Urban struggles and the transformation of the apartheid local state: the case of community and civic organizations in Durban

BRIJ MAHARAJ

Department of Geography, University of Durban–Westville, Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000, South Africa

ABSTRACT. Although the global focus on South Africa has been at the national level, the struggle for the transformation towards a post-apartheid society is being played out largely at the local level. In fact it has been pressure for change at the local level from civic, community, ratepayers and residents' associations that has significantly informed national events. This paper examines the role of civic and community struggles in influencing the transformation of the local state in Durban from the early 1980s to the present time. The Durban Housing Action Committee resisted rent increases for low-income groups and opposed evictions, while the Campaign for a Democratic City initiated demands for a non-racial democratic city. These grassroots initiatives forced the local state to negotiate with the civic and community organizations. This paper also addresses the neglected question of the impact of social movements on local state transformation. It suggests that civic organizations represent powerful agents for socio-spatial transformation.

Introduction

In South Africa the black[1] majority has been denied political power and participation in government at all levels, from the local to the central.[2] Civic organizations have played an important role in articulating the needs of the disfranchised majority, and in many respects have been at the forefront of the struggle for a democratic non-racial society in South Africa (Botha, 1992). The political exclusion of blacks influenced the rise of social movements which 'mobilised civil society around a wide range of politicised causes such as housing, basic services, transport, development and culture' (Copans *et al.*, 1992: 29).

There have been numerous papers on the role of civics in South Africa (e.g. Chaskalson *et al.*, 1987; Jochelson, 1990; Reintges, 1990; Seekings, 1992). In the main the focus has been on civic opposition to the black local authorities (BLAs) and demands for the merger of townships with other group areas under non-racial municipalities. There has been no attempt to examine the role of civics in transforming the apartheid local state (a notable exception is Seethal, 1992). The aim of this paper is to examine the struggles waged by civic and community organizations in influencing the transformation of the local state in Durban since the early 1980s. More specifically, this paper analyses the role of the Durban Housing Action Committee (DHAC) and the

Campaign for a Democratic City in terms of their historical development, the successes of their campaigns and their impact on transforming the local state in Durban. It discusses how these campaigns in the coloured and Indian areas served by the late 1980s as a catalyst for the development of a non-racial alliance opposing the high rents for public housing imposed by the local state. This paper therefore focuses on the role of civic organizations outside townships and shack settlements in the transformation of the apartheid local state. While township civics demanded the abolition of BLAs, the civics discussed in this paper were based in areas already under the jurisdiction of a white local authority, the Durban City Council (DCC), in conjunction with advisory Indian and coloured local affairs committees (LACs).

The empirical data on which this case study is based were obtained from contemporary documentary sources–records and memoranda of civic organizations, minutes of the DCC, and mainstream and alternative newspaper reports. The mainstream newspapers (*Natal Mercury* and *Daily News*) served local white and business interests, and provided wide coverage of the DCC's responses to the demands of civic organizations. However, the mainstream press tended to give sporadic coverage to the activities of the civics. *The Leader*, an alternative, independent and community-orientated newspaper, provided more sustained coverage of the activities of civics. An analysis of these sources will reveal the scope of political agendas, institutional roles and power relationships.

This paper is structured according to the critical stages of urban struggles for affordable rents and non-racial local government. These stages served to emphasize key shifts in the process of contestation and negotiation that occurred between 1980 and 1991. The paper is divided into four sections. The theoretical context for the paper, focusing on the local state, social relations and the politics of place, is presented in the first section. The process of local government restructuring and contestation in South Africa is briefly con-textualized in the second section. In the third section, the struggles of the DHAC for affordable rents is analysed. More specifically, the focus is on the 1980 rent campaign, the rejection of the LACs, local state concessions, rent boycotts, anti-eviction campaigns and the development of a non-racial alliance. These developments precipitated the campaign for a democratic city, which is discussed in the final section.

