Africans in the city. Indeed, Durban’s African workers and petty bourgeoisie had much in common and class distinctions were not always very clear.30

More than half of the interviewed dock workers combined wage labour with small-scale commercial enterprises. They pilfered cargoes and built businesses based on selling stolen merchandise. They invested their wages in rural stores and tearooms run by their wives and took advantage of the flexibility that casual labour offered to take time off whenever their commercial activities required it. As such, one cannot look at either their commercial activities or their wage labour in isolation from their wider livelihood strategies. These workers were part of households that did not fit a ‘one man – one job’ model. Not only did these workers combine dock labour with commercial enterprises, other members of the household often had other businesses as well. For example, some wives opened tearooms or sold vegetables and goods their husbands pilfered. Township women sometimes contributed to the reproduction of the dock worker’s household by selling pilfered goods and sharing the proceeds. Not only did these household have more than one earning-strategy, there were also close links between these sources of income. The docker’s employment enabled commercial enterprises in the townships and rural areas. While wives, mothers, husbands, and township women had some autonomy due to their distance, these different activities cannot be seen as separate. More complex livelihood strategies that straddled formal employment and informal business as well as the urban and the rural tied these seemingly contradictory interests and actions of dock leaders together. Mate, Sibiya, and Dlaba were not the only ones to be wage labourers and aspiring entrepreneurs at the same time. They did fight to

30 Shula Marks notes this for the 1920s, but this dissertation illustrates that this was still largely the case in the 1950s. Shula Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in twentieth-Century Natal* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), 103.
improve working conditions for both shore workers and stevedores, but the household strategies of many workers did not just revolve around their dock labour. Their politics reflected that fact.31

It is not just that these workers wore two hats, one as labourer and one as a self-employed entrepreneur, and could defend their interests in either capacity. There was a functional relationship between both activities. As such, better wages, the continuation of the casual labour system, and shorter hours would not only benefit them as workers, but also as members of households that relied on small-scale entrepreneurialism. Higher wages resulted in more resources to invest and shorter hours meant that more time could be spent on their commercial activities. The defence of the casual labour system was also a defence of the opportunity to offer their labour specifically at those companies that worked ships with interesting goods or to take a day off to work on their business. When dock leaders with commercial ambitions stood up for workers’ rights, this was not just because they were labourers as well, but also because being a dock workers was an integral part of these wider household strategies. Moreover, actions to defend the rights of African traders not only appealed to a sense of injustice about the lack of opportunities for Africans, but also addressed the aspirations of many of these workers, who were often encouraged by the success of others.

Looking at their actions from the perspective of straddling labourers and households, the nationalist violence of the 1949 riots and Phungula’s support for these were more than just a surrogate for a failed general strike. For many straddling dock workers Indian traders were

31 Sara Berry notes: “To the extent that collective action in the pursuit of socioeconomic advance springs from the conditions of production itself, we may expect farmers’ political strategies to resemble their strategies of accumulation and social mobility.” While this research is not about farmers, the idea that industrial and political action on socioeconomic issues reflects the economic strategies of these workers is corroborated by this research. Berry, Fathers Work for Their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yorùbá Community (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 108.
actually competition, just as the Indian trader across the street from the Bell Street Barracks was competition in 1929. In the 1949 race riots, also known as the ‘war of Cato Manor’, African petty accumulators evicted their Indian competition. Many dock workers were petty traders themselves or aspired to become one. Similarly, the support for traders’ rights by Mate and Gumede could be seen in such light.

However, the opportunities that their dock employment offered were slowly eroded during the 1950s and would be drastically curtailed in 1959 with the end of casual labour on the docks. Relative wages went down and the flexibility to combine wage labour with other activities was curtailed. Workers could no longer choose where to present for hiring and there was increased pressure to live in the strictly policed compounds. All these developments complicated commercial strategies. Moreover, containerisation in the 1970s made small-scale pilferage all but impossible. Furthermore, uMkhumbane, which was central to African petty trading in Durban, was being cleared in the 1950s. The apartheid state removed its population to a new township, the far-off KwaMashu, where only licensed traders would be allowed to operate. Not only did decasualisation on the docks follow a global trend of phasing out casual labour in ports and a colonial African trend of stabilisation of urban labour, straddling workers and petty traders in an informal settlement did also not conform to the municipality’s ideal of the urban African worker. Policy makers imagined a hard-working male wage labourer with respect for authority, either living in a planned and orderly township with his nuclear family or living in a hostel and raising his family in the Reserve.32 Africans living in informal dwellings and engaging in informal trade, which could enable them to withdraw from the formal labour market or to only work now-and-then, did not fit this picture.

