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Paul MAYLAM**

RÉSUMÉ

À partir des années 1920, la pression de la paupérisation rurale et l'attraction de l'offre du travail par les industries de transformation ont entraîné une urbanisation rapide. L'article étudie ce processus à partir de l'exemple de Durban entre 1935 et 1950. L'auteur montre comment les Africains ont développé dans cette ville des bidonvilles tant à cause de la pénurie de logements urbains que parce qu'ils souhaitaient vivre dans un environnement permettant une plus grande liberté économique et sociale. Les autorités municipales se sont efforcées d'éliminer ces quartiers vus comme berceaux de la criminalité et des maladies. Cependant, l'insuffisance des ressources financières a empêché la construction de quartiers modèles et a conduit à l'adoption du système de "parcelles assainies" en guise de compromis.

During the past decade much public attention has been focussed on the plight of African urban squatters in South Africa. Extreme callousness and brutality has often been displayed by the governing regime in demolishing shack settlements and uprooting squatters. Such treatment has aroused indignation, at least in some circles, in recent years. But urban squatting, which is not just a recent phenomenon in South Africa, has rarely been viewed from an historical perspective.¹ Informal shack settlements have been growing up around some of South Africa's major cities almost continuously for the past fifty to sixty years. That they still continue to mushroom in certain areas today underlines both the contradictions within the South African political economy and the tensions within the *apartheid* system. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the growth of urban squatting in its earlier phase in the greater Durban region. Certain contradictions and pressures operated to create the conditions for the growth of extensive shack settlements in and around Durban during the 1930s and 1940s. And, as is still the case today, the local and national authorities were unable to cope with these contradictions and pressures.

The “Black Belt”: The Growth of Shack Settlements Around Durban

From the early twentieth century Indians had begun to buy land in the hilly country to the west of Durban's borough boundary. They were primarily market gardeners, growing mainly bananas in an area conveniently close to their markets in Durban. As Durban's African population grew in the 1920s, many of these Indian landowners found it profitable to lease parts of their land to African tenants. So in 1930, the Durban Boundaries Commission reported that a “black belt” had grown up around Durban, “hemming it in on nearly

every side.” The “belt” comprised shack settlements inhabited not only by Indians and Africans but also by a few whites.² In one particular shanty settlement visited by members of the Durban Joint Council in 1930, “400 Indians and Natives lived on 2 ¾ acres, five or six people commonly inhabiting rooms of 800 to 1,000 cubic feet.”³

It is difficult to estimate the exact size of the peri-Durban shack population in the early 1930s. In 1931 a Joint Council report reckoned that of the 38 000 Africans employed in Durban almost 10 000 were without formal accommodation.⁴ When Durban’s boundaries were extended in 1932 by the incorporation of eight peri-urban areas, 21 000 Africans, 51 000 Indians and 20 000 whites were added to the city’s population.⁵

The most densely populated of the incorporated areas lay to the west.⁶ It was here that Durban’s most well-known shack settlement, Cato Manor, was steadily growing. Cato Manor, located about two miles from the centre of Durban, comprised approximately five hundred acres of alternating valley, hill, and ridges. At one time most of the area belonged to white owners who later subdivided their properties and sold to Indians. Official attention was first drawn to the emerging shack settlement in Cato Manor by Dr. Gunn, Durban’s Medical Officer of Health, in 1934.⁷ By 1936 about 2 500 Africans were estimated to be living in the area.⁸ White and Indian property-owners in neighbouring communities were soon complaining. The Westville Local Administration and Health Board reported to Durban’s town clerk: “There is a very bad growing black belt in Cato Manor . . . Natives of vile character are putting up shanties and between making beer and creating disturbances are causing my Board to receive complaints from residents.”⁹ This view was not shared by Gunn. He found the shack-builders to be people with initiative, among the “best class of native worker.” In the course of inspecting the Cato Manor settlement in 1935 he had been “impressed by the praiseworthy efforts of these native families to keep their primitive dwellings as clean, neat and ‘homely’ as possible.”¹⁰ Such expressions of favourable opinion were unusual; they rarely occur in the municipal records.

It is difficult to characterize the early Cato Manor settlement of the 1930s, as the evidence is scarce. But it does seem unlikely that the inhabitants were people driven to shack-building out of necessity and hardship. They were more probably enterprising people who sought to exploit the opportunities offered by living in an “uncontrolled” area relatively close to the city centre. Among these people was a group of African landowners who, from 1930, bought privately owned land in the Chateau and Good Hope Estates adjoining Cato Manor.¹¹

As was the case in Johannesburg,¹² the most dramatic growth of Durban’s shack population occurred in the 1940s. In 1939 there were about 1 000 African-occupied shacks in Durban, of which half were located in the Cato