The local state, social relations and the politics of place

In a recent review of local state literature, Fincher (1989) identified two research lacunas: first, more empirical studies of how local governments have attempted to influence local economic development; and secondly, the investigations into the way in which the local state influences the formation of social relations in localities. According to Duncan and Goodwin (1988: 38) researchers have implicitly viewed the local state as a static physical unit and have focused on descriptions of structures that result from social processes. In order to use the concept of the local state more constructively, it must be integrated with general explanations of social relations and change (Duncan and Goodwin, 1982: 157–158). Fincher (1987: 449) has similarly observed that for the 'local' in the 'local state to be theoretically relevant, there must be evidence that social relations specific to a locality exist'. Indeed, the issue of why specific state forms develop is innately related to how the state evolves in particular spatial localities. Routledge (1993: xvii) has called for a 'place sensitive approach to the study of social movements' because political contestations (dominance and resistance) take place in specific localities. Since people vigorously challenge locality relations, particular localities can become arenas where prevailing social relations and practices can be proposed by subordinate groups and individuals, and this

can lead to broader struggles for social transformation (Fincher, 1987). Thus, localities are not submissive recipients of the products of 'external social forces. Rather, as contested arenas of everyday life in class societies, localities possess an "endogenous" or a "proactive" capacity for social change' (Chouinard and Fincher, 1987: 350).

However, 'relatively little attention has been paid to how conscious relations with the state develop through contests over programmes, policies, and procedures' (Chouinard, 1990a: 1296–1297). According to Chouinard (1990b: 23), 'struggles over state formation shape possibilities for political practice by creating particular terrains of conflict over policies and procedures, by determining terms of access to the state, and by influencing subjective experience of the state and political life'. In this regard the role of social movements in influencing state formation has been recognized. Tarrow (1989: 26) observed that 'there has been an increasing interest in the politics of collective action: its relation to the state, to conventional forms of political exchange, and to political and policy change'. However, the emphasis has been on how the state shapes the outcome of social protest. The important question of 'whether social movements also transform the state' is rarely raised (Quadagno, 1992: 616). Similarly, McAdam (1982: 2) noted that social scientists were unable to 'adequately explain or take account of the impact of social movements on the institutionalised political establishment'. Hence, the capacity of social protest movements to contribute towards state transformation needs to be examined. Quadagno (1992: 618) has suggested that social movements can transform state structures in the following ways:

(1) the penetration of the state by previously excluded and subordinated groups;
(2) the creation of new policies to respond to the demands of protestors;
(3) the creation of new agencies to manage these policies.

The substantive urban analysis of this paper is presented against the theoretical background of a merging of local state and urban social movements literature. In this regard a central theme has been how the state shapes the outcome of social protest. The important question of whether social movements also transform the state is rarely raised, and this is the focus of the present paper. The next section briefly examines the local government restructuring process in South Africa in the 1980s, which provides the contextual setting for the Durban case study.

Local government in South Africa: a contested terrain

In South Africa political representation for blacks at the local government level has always been of an advisory nature. Advisory boards or councils, whose members were mainly nominated by the central and local state, advised the 'white local authorities on how to administer African locations' (Heymans and White, 1991: 4). The Group Areas Act of 1950, in addition to entrenching racial residential segregation, also made provision for separate local government structures for Indians and coloureds (Maharaj, 1992). This resulted in the creation of the discredited advisory LACs.

The 1980s were characterized by a reform of apartheid in the urban arena. The devolution of administrative power from the centre to local levels was one of the principal elements of the state's reform strategy. In order to promote this objective the Black Local Authorities Act of 1982 was promulgated (Bekker, 1988). However, by the mid-1980s the administration of black urban areas had reached crisis levels as the legitimacy of the BLAs was challenged and rejected by civics with strong grassroots support. The state's response was threefold–privatization, increased devolution of administrative functions and

repression. Privatization represented the state's attempt to depoliticize the arena of collective consumption by withdrawing its past responsibility for urban reproduction (Grest, 1988; Seethal, 1991).

The decentralization of administrative functions to local black township councils required a massive increase in the local revenue base, with consequent major increases in rents, property taxaton and other township revenues (Morris and Padayachee, 1988). These increases precipitated widespread civic protests and rent boycotts, which dominated the urban political arena from the mid-1980s. The boycotts and protests soon provided the catalyst for civics to explore alternative local government structures as a means of challenging and transforming the apartheid city. These activities represented the beginnings of a move for a more democratic, non-racial local government, with a shared tax base (Sutcliffe, 1989; Shubane, 1990). The urban locale, and in particular the local state, became a contested terrain.