Nevertheless, decasualisation did have certain advantages for the workers and some workers thought of it as an improvement. A sizable minority of the interviewed dock workers did not try their hand at commercial strategies. They shared the same goals as workers who did engage in informal trade: building and returning to their rural umuzi. Their strategy to achieve these goals was different. They doubled up on shifts and spent as little money as possible while in the city. For these workers, decasualisation could actually have been a positive development, as it took away the insecurity of casual labour, although the interviewees noted that even before 1959 those who wanted to work permanently usually could do so. These workers generally left urban wage labour later than those who did start a business. While the move into self-employment did not mean that they no longer worked, it did liberate them from the urban wage regime they did not enjoy. Those who did not venture into informal trade, however, tended to have lengthy working lives of long and exhausting hours on the docks. They were not afraid of hard work and prided themselves in their strength, perseverance, and the collective nature of their work; in being onyathi.

**Continuing histories of straddling**

Government policies continued to close off many commercial opportunities for Africans after 1959. uMkhumbane was cleared and KwaMashu did not offer the same prospects to aspiring petty entrepreneurs. The circumstances that made it easy for dock workers to start a business also disappeared. In the decades after 1959 the different levels of government continued their legislative attacks on Africans involved in informal trade and especially on women. \(^{33}\) Despite

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these measures, the phenomenon of straddling persisted. Households continued to combine formal wage labour with informal small-scale enterprises, just as they had done before the 1950s.

For example, Eleanor Preston-Whyte and Sibongile Nene noted in 1991 how women with husbands in urban employment were more successful than other female informal traders at a rural pension payout point: “men [...] come with cars [...] many are from town or they bring goods from town for their wives to sell [...] how can we compete?”34 Their husband’s urban employment facilitated the success of these informal traders, just as it did in dock workers’ households in the 1950s. A 1977 survey of female African meat sellers in Durban also demonstrated that few relied on their informal business alone. However, what the other sources of household income were was not asked.35 Even today, households still combine formal with informal sector incomes.36

However, a detailed and historicised account of such household strategies is still missing in the literature. Preferring to stress proletarian or rural consciousness, South African labour and social historiography has largely ignored the fact that workers had businesses on the side, even when acknowledging the presence of ‘penny capitalists’ in mine compounds.37 Furthermore, the literature on the informal economy equally tends to consider these activities in isolation from formal wage labour.38 We know relatively little about how households combined formal and informal incomes into livelihood strategies and how such decisions were taken, or about the evolution of the informal sector. Such a history would challenge the idea of a structural

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disjuncture between wage labour and informal entrepreneurialism, and between the rural and the urban, and show that such strategies of straddling are not exceptional and have a long history. This realisation forces us to reconsider the relation between the informal economy and the formal sector, and between the rural and the urban. Literature on the informal economy often assumes a disconnection between the informal and the formal economy, yet there are often close linkages between the two. Having a job does not mean that one would not participate in the informal economy. Moreover, informal activities subsidise the formal economy, not only by cheapening the social reproduction of labour, for example through informal housing, but also by providing markets and cheap services for formal industries. To come to a better understanding of how the formal and the informal interact, one needs to investigate the livelihoods of people and households who straddle both.

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SAP: South African Police
VWN: Social Welfare and Pensions
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**Interviews**

**Conducted by the author**

Wandile Mzamo, Managing Director at sacs (South African container stevedores), Durban, 15 April 2009.

Eric Ryland, retired shipping coordinator and agent at the port of Durban in the 1960s, Durban, 18 December 2009.