Manor district.¹³ In 1943 Gunn reported Cato Manor to be made up of “a dense mass of hovels, constructed of whatever scrap material comes to hand;” and he estimated the shacks to be at least 1 500 in number.¹⁴ By 1946 there were about 5 000 known African-occupied shacks in Durban.¹⁵ The figure had risen to over 5 500 by 1949; of these about seventy percent were located in the Cato Manor area.¹⁶ By the end of 1950 an estimated 50 000 people were living in Cato Manor.¹⁷

Although the greatest concentration of shacks occurred in Cato Manor there were numerous other settlements scattered around the borough and the peri-urban areas. The southern industrial area of the city drew many shack-dwellers. In one case, “at Jacobs Road, what appeared to be a large stack of loose bricks, stored for ultimate use in building construction, was found, on closer examination, to consist of some 23 cubicles housing 70 Natives.”¹⁸ Some settlements were growing up outside the city’s boundaries.¹⁹ Other venturesome shack-builders were penetrating close to some of Durban’s most venerated areas; in 1949 shacks were found next to the Botanic Gardens and on land opposite the Country Club. So serious was the situation, complained Gunn, that no part of the city could be regarded “as wholly immune” from shack-building.²⁰

Various materials were used in the construction of the shacks. Most were built of wooden posts and corrugated iron sheeting or flattened iron drums; some were made of tin, mud, and sacking. Rooms were usually very small, averaging approximately eight feet by six feet in size.²¹ As the population grew, settlements like Cato Manor became extremely congested and overcrowded. Many observers drew attention to the hazardous health conditions that prevailed in these densely populated areas, where there was virtually no formal water supply and no regular system of sanitation, drainage, or refuse removal. In 1943 a small team of investigators reported on the position in Cato Manor:

Without exception these so called dwellings fail to comply even with the most elementary hygienic and structural requirements, with no consideration of sewerage services or disposal of rubbish. Although an odd water standpipe was noted here and there these are certainly not nearly adequate even for the shacks adjacent thereto, so that in the main the picture confronting us was dismal in the extreme.²²

Another municipal report of 1946 drew attention to the enormous health hazards: “. . . upwards of 30 000 persons live under conditions of insanitation and congestion which favour the prevalence of Enteric or Typhoid Fever, the Dysenteries, Typhus, Tuberculosis and Venereal Diseases.”²³ The same report estimated that more than half the infants born to African shack-dwellers died before reaching twelve months of age.²⁴

For a great many of Durban’s middle class residents, the shack settlements aroused sentiments of fear and indignation. Particularly vociferous were Indian property-owners in neighbouring areas. The Cato Manor Ratepayers Association complained that their community was threatened by disease, and that

Indian market gardeners were being “ruined” as shack-dwellers stole their produce or polluted their gardens.²⁵ In 1948 the Merebank branch of the Natal Indian Congress drew the town clerk’s attention to the “nuisance” being created by shack-dwellers in their area.²⁶ The shack settlements were widely perceived as hotbeds of crime, vice, and disease. This was the view presented in *The Durban Housing Survey*, undertaken and produced by the University of Natal in the early 1950s: “the most serious threat to Durban’s health and racial harmony lies in her slums and vast shack settlement, the breeding grounds of disease, crime and despair made more dangerous by ignorance and neglect.”²⁷ Not all, however, adhered to this view. Even Havemann, the manager of Durban’s Native Administration Department, was prepared to concede in 1949: “though they have their quota of criminals and idlers the residents of Cato Manor are not a mass of brawling insurgents. They are on the whole decent working men trying their best to provide for their families.”²⁸ In this last statement lies, from the African viewpoint, the essential rationale for shack settlements.

Why Shack Settlements?

The growth of shack settlements in Durban can only be explained within the wider context of the political economy of South Africa. At a fundamental and obvious level the settlements were a product of increasing African urbanization. This latter process was, in turn, closely related to trends in rural areas and to industrial development. From the 1920s the accelerating impoverishment of the African reserves was an increasingly conspicuous trend. The Native Economic Commission Report of 1932, for instance, had drawn attention to the underdevelopment of the reserves.²⁹ High population density, land shortage, soil exhaustion, and overstocking combined to create conditions of severe hardship for Africans in the reserves. The situation could be exacerbated by years of drought, as occurred between 1944 and 1946, leading to heavy cattle losses and crop failure.³⁰ More and more Africans were thus forced to seek their subsistence in urban areas. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that the City Medical Officer of Health should report in 1946 that most of Durban’s shack-dwellers had come from rural areas.³¹

It was not only the push of rural impoverishment that drove an increasing number of Africans to urban areas. Rapid industrial growth created a massive labour demand which further generated African urbanization. From the mid-1930s the post-depression recovery saw a rapid growth in manufacturing in South Africa’s industrial centres, among which Durban featured prominently. Durban’s economy was given a further boost by World War II, which stimulated the local manufacture of consumer goods and war materials and generated increased activity at the docks. The gross output of Durban’s secondary industry rose from £13 599 000 in 1934-35 to £23 734 000 in 1939-40 to £49 275 000 in 1945-46.³² This industrial growth had a double effect on the process of African urbanization. First, it drew an increasing number of Africans

to Durban. This increase was particularly marked during World War II. A survey conducted by Durban's Native Administration Department in 1943 showed that the number of Africans employed by twenty-five of the city's industrial establishments, selected at random, rose from 3 904 in 1939 to 14 985 in 1943. By 1945 the total number of African males registered in employment by the Native Administration Department had reached 71 210.³³