In Durban, two major civic organizations, the Joint Rent Action Committee (JORAC) and the DHAC, were formed in the early 1980s and were 'structured largely along racial lines because of the discrete geographical area and bureaucratic structures that Africans and Indians respectively operate within, and must therefore confront' (McCarthy, 1985: 11). Reintges (1990) analysed JORAC's opposition to the Port Natal Administration Board rent increases in African townships around the Durban region, and its resistance to the planned incorporation of these townships into the Kwazulu bantustan.

The following sections of this paper examine the struggles of the DHAC to transform the local state in Durban from the 1980s. Durban reflected the cutting edge of many problems facing South Africa as it attempted to come to terms with a depressed economy, opposition to rent increases and political demands for a non-racial, democratic city. The analysis will reveal that the DHAC and the Campaign for a Democratic City, drawing on widespread grassroots support, spearheaded demands for affordable rents and non-racial local government, respectively. In consequence, the local state was forced to recognize, negotiate with and make concessions to the civics.

The struggle for affordable rents

The 1980 campaign

The DHAC was launched on 29 March 1980 at a meeting of 29 civic organizations primarily from Indian and coloured low-income public housing estates in the Durban Municipal Region (Chatsworth, Phoenix, Newlands East, Wentworth, Sydenham) (*Figure 1*). The meeting was convened by the Natal Indian Congress[3] in response to the DCC's decision to increase rents in its public housing sector by 15 percent (DHAC, 1992: 3). Mr D. K. Singh, a lawyer and a veteran in the struggle against apartheid, was elected as the DHAC chairperson. He stated that the rent increases reflected the failure of the DCC to provide affordable housing for blacks, and that the DHAC would engage in mass action to oppose the hikes (*Leader,* 4 April 1980). The objectives of the DHAC were to transform the local state in Durban as a precursor to the transformation of the apartheid state, to extend the franchise to all citizens, and to ensure the re-allocation of urban resources within Durban. To this end, it later affiliated to the United Democratic Front (DHAC, 1981).[4]

A number of housing action committees were formed in Chatsworth, Phoenix, Newlands East and Sydenham (*Figure 1*), functioning under the umbrella of the DHAC. Numerous rent protest meetings were held in the townships. At one such meeting of more than 1000 people in Phoenix, Mr D. K. Singh stated that blacks were experiencing

Predominant Race Group

☐ White
▨ Coloured
▦ Indian
▨ Black
☐ Undeveloped
⸮ Durban Municipal Boundary
⸮ Durban Functional Boundary

FIGURE 1. The Durban Functional Region. *Source: Daily News* (22 September 1994); *Natal Mercury* (11 August 1994).

problems because they did not have the franchise–a factor that allowed authorities like the DCC to take advantage of them (*Leader*, 18 April 1980).

Given the increasing momentum of the protest campaign in the townships, the DCC was forced to meet with the DHAC in April 1980. At this meeting the DHAC asked the council to postpone the rent increases. Although the DCC did not accede to this request,

it agreed that a review was necessary (DHAC, 1981: 4). It was forced to take note of the protest action and, together with the National Housing Commission, developed a new formula for calculating rent which would bring some relief for indigent tenants. In terms of this formula, those earning up to R150 a month would pay R7.50, and those earning up to R450 would not pay more than 25 percent of their salary in rent (*Leader*, 6 June 1980). The review of the rent increases reflected the success of community protest and organization and raised questions about the legitimacy of the LACs.

The rejection of the LACs

The implementation of the revised rent increase (effective from October 1980), however, revealed that most of the council's tenants would be paying higher rents. In spite of numerous requests the DHAC was unable to obtain a clear explanation from the DCC as to how the new rents were calculated. DCC officials refused to meet with the DHAC and wanted the organization to work through the discredited LACs (*Leader*, 19 September 1980).