**Conducted by Sibongo Dlamini**

All these interviewees are retired dock workers who started working on the docks between 1939 and 1959, except Mr. Sibiya from eShowe.

Khethekwakhe Zondo, KwaMbonambi, KwaZulu-Natal, 6 May 2009.


Thembinkosi Miya, iXopo, KwaZulu-Natal, 26 May 2009.


Lalani Dumakude, Impendle, KwaZulu-Natal, 7 June 2009.

Thoko Mlaba, New Hanover, KwaZulu-Natal, 8 June 2009.


Amos Sibiya, eM pangeni, KwaZulu-Natal, 10 June 2009.


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Bongeka Faku, Magusheni, Eastern Cape, 27 June 2009.
Doda Ndaweni, Gxuha, Eastern Cape, 28 June 2009.
Mzo Mzongo, Izingolweni North, KwaZulu-Natal, 30 June 2009.
Zandile Mbile, Highflats, KwaZulu-Natal, 7 July 2009.
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Co Pityana, Mt. Frere, Eastern Cape, 28 July 2009.
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Sipho Mkhize, Jolivet, KwaZulu-Natal, 5 November 2009.
Mzenkosi Duma, Mkhunya North, KwaZulu-Natal, 13 November 2009.
Zodwa Tenza, Hlokozi, KwaZulu-Natal, 15 November 2009.
Bheka Dlaba, Mooi River, KwaZulu-Natal, 17 November 2009.
Mr. Sibiya, Dumile Sibiya's son, eShowe, KwaZulu-Natal, 18 November 2009.

Transcripts from earlier oral history projects by SAIRR and the University of Natal have also been used. These sources have been listed under manuscript sources, unofficial sources.
Appendix A: Some life histories

This dissertation relies extensively on the life histories of the interviewees, but throughout the text only fragments have been revealed. This appendix is an illustration of the life histories of some of the interviewees. The selection of case studies is made to exemplify some of the major strategies, rather than on the basis of representativeness.

Zolile Khumalo

Zolile Khumalo\(^1\) first came to Durban in 1955, when he was twenty years old. He came from a poor family in Newcastle and his father passed away when he was still young. His mother struggled to keep the homestead afloat, so he decided that he should get a job in order to support her. Many of his peers started as domestic servants in the small town of Newcastle, but more money could be made in the big cities: Durban or Johannesburg.

He came to Durban knowing that he would be a dock worker, as his mother had asked a neighbour to arrange him a position. Zolile immediately started as a permanent labourer, which he remained until his retirement in 1999. He lived in the Rennies\(^2\) company compound, where he could eat and sleep free. Thus, he did not spend much of his wages in the city. He also did not socialise much in Durban, which further limited his expenses. He preferred social life in the rural areas. Moreover, his mother had warned him to stay away from the city girls. He was not yet married when he first came to Durban, but he did have a girlfriend at home.

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\(^1\) Interview with Zolile Khumalo, Newcastle, 16 May 2009.

\(^2\) Rennies was one of the old shipping companies in Durban. Today it is part of the Bidvest Group. There are two books about its history; one was published for the commemoration of their centenary and the other one when the company was 150 years in existence. *The House of Rennie: One Hundred Years of Shipping, 1849-1949* (Durban: William Brown & Davis, [c. 1949]); Brian Ingpen, *Horizons: The Story of Rennies 1849-1999* (Johannesburg: Rennies Management Services, 2000).
Doubling up on shifts, living cheaply in the compound, and participating in stokvels enabled him to pay his own ilobolo and to marry his girlfriend. As the only son he had access to the land of his deceased father in the Reserve, but it was not big. His mother worked the land and took decisions about running the homestead, until he married and his wife took over some of these responsibilities. Despite the small size of his holding, the women managed to sell some amadumbe\(^3\) and potatoes, which they still do today. Once the ilobolo was paid, he could invest his wages in cattle, goats, and fences to protect the crops from grazing livestock. However, he never engaged in any commercial business and like most dock workers without a business, he did not retire early. He worked on the docks until he was sixty-four, an advanced age for doing such a heavy job.