The second effect was to stabilize Durban's African labour force. A large proportion of this labour force had for long been composed of migrants. But a constant turnover of workers was particularly unsatisfactory for the manufacturing sector. Thus, more and more African labourers became permanent urban-dwellers. As a result, an increasing number of family dependents also came to live in and around Durban. Between 1936 and 1946 the female African population of Durban doubled from 14 234 to 28 523.³⁴

The pace of African urbanization did not slacken after World War II. In October 1946 Gunn remarked:

Although the activity of war-time industry has greatly diminished, the effect of its stimulus remains such that it has not been possible, even if it were politic, to repatriate the Native workers and their families back to the Reserves. Indeed, were it possible to do so it is at least doubtful whether it would be politic in view of the far-reaching plans which are now being concerted for the expansion of Durban's post-war industry, commerce and general development . . .³⁵

The drift of Africans to urban areas had become an irreversible process. The push of rural poverty had combined with the pull of labour demand to accelerate the process. However, as time progressed African urbanization was to become less and less a product of this pull factor, and more and more a result of the push of rural impoverishment.

These push/pull factors may largely explain the growing presence of Africans in Durban during this period, but they do not provide a sufficient explanation for the growth of shack settlements. In simple terms this growth could be explained by the shortage of formal housing for Africans in Durban. From the 1920s the provision of formal accommodation for Africans had failed to keep pace with the growing urban population. This trend accelerated from the mid-1930s so that the gap grew ever wider. Early in 1944 Durban's total African population was estimated to be about 83 000. Of these about 36 200 were housed by their employers, either in compounds or in servants' quarters on private properties; about 16 400 were accommodated in municipal townships or hostels; about 2 200 were housed in private, licensed premises. This left about 28 000 people who had to find some kind of informal accommodation for themselves.³⁶ In 1949 Havemann, the Native Administration Department Manager, estimated that of the 90 000 African males registered to work in Durban, 30 000 were without formal accommodation;³⁷ by adding thousands of women and children to this figure the enormous extent of the housing shortage becomes apparent.

During World War II Durban's failure to provide more formal accommodation for Africans was due partly to the scarcity of staff and materials. But war conditions only aggravated the housing shortage that had long since been a source of anxiety to the municipal authorities. The underlying problem was one of finance. The central government was generally unwilling to finance African housing on the grounds that it was a municipal responsibility. The Durban Corporation adamantly refused to use ratepayers' money to provide accommodation for Africans; instead, it tried to place the onus on employers who derived the most benefit from the African presence in Durban. Employers argued that all ratepayers derived benefit and that the general borough fund should bear the burden. In the event, most of the financial burden for African housing was borne by Durban's Native Revenue Account which drew most of its funds from the sale of beer. Although the municipal beer monopoly was a profitable operation, it could never produce enough money for the municipality to come anywhere near to meeting the housing shortage. By 1948 the situation was so serious that one city councillor remarked: "Only with armies of Natives, thousands of acres of land and colossal sums of money could the Municipality make any impression on the present situation which worsens weekly."³⁸

It would be a mistake to see Durban's shack settlements simply as the product of a housing shortage. Africans were not merely passive victims in the whole urbanization process. Although appalling living conditions often prevailed, the shack settlements did offer advantages and opportunities to their inhabitants. First, they were free from the strict regulation and control exercised by the authorities in municipal institutions. Second, shacks were cheap accommodation; and being located close to places of work, transport costs were reduced. And third, the settlements offered enormous scope for informal sector activity. Petty entrepreneurs operated as unlicensed traders, hawkers, painters, backyard motor mechanics, or shack-builders.³⁹ By about 1950 African shack-builders were charging, on average, £20 for materials and £10 for construction work.⁴⁰ The settlements themselves offered business opportunities; and the proximity to central Durban of a place like Cato Manor enabled women in particular to take on work as domestic servants or washerwomen. But the biggest business of all was illicit liquor-dealing. Although police raids were conducted, the relative absence of control allowed for both the manufacture and sale of liquor. By the late 1940s Cato Manor was a major attraction for non-residents and had become a centre of weekend social activity.⁴¹