During the initial stages of the negotiations the DCC had been cooperative with the DHAC. However, the LAC members argued that the DCC should negotiate with them, as this would increase their credibility in the community. Consequently, the DCC began to avoid meeting with the DHAC officials. The DHAC argued that the LACs were hindering the struggle against high rents. It also called on the council to freeze all rent increases until the issue had been discussed with the true representatives of the community (*Leader*, 26 September 1980). At mass meetings held in Phoenix and Newlands East, residents strongly supported the withholding of rents until the DCC introduced a fairer deal (*Leader*, 26 September 1980). The threat of an impending rent boycott forced the DCC to meet with DHAC representatives.

Local state concessions

A delegation of 17 DHAC representatives presented a detailed memorandum highlighting the socioeconomic plight of tenants in council housing at a meeting with the DCC officials and councillors on 29 September 1980. Many of the city councillors were 'very impresed with the nature of the representations' and 'several councillors expressed shock at the evidence presented by the delegation' (*Leader*, 3 October 1980). The DHAC requested the formation of 'a standing committee comprising City Councillors and representatives of the housing action committees' to reassess and restructure rents for all council tenants (*Leader*, 3 October 1980).

Following the meeting with the DHAC, the council agreed to a four-month moratorium until February 1981 on rent increases (DCC Minutes, 6 October 1980). The DCC also established a special working committee comprising representatives from the council, the DHAC and the LACs to resolve the rent crisis. This placed the DHAC in a difficult situation as the LACs had been rejected by the community. After considerable debate the DHAC agreed to serve on the committee because:

(1) it had not rejected negotiating with the DCC;
(2) the LACs were appendages of the local authority;
(3) failure to participate in the committee would set back the struggle for affordable rents;
(4) neither the working committee nor the LAC represented a 'substitute for direct representation on the Council and other decision-making bodies' (*Leader*, 5 December 1980).

However, at its meeting on 12 December 1980 the DCC reneged on the above arrangements, unilaterally deciding that the four-month moratorium on rent increases would not be extended and that the new rents would be effective from February 1981 (DCC Minutes, 12 December 1980). In spite of repeated attempts, the DHAC was unable to obtain information from the DCC on how the new rent structure was calculated (*Leader*, 19 December 1980). This led to the adoption of rent boycotts as a protest strategy.

Rent boycotts

At mass meetings held in Newlands East, Sydenham and Phoenix, tenants expressed anger at the intransigence of the DCC and resolved overwhelmingly to boycott paying rents in March 1981, regardless of the consequences (*Leader*, 6 February 1981, 20 February 1981). The DCC, however, was unmoved by the mass protest action. Although it was evident that a rent boycott had been imminent since February 1981, the DCC only met with the DHAC on 18 March 1981 to discuss the matter. After the meeting the DHAC noted that the council was 'not adequately motivated to create the right climate for a meaningful discussion which would assist in reducing the rents burden and thereby averting the crisis looming in the townships' (*Leader*, 20 March 1981). By April 1981 at least 2000 families had not paid their rents.

The DCC responded by disconnecting the electricity supply of residents in Phoenix who had not paid rents. By 9 April 1981, 52 houses were affected. The DHAC viewed the DCC's actions as attempts to intimidate, confront and divide the people (*Leader*, 10 April 1981) . The DCC claimed that the rent boycott figures were exaggerated and that the DHAC did not represent the majority of the residents. The DHAC replied that 'it ought to be clear to the most cursory observer of social movements that boycotts waver and change daily . . . [the] rents boycott and its strength varies from place to place and time to time' (*Leader*, 10 April 1981).

About 10 000 residents in the townships switched off their lights on 10 April 1981 in response to a call from the DHAC to sympathize with those whose electricity had been disconnected (*Leader*, 17 April 1981). This dispelled the DCC's question about the DHAC's credibility and support base. Buoyed by its successes, the DHAC charged that the council was 'anti-democratic, repressive and intolerant', and that it functioned as a 'political institution determined to perpetuate its own privileges and safeguard the interests of the minority that elected it' (DHAC, 1981: 6).