**Godidi Msomi**

Godidi Msomi\(^4\) was born in 1940 in rural uMkomaas and was eighteen when he first came to Durban. His father had been a dock worker as well, but fell ill and died in the hospital. Before his death, his father and a white supervisor agreed that Godidi would take up his job. Later, his younger brother also became dock worker on request of the same supervisor. This was his first urban job and he never engaged in any other form of wage labour.

At first he lived in the compound, but after two months he moved in with his new girlfriend in Lamontville and started pilfering. Thombi already had a business selling ice cream, but he convinced her to start selling sandwiches, cigarettes, tea, and other small snacks and drinks on the docks, including beer. Whites also bought from Thombi. After she was arrested for illegal trading, she was helped out by a foreman. He gave her access to a tool-shed from which she could

\(^3\) *Amadumbe* is the local variety of *Colocasia Esculenta*, or *taro*, a root vegetable.

\(^4\) Interview with Godidi Msomi, uMkomaas, 21 May 2009.
trade without being spotted by the police. Pilferage and selling earned them a lot of money, which he invested in cattle and in a rural store. His mother and first wife did their part by selling their produce. However, he did not just pilfer broken bags of salt, sugar, and rice. He also stole guns with the help of ship crews he befriended. Guns were prized possessions that sold well in his home-area, which was torn apart by faction fights.

Thombi became Godidi’s second wife, though he already knew her and lived with her when he married his first wife. She already had three children. He paid ilobolo himself and in cash, as her parents lived in Durban and had no use for cattle. He said that both his mother and his first wife agreed with this marriage after he told him how important Thombi’s role had been in their commercial success. Godidi was well connected and could not only make sure that he was hired himself, but also that people he knew from Lamontville and uMkomaas would get a job. All this made him a successful man in life. He has a big store that is still in business today and thirteen children. Two of his sons are in the police force and one is a soldier. One son is still in school. Seven of his daughters are married and two are still in school. He retired after establishing his store, twenty-one years after starting work on the docks.

Zifo Mzizi

Zifo Mzizi’s career on the docks was quite short: he started in 1956 and retired in 1962. Thus, he only worked on the docks for six years. Zifo grew up in his grandfather’s umuzi near Underberg, as his father died shortly after he was born. There was no urgent need for him to start working, as the homestead was not especially poor. However, he did want to improve his grandfather’s land by fencing it and he wanted to buy some livestock, especially horses and sheep, as they already

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5 Interview with Zifo Mzizi, Underberg, 16 June 2009.
had a lot of cattle. The amount of Reserve-land they had access to was also relatively big.  
Therefore, they did not have to buy much from the store, except paraffin and matches. They paid for this with the proceeds from selling their own produce.

As he was not heavily dependent on wages, he only worked part-time on the docks. He would work for two or three weeks and then be at home for two or three weeks. As a casual labourer, he could not stay in a company compound. At first, he paid for groceries in town, but he found out later that he could just live off loose food that was spilled on the wharves and cook it in tin pots. He did not pay for accommodation either, as he just slept under the verandas of the sheds in the Point area. He was hardly the only one to do so and the veranda-dwellers formed a close-knit group: “I only socialised with the other veranda-dwellers; we smoked dagga and had fun together.”

His cousin arranged a job for him on the docks. Shortly after starting as a togt worker, refusing to be registered as a permanent labourer, he also started selling cigarettes and fruit on the docks. Later, he opened a store in his home area, called Kwathandabantu. He invested in this with the proceeds of his dock labour, his retailing in the city, and selling a few horses. The success of this venture was facilitated by its virtual monopoly. Before the store opened, people had to walk a very long way to buy groceries. He also stole hoses and a generator from the wharf to use to water his land. He retired from the city once his store was running well. This freed him from the wrath of the izinduna and white supervisors and their vulgar language. They were particularly

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6 He mentions six acres, which is significantly larger than most other acreages that were mentioned by the interviewees. Other numbers mostly ranged between one-half to one acre. However, contemporary studies of conditions in the Reserves give significantly different numbers. In The African Factory Worker, for example, an average of seven acres per family is mentioned. It is not clear whether similar criteria were used in these studies. Were grazing fields included, were both the amasimu (main fields) and the izife (garden plots) included, and were the amazala (small plot near the homestead) included? See: University of Natal, Department of Economics, The African Factory Worker: A Sample Study of the Life and Labour of the Urban African Worker (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1950), 193-194.
hard on him because he was strong but refused to sign up as a permanent labourer. Now he rents the store out to another storekeeper until his son is old enough to run it.