If liquor was big business, so was shack-renting. In 1949 it was estimated that eighty percent of the land on which shacks were built was owned by Indians.⁴² Some were comparatively large landlords. In 1945 Sayed Omar, for instance, owned a portion of Cato Manor land on which there were 164 shacks occupied by about 1 000 African tenants.⁴³ Panjalai's property, known as the "New Town" area of Cato Manor, had 1 200 tenants in 1948.⁴⁴ Indian landlords, however, only rented out shack sites. Most shacks were built and owned by their occupiers. But as the demand for accommodation increased in

the 1940s there grew up a class of African rack-renters. Some speculators enlarged their shacks so that a single shack might comprise fifteen to twenty rooms, each of which could be sub-let at great profit to the shack-owner.⁴⁵ In 1950 one African paid an Indian thirty shillings a month for land on which he had erected seventeen shelters, of which sixteen were sub-let at rents of £1 a month.⁴⁶ There was also a small class of African landowners. Since 1930 ninety-one acres of privately owned land at Chateau and Good Hope Estates, adjoining Cato Manor, had been sold to Africans for £25 per quarter-acre plot. Many of these landowners later divided their plots into three or four shack sites, each of which would be let for £1 a month.⁴⁷

The growth of shack settlements around Durban thus cannot be seen simply as the African response to the pressures of rural impoverishment, labour demand, and the housing shortage. The settlements were areas where Africans could escape from excessive control by police and officials, where they had more opportunities for earning their subsistence, and where they could more easily shape their own lives. In this way, the settlements also posed problems for the municipal authorities, for whom shack-building highlighted certain fundamental contradictions. At one level, the settlements offered advantages to the municipal administration and to local employers. The shacks were a cheap form of accommodation which placed no financial burden on ratepayers; and employers were relieved of both the cost of housing their shack-dwelling employees and the burden of subsidizing the transport costs of those workers whose shacks were close to their place of employment. However, the basic contradiction arose between the need, on the one hand, to exploit a labour force that could reproduce itself cheaply, and on the other, to exercise social and political control over that labour force. The contradiction was hard to resolve. And as Chester, the Manager of Durban's Native Administration Department, told the Durban Health Enquiry Commission in 1943, it was especially difficult to resolve in war-time: "We wanted their labour, and either we had to sabotage our war effort by turning them out of town, or tolerate them where they were at Cato Manor. We took the lesser of the two evils."⁴⁸ Herein lay the crux of the dilemma. Durban needed cheap labour, not only for the war effort, but for peace-time industry and commerce. We must now examine how the local authorities tried to grapple with this dilemma.

The Municipal Response

As Durban's shack settlements steadily grew in the 1930s the municipal authorities began to consider ways of tackling the issue. For the most part their response was lacking in both subtlety and realism. The formulators of a municipal housing policy for Africans were guided by certain fundamental concerns. First, such a policy had to be geared to the needs of employers. As the 1927 Mayor's Minute pointed out: "Among the first requirements of industrial enterprise is a labour supply conveniently situated. . .;" this meant: "The

Native quarters must be in relatively close proximity to their place of employment."⁴⁹ Racial segregation was a second concern: "Such housing must be separate from the localities recognised as residential areas by Europeans."⁵⁰ A third objective was to eliminate slums and shacks, and a fourth to house Africans in formal, controlled accommodation. The Report of the 1930 Durban Boundaries Commission argued: "For the removal of Durban's 'black belt' a considerable housing programme must be launched."⁵¹

These concerns became major preoccupations during the 1930s. Most municipal leaders thought in terms of expanding formal accommodation for Africans as the best way both to achieve segregation and to eliminate shacks. But apart from the construction of Lamont township in the early 1930s very little was done. When the whole city became a proclaimed area in 1937 the provision of formal housing became an urgent need. Under the proclamation, all Africans living in Durban, except certain exempted groups, were required to live in municipal townships or hostels or in licensed premises such as compounds or servants' quarters.⁵² The proclamation aimed at the simultaneous achievement of the four above-mentioned objectives. But its success depended on the considerable expansion of formal accommodation for Africans. So in August 1937, the City Council approved expenditure of almost £153 000 on expanding existing African accommodation at Lamont, Somtseu Road, and Jacobs.⁵³ In 1939 plans were drawn up for a new township at Blackhurst Estate (later named Chesterville) and a hostel for single men at Merebank.⁵⁴

The expansion of formal housing was not the only strategy employed by the municipal authorities to achieve their aim of eliminating shacks, effecting residential segregation, and creating the conditions for maximal labour exploitation. As Chester, then assistant manager of the Native Administration Department, pointed out in 1936: "there does not exist any machinery or means whereby any programme of housing [for Africans] on a comprehensive and desirable scale can be attempted or carried out without serious financial loss and consequent burden on the funds of the local authority."⁵⁵ Chester's suggested remedy was to make it compulsory for all employers to provide accommodation for their African workers.⁵⁶ In 1941 a government proclamation was issued authorizing the Durban City Council to require employers to provide such accommodation.⁵⁷