The intimidation from the DCC took a more dramatic turn when some councillors called for the eviction of those tenants who had not paid their rents. Given the impending evictions, the DHAC called on council tenants in Phoenix, Newlands East and Sydenham to pay their rents–thus ending the six-week boycott (*Leader*, 17 April 1981). In spite of the suspension of the rents boycott, the DHAC's struggles had resulted in definite gains:

(1) deferment of the 15 percent rent increases from May to September 1980, and the subsequent four-month moratorium until February 1981;
(2) decrease in rentals paid by tenants earning less than R150 per month, as well as some relief for those earning R150–250;
(3) recognition by the DCC of the DHAC as the *de facto* representative of the residents;
(4) increased consciousness amongst the masses about their common problems, and a demonstration of how effective participation in mass protest action could help alleviate their difficulties;

(5) tentative steps towards an interracial alliance (albeit only coloured and Indian), in spite of the central state's apartheid policies and practices, and an illustration of how united action by black communities could effectively challenge apartheid local government structures;

(6) articulation of the demands of the working class at the grassroots level.

Between 1982 and 1985 the DHAC continued to oppose high rents, and also vigorously protested against racial representation in the tricameral parliament. The inability of people in the townships to pay rents reached crisis proportions during South Africa's deepening economic crisis in the mid-1980s. Consequently, many families were in arrears with their payments and evictions were imminent.

The anti-eviction campaign

In June 1985 the struggle for affordable rents took a turn as hundreds of families living in council housing were in arrears with their rent and faced eviction. The DCC confirmed that 29 Indian and coloured families were on the eviction list.[5] In a detailed memorandum to the DCC, the DHAC argued that evictions were 'uncivilised and immoral . . . [and] that harsh punitive measures are inappropriate against black people who are forced into poverty by the iniquitous society that they live in' (DHAC, 1985b: 11). The DHAC contended that the DCC had to make an effort to resolve the problem because all the affected residents contributed to the economic development of the city as workers, consumers and ratepayers, and were entitled to share in the resources of the city (DHAC, 1985b: 10).

Following the DHAC's intervention, the DCC extended the deadline for the payment of rent arears by a month and all eviction orders were deferred. However, given the region's deteriorating economic situation, the DHAC argued that the problem would recur every month. The DHAC requested that the council set aside a large sum of money to provide relief for the affected families who were unable to meet their rents. Furthermore, it called for all rent increases to be frozen for one year. The DHAC also requested that its officials be permitted to address all councillors in order to help them understand the problems in the townships (DHAC, 1985a: 12–15). In response to the DHAC memorandum, the Housing Policy Sub-Committee of the DCC conceded that there was an economic recession, but emphasized that the costs of providing municipal services had to be recovered. Furthermore, it was not the council's policy to subsidize rents, and the suspension of increases would be tantamount to subsidization. Also, the eviction of tenants was a last resort.[6] However, in July 1985 the DCC set aside a sum of R250 000 for the Mayor's Relief Fund for use by all citizens experiencing economic difficulties, including residents in council housing projects (DCC Minutes, 15 July 1985).

In July 1985 the cental state imposed a state of emergency as the 'authorities believed that civics were attempting to "make South Africa ungovernable" and to establish "alternate local government structures"' (Heymans, 1993: 6). Consequently, the DHAC came under increasing pressure from the repressive apartheid state. Its office was raided and its secretary, Pravin Gordhan was detained (*Leader*, 30 August 1985).[7] Almost simultaneously, the DCC, on the advice of the LACs, decided that it would no longer provide the DHAC with a list of people facing eviction. The DHAC accused the DCC of trying to prop up the discredited LACs and the apartheid system, and challenged it to let the community decide who should have access to the eviction lists (*Leader*, 9 August 1985).

With considerable experience and expertise in opposing the rent increases, the DHAC discovered that the rent that tenants paid comprised four components: interest and redemption, service charges, municipal charges and electricity and water. Interest and redemption referred to the cost of the house and land. This was collected by the DCC on behalf of the central government. Service charges referred to the costs of maintaining the township (materials, wages, insurance, community facilities, and so on), and accrued to the council. Municipal charges included rates, communal electricity and water, which were also paid to the DCC. The DHAC argued that all four components must be considered in any definition of rent (DHAC, 1989: 8). In the light of the civic opposition in Durban and elsewhere, the central state was planning to introduce a new rent formula for public housing.