**Hlolomzi Ngcwangula**

Hlolomzi Ngcwangula had to look for a job because he was from a poor family. He found one on the docks because of his brother-in-law, who was an *induna* at a stevedoring company. He worked as many shifts as possible and never had anything else on the side. This, however, did not exclude a one-off deal. Occasionally, a supervisor or *induna* would approach him to carry some pilfered cargo to their *bakkie*. On such occasions, he would get part of the loot in return for his silence. He sold these goods, but never pilfered himself. These sporadic sales did not imply a commercial career.

Hlolomzi remained on the job for forty years, until he was retrenched in 1997 at the age of sixty-one. His most important attempt at diversifying his livelihood was asking advice from experienced farmers on how to get more from his land. It did not have the desired effect, which he blamed on his ‘stiff minded’ wife. He did participate in *stokvels*, which helped him buy cattle.

**Bheka Dlaba**

Bheka Dlaba from Mooi River came to Durban in 1956. His household only had access to a very small plot of land that did not come close to meeting their consumption needs. He quickly discovered that dock work offered great opportunities for pilferage and he did not only pilfer to feed himself. He opened a little *spaza* shop in uMkhumbane. As he did not pay for his merchandise, he could sell it very cheaply. He also sent pilfered salt and sugar home for his wife to sell. Later, he would use this customer base to start selling chickens as well.

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7 Interview with Hlolomzi Ngcwangula, Lusikisiki, 29 July 2009.  
8 Interview with Bheka Dlaba, Mooi River, 17 November 2009.
He partnered up with a city woman who sold his goods in uMkhumbane while he was at work. He paid for the upbringing of her children, but was careful not to make her his girlfriend; he did not like city women. Bheka’s success as an entrepreneur was not what makes his story so interesting. He was also one of the organisers of a strike in 1958, though it is unclear whether that meant the overtime ban in April or the shorter strike at Jack Storm & Co. Both conflicts were essentially about the same issue: did the day for which they were paid end when the ship was finished or at 5 p.m. In other words: if a job was done before five, did they still have to start a new job and work till 5 p.m.? They heard that they worked more than workers in other ports from ship crews. They tried negotiating with the employers first. Bheka was arrested together with the other strike leaders and the other labourers collected money to pay the fines. They were released the same day. One of these leaders was Mzamo Phungula, who was known by his nick-name Zulu Phungula in order to avoid arrest.
Appendix B: Shipping statistics

Total Cargo Handled, in thousand harbour tons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>1,570</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>2,767</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>5,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>2,135</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>2,578</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>5,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>2,494</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>2,415</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>5,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>2,527</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>2,556</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>5,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>2,761</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>3,137</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>5,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>2,823</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>3,435</td>
<td>1944</td>
<td>4,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>3,594</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>3,592</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>5,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>3,834</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>4,410</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>4,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>3,985</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>4,520</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>5,791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>4,264</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>4,855</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>5,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>4,868</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>6,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>5,015</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>6,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>5,222</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>6,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>5,350</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>6,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>2,307</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>4,548</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>5,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>3,051</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>3,410</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>5,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>2,979</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>3,072</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>6,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>3,189</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>3,297</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>7,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>3,138</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>4,332</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>7,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>2,683</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>4,936</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>8,358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>2,528</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>5,025</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>8,102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>2,802</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>6,057</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>9,240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Cargo Handled, in thousand harbour tons
Appendix C: Wages and cost of living

Throughout this dissertation, there are references to the earnings of dock workers and the cost of living in the city. This appendix contextualises these numbers by providing comparisons. This is not a straightforward exercise, as many of the contemporary sources made assumptions about a stable, urban family life and predictable earnings that cannot be made. Many of the sources are also fragmented and incomplete.