Not all of Durban's leading administrators were ardent advocates of formal housing for Africans. The main exception was Gunn, the Medical Officer of Health. Whilst committed to shack elimination, Gunn saw the dangers of an over-commitment to a formal housing policy. As early as 1934 he condemned the Lamont township scheme as an expensive failure: it was far from places of work, and its transport and shopping facilities were inadequate.⁵⁸ He argued that careful consideration had to be given to the existing life-style of shack-dwellers: "Re-housing will fail in its object, if it compels a radical interference with the basis of living and means of support to which the slum-dweller has

been accustomed and habituated.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, when planning the type of housing structure for Africans it was “necessary to modify certain conventional ideas. Once the major considerations relating to site are satisfied, the widest scope should be given to choice of building materials and methods . . .”⁶⁰ Gunn thought in terms of self-help schemes: “The progress of slum elimination must keep pace with the ability of the displaced people to house themselves as far as possible, suitably assisted where necessary, by loan facilities and the availability of approved and convenient sites.”⁶¹

Gunn’s approach was remarkably far-sighted, and it resembles some of the more enlightened thinking on African housing in South Africa today. But just as the present South African government persists in its “bulldozer” tactics of demolishing squatter settlements, so was Gunn’s policy virtually ignored in the 1930s. But Gunn was given some endorsement by the 1944 Report of the Durban Health Enquiry (Wadley) Commission. The Report condemned the earlier preoccupation with permanent, formal housing; rather should basic water and sanitation services have been extended to the growing shack settlements as a temporary measure to enable them to maintain certain health standards.⁶²

In the 1930s Durban’s planners, Gunn excepted, clearly overestimated their ability to provide formal accommodation for the city’s African population. Their approach had been unimaginative and unrealistic; and they had been unable to escape from the financial constraint arising from the city’s unwillingness to burden ratepayers with any responsibility for African housing. By the mid-1940s the serious consequences of their failure to heed Gunn’s earlier warnings were becoming apparent. The labour needs of the war effort had drawn thousands of Africans into Durban within a few years. And the shortage of skilled labour and construction materials, brought about by war conditions, meant that the expansion of formal housing for Africans was further retarded.

As shack settlements mushroomed during the 1940s, the municipal authorities struggled to devise strategies to cope with the situation. It was becoming increasingly clear that a crude policy of demolishing shacks was unworkable. Demolition tended to result in a process of “shack shifting,” whereby owners of demolished shacks moved to another area of the city and built another informal structure. Moreover, there were legal barriers to demolition. In 1943 the position was that a shack could not be demolished without a court order; and to obtain a court order it was necessary to show that alternative accommodation existed.⁶³

Equally impractical was the idea that shack-building could be curbed by a more rigid implementation of influx control. In 1943 a two-man committee, comprising Chester and Heald, the government’s Inspector of Urban Locations, conducted an investigation into the situation at Cato Manor and another

settlement at Newlands, north of Durban. In their report they proposed that “steps should be taken to deal with any natives, male or female, found in the area who fall within the ‘idle, dissolute or disorderly class;’” such people, who were considered surplus to labour requirements, could be expelled from an urban area under various legislation, in particular the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act.⁶⁴ Although the proposal was endorsed hastily by the City Council,⁶⁵ it was hopelessly divorced from the realities of the situation. Influx control was no antidote to rural impoverishment; it could hardly be implemented at a time of increasing labour demand; besides, the central government had recently ordered a relaxation of the pass laws. However much the municipal authorities and the central government strove to limit the African presence in Durban according to labour needs, Africans continued to migrate to the city throughout the 1940s and thereafter. Successive Nationalist governments since 1948 have continued to tighten influx control but have been quite unable to impose the desired limits on the process of African urbanization.

The municipality’s preoccupation with formal housing went hand in hand with influx control. This preoccupation, too, persisted through the 1940s. In 1945 the Council’s Native Administration Committee resolved that steps be taken “to exclude the unwanted native element from the City precincts and promote permanent housing for Natives employed in the City.”⁶⁶ By 1946 the building of Chesterville township, comprising 1 265 two-bedroomed houses, had been completed.⁶⁷ The municipal authorities had estimated that Chesterville would serve to re-house the Cato Manor shack-dwellers. As Chester told the Durban Health Enquiry Commission, “We bought Blackhurst [Chesterville] primarily to clean up the whole of that area [Cato Manor]. We estimated we had sufficient land to re-house the shack-dwellers on the property we bought.”⁶⁸ However, the more perceptive Gunn was able to see soon after its completion that Chesterville represented a mere drop in the ocean:

Although this scheme [Chesterville] provided over twelve hundred new houses, its effect upon the progress of shack settlement has hardly been perceptible. At most, a few of the worst spots in the Booth Road slum [Cato Manor] have been evacuated and cleared but this gain has been more than offset by shack building in other peripheral parts of the City. Nor is it likely that the proposed extension of Lamont Location will effect any more substantial reduction in the number of shacks located within the City or close to its boundaries when the extension has been completed.⁶⁹

In the meantime Gunn had been persisting in his more pragmatic, short-term approach to the shack question; and this was gradually to gain official acceptance. Reporting to the Town Clerk in May 1943, Gunn urged that realities be faced and temporary expedients be adopted:

In the absence of the alternative of proper housing, the erection of shacks and shanties must be condoned meantime, but failure to provide the basically essential services of water supply and sanitary services must be made good *at all costs and with the least possible delay.*⁷⁰

Early in 1944 the City Council began to take some notice of Gunn's advice, and departed from its earlier rigid insistence on influx control, shack demolition and formal housing programmes. Instead, it devised a strategy which aimed to concentrate and control existing shack settlements. The strategy comprised two essential elements. The first was to "peg" the shack situation by preventing the construction of any new shacks; this required a careful survey to be made of all existing shacks. The second was to require all owners of land on which shacks were built to provide adequate water and sanitary services for their tenants.⁷¹ Once again, the concern to avoid drawing upon general borough funds was apparent.