Resistance to the new rent formula: a non-racial alliance

In terms of the new rent formula introduced in 1987, the state would only subsidize the interest and redemption component of rent. The new formula was to be implemented by the DCC in July 1988. Although the interest and redemption costs of most tenants decreased, this saving was lost as a result of increases in service charges, which were not pegged by the 1987 formula. About one-third of council tenants had their service charges increased by more than 25 percent. The DHAC argued that this was above the inflation rate and could not be justified by the DCC. The low-income tenants were most adversely affected as a result of the DCC's policy of rationalization, in terms of which the different cost components of rent were the same for each type of dwelling unit, rather than for income categories, as had been the previous practice (DHAC, 1989: 9).

The DHAC called on the DCC and the government to immediately freeze 'all increases until an acceptable rental formula has been agreed to by the authorities and the community' (DHAC, 1989: 14). It also initiated a series of protest actions reminiscent of the 1980–81 campaign. On 16 April 1988 more than 500 residents from the different townships marched to the City Treasurer's Department in Durban and presented their demands to councillors and officials. The residents were assured that the DCC would be informed about their grievances. The DHAC warned that the march was the 'first expression of anger . . . that the communities were not going to accept the rent increases' (DHAC, 1989: 42).

The protest march was followed by a mass meeting held in the Durban City Hall on 26 April 1988, which was attended by 4000 people of all races from Chatsworth, Phoenix, Newlands East and West, Umlazi and Kwa Mashu, as well as white council tenants living in Umbilo. The *Daily News* (27 April 1988) described the meeting as follows:

> Black, white, coloured and Indian tenants of the DCC–united in their efforts to demand rents they can afford–all joined hands . . . The strength of feeling was shown in the cross section of people who attended. Many elderly–and clearly ailing–residents were present, as were mothers carrying babies, youths, students and middle aged family representatives of all races.

In addition, civic and ratepayer associations, as well as welfare, social, youth and trade union organizations were represented at the meeting (*Daily News*, 27 April 1988). The DHAC argued that it was the first time in the history of Natal that 'black and white people stood shoulder to shoulder and hand to hand to tackle the white DCC as equals' (DHAC, 1992: 6). These developments reflected the formation of a 'multi-class populist alliance' (Seethal, 1992: 548). Although DCC officials and councillors had been invited to the meeting, they did not attend.

The meeting supported the DHAC campaign against increased rents and the new rent formula because:

(1) the affected communities had not been consulted;
(2) residents who were already facing high living costs would experience considerable suffering;
(3) pensioners would be the hardest-hit group;
(4) higher rents were imposed for poorly constructed houses with few facilities;
(5) state funds which could subsidize rents were spent on defence and in implementing apartheid (*Daily News*, 27 April 1988).

In spite of such massive protests, the DCC was not prepared to meet with the DHAC.

The DHAC responded to the DCC's intransigence by holding a mass meeting of over 5000 residents at the University of Natal on 26 June 1988. The meeting unanimously agreed that the rent increases should not be paid and that a rent ballot be conducted. The ballot required tenants to vote on the future direction of the rent struggle. The affiliates of the DHAC went from street to street and canvassed 60 percent of the tenants. In general, they voted overwhelmingly in favour of paying the lower rents that were charged prior to the July 1988 increase (DHAC, 1989: 42–43).

In July 1988 the DCC went ahead with the rent increases. Many tenants fell into arrears and some had their electricity disconnected. By March 1989 more than 200 council tenants had been served with eviction notices.[8] The DHAC argued that this proved that the new rent formula was a recipe for 'disaster and hardship', and appealed to the DCC to be reasonable (*Leader*, 17 March 1989). It maintained that a fair housing and rent policy could only be realized if there was a non-racial city council, and if the wealth of the region and country were shared among all the people (DHAC, 1989: 36). The DHAC urged the DCC and the government to negotiate a new rent formula with civic and community organizations.