All numbers are in pounds, shillings, and pence, and not in South African Rand, which was only introduced in 1961. The pound was not a decimal currency. One pound consisted of twenty shilling and one shilling consisted of twelve pence. Thus:

- £1 was 20s.
- 1s. was 12d.

The Rand was introduced at a value of ten shilling. One pound was thus two Rand.

David Hemson gave some useful information about the earnings of dock workers in different years:¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Togt wages</th>
<th>Other information</th>
<th>Food Price Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>3s. 6d. per day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>3s. per day</td>
<td>6s. per night</td>
<td>37.1 (1970 = 100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>4s. 6d. per day</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>4s. per day</td>
<td>£2. 5s. to £2 10s. per month</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6s. per night</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ David Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock workers of Durban” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1979), 721-728.
1937 2s. 6d. per day 28.0
1940 4s. per day 30.1
1941 4s. 6d. per day, COLA: Cost of Living Adjustment 32.3
Plus 6d. COLA 8d. per hour for overtime; Sunday overtime at 11d. per hour
1949 8s. 3d. per day 47.3
1951 53.6
1956 8s. 4d. per day, Total per day is 12s. 6d. 70.3
plus 4s. 2d.
1958 14s. per day 75.6

Considering the uncertainty of their earnings, some examples of monthly earnings of togt dock workers from June 1954 can give an idea of what workers actually managed to bring in. Three examples of togt labourers at African Associated are given in the files of the Department of Labour. One earned £15 17s. 6d. by working twenty-six regular shifts, eight night shifts, and one Sunday. Another docker earned £16 3s. 6d. for twenty-six days, six nights, and two Sundays. The third workers earned £14 19s. 6d. in twenty-six days, four nights, and one Sunday.\(^2\) The 1950s were, however, a very busy time in the harbour and it is unlikely that at other times the workers would have worked on all weekdays in an entire month.

Wage determination 183, published on 6 February 1959, set the following rates:\(^3\)

**Togt Wages including COLA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Cape Town</th>
<th>Port Elizabeth</th>
<th>East London</th>
<th>Durban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stevedoring hand</td>
<td>17s.</td>
<td>15s.</td>
<td>14s. 6.</td>
<td>14s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchman</td>
<td>19s. 6d.</td>
<td>17s. 6d.</td>
<td>17s.</td>
<td>16s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangway man</td>
<td>19s. 6d.</td>
<td>17s. 6d.</td>
<td>17s.</td>
<td>16s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induna</td>
<td>22s.</td>
<td>20s.</td>
<td>19s. 6d.</td>
<td>19s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^2\) SAB, ARB, vol. 3315, file 1196/5/2, part I, undated document.