Attempts were soon made to implement the new policy. Shacks were surveyed and enumerated; many shacks built after the "pegging" were demolished; and landlords who failed to provide water and sanitary services were prosecuted under the so-called zonal regulations.⁷² But the measures did not have the desired effect. It proved impossible to curb the construction of new shacks. Only about fourteen percent of the shacks built in the first two years after the implementation of pegging were demolished.⁷³ "No sooner," bemoaned Gunn in 1946, "is an area numbered, pegged and brought under control from the building point of view than shack building activities are transferred to areas outside established control."⁷⁴ Nor did shack landlords provide the water and sanitary services as required by the zonal regulations. Some simply paid fines, which were considered less than the cost of providing the services. Others responded by evicting their tenants, who moved elsewhere, thereby bringing about a process of shack-shifting.⁷⁵ Here, at least, was some recognition being given to the sites-and-services principle; but the measure floundered on the usual unwillingness of the city to bear the cost from borough funds.

The inability of Durban's authorities to control shack settlements continued to be apparent throughout the late 1940s. From 1948 until about 1953 Durban experienced a considerable fall in its rate of industrial growth.⁷⁶ As a result, the demand for labour also fell, and Durban found itself with an excessively large pool of "surplus" labour. So, influx control measures, which had been relaxed for most of the 1940s, were again tightened. In July 1949 the City Council decided to enforce strictly the provisions of a proclamation of 1940 which prohibited the entry of African work-seekers into an urban area where there was already full employment and required the removal of all unemployed Africans from the same area.⁷⁷ But again it proved impossible to stem the flow. Between 1949 and 1950 the African population of Durban rose by almost 18 000, from 109 543 to 127 496.⁷⁸ At the same time, the provision of formal accommodation fell even further behind, so that the population of shack settlements, particularly Cato Manor, continued to expand enormously.

Durban's authorities and middle-class residents had for long seen Cato Manor as a social and physical threat — as a health hazard and as a centre of

crime and vice. In the late 1940s it also became a serious political threat. In January 1949 serious rioting broke out in Durban, sparked off by an incident at a bus stop between an Indian and an African. Most of the rioting, involving mainly Africans and Indians, centred on Cato Manor. Eighty-seven Africans, fifty Indians, and one white were killed; over 1 000 people were injured; and many buildings were destroyed or damaged. Cato Manor's surviving Indian residents, who were mainly traders and landlords, were forced to evacuate the settlement.⁷⁹ After the riots Africans claimed that they had won the "battle of Cato Manor," and many people who had formerly lived in backyard premises in the city or even in more formal accommodation moved out to the settlement.⁸⁰

Conclusions

By 1950 Durban's municipal authorities had clearly failed to escape the contradictions wrought by the process of African urbanization. During the 1930s and early 1940s the official municipal response to the growing shack settlements had been largely characterized by indifference and neglect. Only the City Medical Officer of Health, Gunn, had made any practical proposals. When efforts were made to grapple with the situation in the 1940s, the measures attempted bore little relationship to the underlying realities of the local and national political economy.

Durban's municipal authorities, employers of labour, and middle-class residents shared, in varying degrees, certain fundamental concerns. One was to maximize use of the city's pool of cheap African labour; a second was to maintain control over the city's African population; and a third was to exercise that control without burdening the city's ratepayers. The ever-increasing size of Durban's shack population would seem to suggest that the first and third of these considerations took priority over the second.

The city's cheap labour requirements tended to fluctuate in both the long and short term. Cycles of boom and recession had an obvious effect on labour demand. We have seen that the demand for labour was particularly high during World War II, which was also a time of rapid growth in shack-building. In the short term the city's holiday and harbour trade created seasonal fluctuations in labour demand. As Justice Broome pointed out in his 1948 report on "native affairs" in Durban, "the requirements of industry demand that there shall be readily available a reservoir of labour that can be drawn upon to meet seasonal demands. This is particularly the case in the harbour area."⁸¹ It was thus in the interests of Durban's employers to have at hand a reservoir of cheap labour that was surplus to immediate needs. However, the "push" of rural impoverishment tended to create, especially in times of recession, a surplus pool that was too large. It was on these occasions that influx control measures were applied more stringently.