In 1989 the government established a working committee to establish a new rent formula. The DHAC was invited to make proposals to this committee. A 20-person DHAC delegation met with the working committee in Pretoria on 20 October 1989. The committee stated that the DHAC's views would be considered when the rent formula was being revised. However, the recommendations of the committee were not made public (DHAC, 1992: 9).

Civics have their strengths and weaknesses. Clearly, their ability to mobilize township residents around consumption issues and to represent them in negotiations with the local state was their strength. Their major weakness was the lack of control over local resources (Seekings, 1992: 233). The Durban case study on the DHAC confirms these characteristics. However, the DHAC was also at the vanguard of the demands for a non-racial city–a move that gained considerable impetus following the unbanning of the African National Congress in February 1990 and the beginning of negotiations for a non-racial, democratic South Africa.

Campaign for a democratic city

On 10 March 1990 a number of civic organizations, including the DHAC, Westville Residents' Support Group, Berea Residents' Association and Lamontville Residents' Association, met to discuss strategies for non-racial local government in the Durban area. At the meeting many speakers highlighted the unequal allocation of resources in black

areas, attributing this to being disfranchised. The meeting confirmed the necessity for a non-racial local government, representative of all communities in Durban, and called for the boundaries of Durban to be redefined to include Kwa Mashu, Umlazi and Shallcross (see *Figure 1*) (*Herald*, 25 March 1990).

The vehicle to achieve these objectives was the Campaign for a Democratic City (CDC), which was formally launched on the 29 September 1991 and was supported by about 75 civic groups, straddling race, class and geographic boundaries. The CDC resolved to strive for:

(1) the eradication of apartheid local government structures in the Durban Functional Region;[9]
(2) the realization of a non-racial, democratic and equitable local government based on a common non-racial voters roll;
(3) the immediate improvement in the living conditions of the over three million people who inhabited the region.[10]

The CDC strongly opposed the racial allocation of public housing in the city. In a memorandum, the DCC was asked to formulate a new non-racial list, so that vacant dwellings could be allotted to those in need.[11] Councillor Mona Riddle, chairperson of the Community Services Committee, replied that non-racial housing allocation had been accepted in principle by the DCC, but that the municipal restructuring process had delayed its implementation (*Daily News*, 27 June 1991). At a meeting held on 10 July 1991, a subcommittee comprising representatives from the CDC and the Community Services Committee was formed to develop a new non-racial housing list. The CDC was satisfied with the outcome of the meeting, particularly as they would be involved in the decision-making process (*Daily News*, 11 July 1991). This represented a penetration of the apartheid local state by the civics.

However, a major obstacle with regard to these housing lists appeared to be at the central state level. The DCC questioned the central state about maintaining three separate lists and threatened to obtain a Supreme Court order to force the central state to draw up a non-racial housing waiting list. The central government replied that 'housing was still an "own affair" and segregation will remain until a new constitution was in place" (*Natal Mercury*, 10 August 1991).

Conclusion

This paper has examined some of the urban struggles and conflicts contributing to the transformation of the apartheid local state in Durban. Civic organizations like the DHAC and CDC served as important agents of social change and initiated a shift towards a non-racial local government. They also contributed towards the development of collective political consciousness across race barriers. A major factor facilitating mobilization was material—the incapacity of the people to pay increasing rents in Durban. While the focus was on local problems, the civics were aware that these issues were inextricably linked to the apartheid central state. Hence, the civics consciously advanced non-violent strategies—mass meetings, demonstrations, marches, boycotts and petitions—that advanced the struggle for local national political change.

In Durban, the apartheid local state initially ignored the DHAC's request that rent increases be reviewed, and the organization was branded as radical. However, as the DHAC's capacity to mobilize thousands of residents and the reality of a rent boycott

became apparent, the DCC was forced to negotiate with it. By demonstrating its capacity for mass action the DHAC forced the local state at various stages to negotiate with it and to temporarily defer rent increases. Clearly, the DHAC's pragmatism and willingness to negotiate with DCC officials, and to participate in the council's structures and forums, dispelled the local state's attempts to discredit it.