Weekly wages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cape Town</th>
<th>Port Elizabeth</th>
<th>East London</th>
<th>Durban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stevedoring hand</td>
<td>£4 5s.</td>
<td>£3 5s.</td>
<td>£3 2s. 6d.</td>
<td>£3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchman</td>
<td>£4 17s. 6d.</td>
<td>£3 15s.</td>
<td>£3 12s.</td>
<td>£3 10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangway man</td>
<td>£4 17s. 6d.</td>
<td>£3 15s.</td>
<td>£3 12s.</td>
<td>£3 10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induna</td>
<td>£7 5s.</td>
<td>£5 15s.</td>
<td>£5 10s.</td>
<td>£5 5s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overtime, Monday to Saturday, per hour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cape Town</th>
<th>Port Elizabeth</th>
<th>East London</th>
<th>Durban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stevedoring hand</td>
<td>2s. 8d.</td>
<td>2s. 4d.</td>
<td>2s. 3d.</td>
<td>2s. 3d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchman</td>
<td>3s.</td>
<td>2s. 8d.</td>
<td>2s. 8d.</td>
<td>2s. 7d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangway man</td>
<td>3s.</td>
<td>2s. 8d.</td>
<td>2s. 8d.</td>
<td>2s. 7d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induna</td>
<td>3s. 5d.</td>
<td>3s. 1d.</td>
<td>3s.</td>
<td>2s. 11d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sunday, basis pay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cape Town</th>
<th>Port Elizabeth</th>
<th>East London</th>
<th>Durban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stevedoring hand</td>
<td>10s. 6d.</td>
<td>9s.</td>
<td>8s. 10d.</td>
<td>8s. 4d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchman</td>
<td>13s.</td>
<td>11s. 6d.</td>
<td>11s. 4d.</td>
<td>10s. 10d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangway man</td>
<td>13s.</td>
<td>11s. 6d.</td>
<td>11s. 4d.</td>
<td>10s. 10d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induna</td>
<td>14s.</td>
<td>12s. 6d.</td>
<td>12s. 6d.</td>
<td>12s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sunday, hourly pay on top of the basis pay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cape Town</th>
<th>Port Elizabeth</th>
<th>East London</th>
<th>Durban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stevedoring hand</td>
<td>2s.</td>
<td>1s. 9d.</td>
<td>1s. 8d.</td>
<td>1s. 8d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchman</td>
<td>2s. 3d.</td>
<td>2s.</td>
<td>2s.</td>
<td>1s. 11d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangway man</td>
<td>2s. 3d.</td>
<td>2s.</td>
<td>2s.</td>
<td>1s. 11d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induna</td>
<td>2s. 8d.</td>
<td>2s. 4d.</td>
<td>2s. 3d.</td>
<td>2s. 2d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to these numbers, dock workers could earn significantly more than most unschooled Africans in Durban, especially if they were casual labourers and took worked overtime. The examples of June 1954 compare very favourable to the statistics by H.R. Burrows from 1951,
when less than five per cent of the African population in Durban earned more than £15 per month. Forty-three per cent of the African population earned between £7 and £9. The author added that his statistics probably overestimated the real earnings of Africans, as the better employers would have been more forthcoming with this information. The estimate of Leo Kuper, Hilstan Watts, and Ronald Davies for the same year was an annual income of £105 per worker, or less than £9 per month.

These statistics about income do not necessarily tell us much about the cost of living. Data about the cost of living are equally fragmentary. Official figures were often based on items that were mostly consumed by whites and did not include price information on mealies, for example. There is, however, some evidence to be found in the mid-century family budget surveys by liberal scholars. O.P.F. Horwood gives rent estimates for Durban in 1958, where a three-roomed house in Lamonville cost £2 10s. per month. However, this is not very useful in estimating what rent for dock workers may have been, as very few would have lived in a house on their own. They would stay in the compounds, rent a one-room shack, or sleep outside. The rent for a room in uMkhumbane was on average £1 3s. in the late 1940s, according to Iain Edwards. However, uMkumbane was demolished in the 1950s, which would have impacted the availability and price of informal housing throughout the city. Food for a family of five was estimated at £10 12s. 8d. per month in 1951 and £14 17s. 9d. in 1958. It thus seems reasonable to

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8 Horwood, op. cit., 29.
estimate that food for a single worker doing physical labour would at least cost £4 per month at the end of the 1950s.

Workers who received free food and accommodation or who pilfered and slept under the verandas were less affected by the cost of living in Durban. For them, the cost of cattle may have been more important. During the 1930s, the price for a head of cattle was at a low between £2 10s. and £3, down from £5 at the turn of the century. By 1942, however, cattle reached its peak value of £8, only to fall to between £4 and £5 again by the end of the decade.⁹

Appendix D: Photographs

The copyright to all pictures belongs to the Local History Museum in Durban. Dates are unknown, unless mentioned.

Photo 1: Timber being loaded from sailing ship *Viking*
Photo 2: Dock workers off-loading drums from a ship

Photo 3: Busy scene on the wharf
Photo 4: Exporting meat for Italian army from Maydon Wharf, c. 1935

Photo 5: Aerial view of the Point area
Photo 6: Dock workers taking a break

Photo 7: Group of dock workers at the Point, possibly protesting