An excessive labour surplus also posed for the Durban municipality enormous problems of social control. The key instrument for controlling the city's African population was formal, regulated accommodation, in the shape of hostels, compounds, or townships. The municipal authorities were committed in principle to this type of accommodation, but financial constraints prevented them from translating the principle into solid practice. It was a cardinal rule before 1950 that no ratepayers' money be spent on African housing. And the city's Native Revenue Account, however much buoyed by beer profits, could never provide the funds required to make up the ever-growing housing backlog. So, a vast number of Africans found shelter in the burgeoning shack settlements in and around Durban. These settlements imposed no direct, immediate financial burden; they were a means by which the labour force could reproduce itself cheaply. It seems that this consideration weighed heavily in the municipal response to shack-building. From the mid-1930s the Medical Officer of Health constantly pleaded for some form of health control to be exercised in the shack settlements. But his pleas were ignored as the City Council and other departments persisted in their belief that all shack-dwellers could eventually be housed in formal, controlled accommodation. In 1964 they began to admit their failure to achieve this goal. But this admission only resulted in half-hearted measures. The attempt to "peg" the shack settlements and to force landlords to provide water and sanitary services failed either to curb shack-building or to improve health conditions in the settlements.

Eventually, in 1952, the municipality did agree to shoulder some of the responsibility by setting up the Cato Manor Emergency Camp, to which rudimentary water and sanitary service were supplied. At much the same time the decision was taken to relocate the majority of shack-dwellers in a new township to be built to the north of the city. In 1958 the removal of Africans from Cato Manor to KwaMashu began. Those who were among the first to make this move were generally happy to do so. But there were also groups in Cato Manor who opposed the move, particularly the illicit liquor-dealers whose operations thrived in the relatively uncontrolled shack settlements.⁸² In 1959 and 1960 this opposition flared up into violent protest and rioting.⁸³ But the removals continued, and by 1966 virtually every shack had been cleared from the Cato Manor area; 82 000 people had been removed from the settlement, in addition to about 13 000 who were moved from other shack settlements.⁸⁴ Some might claim that this was a triumph for the advocates of formal housing. However, KwaMashu is a bleak monotonous township far removed from the centre of Durban. Residents have to pay high transport costs, and they are "subject to a barrage of rules and regulations."⁸⁵ Moreover, the construction of KwaMashu and another township at Umlazi to the south of Durban has not removed the housing backlog. Vast shack settlements are still growing on the periphery of Durban and other South African cities; and the central government's response, mainly in the shape of pass laws and the bulldozer, shows that few, if any, of the earlier lessons have been learned.

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1. An important exception is A.W. Stadler, "Birds in the Cornfield: Squatter Movements in Johannesburg, 1944-1947," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6, 1 (October 1979).

2. *Mayor's Minute*, 1931. Report of the Durban Boundaries Commission, October 1930, p. 13. The commission was appointed to investigate the possible extension of Durban's boundaries.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

4. Report on the Housing of Natives in Durban and the Peri-Durban Areas, submitted by the Durban Joint Council to the Native Economic Commission 1931. "Formal" accommodation includes municipal townships and hostels, private compounds, and backyard quarters for domestic servants.

5. *The Durban Housing Survey* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1952), p. 19.

6. There were other shack settlements in the Greenwood Park area to the north, and the South Coast Junction region to the south.

7. TCF (Town Clerk's Files)/Enquiry into the Administration of the Public Health Department. Report of the Durban Health Enquiry Commission, November 1944, p. 29.

8. *Durban Housing Survey*, p. 303.

9. Native Administration Committee Agenda Book, 16 March 1936. Secretary, Westville Local Administration and Health Board to Town Clerk (Durban), 27 February 1936.

10. TCF/Elimination of Slums, Mayville. Gunn to Town Clerk, 11 September 1935.

11. *Durban Housing Survey*, p. 300.

12. See Stadler, "Birds in the Cornfield."

13. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 4. Gunn to Town Clerk, 20 October 1948.

14. *Ibid.*, file 1. Gunn to Town Clerk, 26 August 1943.

15. *Ibid.*, file 4. Gunn to Town Clerk, 20 October 1948.

16. *Ibid.*, file 5. Memorandum re: Native Shacks, 7 October 1949. Estimates tended to vary. It was a problem defining a single shack, as one construction might include a number of different rooms, each housing a separate family. It was also difficult to achieve accurate enumeration when the population was so transient.

17. *Durban Housing Survey*, p. 348.

18. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 2. Report of the Medical Officer of Health, July 1945.

19. *Ibid.*, file 3. Gunn to Town Clerk, 4 April 1946.

20. *Ibid.*, file 5. Gunn to Town Clerk, 30 June 1949. Not all shacks were occupied by Africans. In 1944 there were reported to be 630 Indian-occupied shacks in various parts of Durban. *Ibid.*, file 2. City Valuator and Estates Manager to Town Clerk, 20 February 1945.

21. *Durban Housing Survey*, p. 372.

22. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 1. Report on an Investigation into the Position of Natives at Cato Manor and Newlands, 1943, by C.A. Heald and T.J. Chester.