This paper has drawn attention to how social relations with the state evolve and unfold through struggles with the state over policies and practices in specific localities (Chouinard, 1990a: 1296–97; Duncan and Goodwin, 1988: 29). Localities represent powerful catalysts for necessary social change. As people vigorously challenge existing locality relations, such localities are able to consolidate resistance to prevailing social relations and practices, and advance the struggle for social transformation (Chouinard, 1988: 53). These tendencies were clearly manifest in the Durban civics' struggles for a non-racial democratic local government as the DCC and its substructures grudgingly accorded the DHAC and the CDC *de facto* legitimacy by negotiating with them as equals. In the process, 'dummy' structures like the LACs were increasingly ignored and the local state was forced to challenge the central state with regard to the racial allocation of public housing.

This paper has also addressed the neglected question of the role of civics in contributing towards the transformation of the local state. Civic movements in Durban meet Quadango's (1992) criteria for the transformation of state structures. At various stages the local state in Durban was forced to:

(1) recognize and negotiate with civics representing the politically disfranchised;
(2) review its rent increases, and develop new policies in response to the protest action;
(3) set up new agencies (e.g. substructures comprising representatives from the DCC and the civics). The local state was forced to consult with the DHAC and the CDC when implementing new policies.

Attention has also been drawn to housing as a locus of conflict. Housing issues, especially rents and affordability, have been central concerns for civics in South Africa because blacks were denied land tenure in urban areas until 1986. In Durban, coloureds and Indians were forced to relocate in segregated public housing estates like Phoenix, Chatsworth and Newlands East under the Group Areas Act (1950). The local state attempted to dominate residents in public housing estates by imposing unbearable rents which were opposed. Hence, public housing estates constituted a 'terrain of resistance' (Routledge, 1993). The housing issue also served as a catalyst for the formation of a multi-class, non-racial, populist alliance and the emergence of metropolitan integration in Durban. In consequence, local housing issues involved a challenge to apartheid at the highest levels.

In conclusion, this paper suggests that significant political transformation at the local level can be achieved via the organization and mobilization of the working class in their living environment. While the Durban case study has its own geographic and historical specificity, it does help to explain the dynamics underlying urban politics as disfranchised communities challenge local state practices.

Finally, as South Africa launches into a process of socio-political-economic transition, its civics will have to change their *modus operandi* from that of protest and opposition to creative engagement in the process of reconstruction and development. Civics have had the greatest experience in functioning within a democratic framework, and it is in this arena that they can make a most significant contribution to South Africa's fledgling democracy.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Any study of the South African social formation cannot avoid reference to race and ethnic divisions. However, use of such terminology does not in any way legitimate racist ideology.
2. All South Africans participated in elections for a non-racial democracy in April 1994. Elections for non-racial local government are being planned for October 1995.
3. An extra-parliamentary political organization founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1894.
4. The United Democratic Front (UDF) was a grouping of extra-parliamentary organizations formed in 1983 to oppose the tricameral parliament, and which became the vanguard of the opposition to apartheid in the 1980s.
5. Memorandum from the DHAC presented at the joint meeting of the Management and Health and Housing Committees of the DCC, 27 August 1985, p. 2.
6. Detailed response to the DHAC memorandum by the Sub-Committee re Housing Policy (no date).
7. Pravin Gordhan subsequently became the rotating chairperson of the Conference for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) and the Transitional Executive Council, which were largely responsible for mapping the path for a non-racial democracy in South Africa.
8. By the end of 1993 tenants in Phoenix, Chatsworth, Sydenham, Newlands East and Wentworth owed the DCC more than R2.5 million in rent arrears (*Sunday Times*, 19 December 1994).
9. The Durban Functional Region referred to areas that were functionally related (e.g. in terms of employment and commuting patterns) to the Durban Municipal Region (see *Figure 1*).
10. Campaign for a Democratic City, *Draft Guidelines for the Civic Forum* (n.d.), pp. 1–2.
11. There were about 100 vacant council flats in white areas (*Sunday Tribune*, 7 July 1991).

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