23. *Ibid.*, file 3. Municipal Report re: Control of Shack Housing, 16 September 1946.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, file 1. R.P. Naicker to Town Clerk, 12 July 1943; *Ibid.*, Dick Naicker to Town Clerk 19 October 1944; *ibid.*, file 3. R.P. and Dick Naicker to Town Clerk, 19 July 1946.

26. *Ibid.*, file 4. Natal Indian Congress to Town Clerk, 19 March 1948.

27. *Durban Housing Survey*, p. 341.

28. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 5. Havemann to Town Clerk, 30 July 1949.

29. Report of Native Economic Commission 1930-1932, U.G.22, 1932, Part III, p. 80.

30. D. Hemson, "Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock Workers of Durban," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 1979, pp. 342-43.

31. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 3. Gunn to Town Clerk, 16 October 1946.

32. *Durban Housing Survey*, p. 19.
33. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 4. Memorandum by Mrs. Maytom, 22 February 1948.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, file 3. Gunn to Town Clerk, 16 October 1946.
36. TCF/Enquiry into the Administration of the Public Health Department. Evidence of T.J. Chester, p. 465.
37. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 5. Havemann to Town Clerk, 30 July 1949.
38. *Ibid.*, file 4. Memorandum by Mrs. Maytom, 22 February 1948.
39. Gavin Maasdorp and A.S.B. Humphreys, eds., *From Shantytown to Township* (Cape Town: Juta, 1975), p. 15.
40. *Durban Housing Survey*, p. 370.
41. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 5. Memorandum by K.J. Clarke, 1949.
42. *Ibid.* Gunn to Town Clerk, 2 May 1949. Of the remaining twenty percent it was estimated that eighteen percent was white-owned, and two percent African-owned.
43. *Ibid.*, file 2. Cowley and Cowley to Town Clerk, 19 November 1945.
44. *Ibid.*, file 4. Gunn to Town Clerk, 9 January 1948.
45. *Ibid.*, file 3. Health Department Memorandum, 18 September 1947.
46. *Durban Housing Survey*, p. 362.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 300
48. TCF/Enquiry into the Administration of the Public Health Department. Evidence of T.J. Chester, pp. 469-70.
49. *Mayor's Minute*, 1927, p. 275.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, 1931. Report of the Durban Boundaries Commission, October 1930, p. 15.
52. *Mayor's Minute*, 1937, p. 25.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, 1940, p. 13.
55. Native Administration Committee Agenda Book, 6 February 1936. Memorandum by T.J. Chester, January 1936.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Natal Provincial Gazette, 27 February 1941.
58. *Mayor's Minute*, 1934, p. 101.
59. *Ibid.*, 1936, p. 71.
60. *Ibid.*, 1935, p. 33.
61. *Ibid.*
62. TCF/Enquiry into the Administration of the Public Health Department Report of the Durban Health Enquiry Commission, November 1944, pp. 29-30.
63. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 1. Memorandum by Town Clerk, 17 November 1943.
64. *Ibid.* Report on an Investigation into the Position of Natives at Cato Manor and Newlands, 1943, by C. A. Heald and T.J. Chester.
65. *Ibid.*, file 3. Gunn to Town Clerk, 16 October 1946.
66. *Ibid.*, file 2. Memorandum by Town Clerk, 14 January 1946.
67. *Durban Housing Survey*, pp. 332-34.
68. TCF/Enquiry into the Administration of the Public Health Department. Evidence of T.J. Chester, p. 470.
69. TCF/Crime, Unauthorised Shacks, file 3. Gunn to Town Clerk, 16 October 1946.
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*, file 2. Memorandum by Town Clerk, 9 January 1945.
72. *Ibid.*, file 3. Chester to Town Clerk, 24 April 1946, and Gunn to Town Clerk, 9 August 1946.
73. *Ibid.* Report by Gunn, April 1946.

74. Ibid. Gunn to Town Clerk, 16 October 1946.
75. Ibid., file 2. Report by Gunn, July 1945, and Gunn to Town Clerk, 14 December 1945.
76. M. Katzen, *Industry in Greater Durban* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission, 1961), p. 13.
77. Hemson, "Class Consciousness," pp. 357-58.
78. *Durban Housing Survey*, p. 35.
79. E.C. Webster, "The 1949 Durban 'Riots' — A Case Study in Race and Class," in *Working Papers in Southern African Studies*, ed. P.L. Bonner, (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1977), pp. 11-12.
80. Personal communication, Mr. Ian Edwards, who is at present working on an M.A. thesis on the removals from Cato Manor and the founding of KwaMashu.
81. Report of the Judicial Commission on Native Affairs in Durban (Broome Commission), 1948, p. 21.
82. A. Manson, "From Cato Manor to KwaMashu," *Reality*, March 1981, pp. 10-12.
83. For a study of the riots, see L.K. Ladlau, "The Cato Manor Riots, 1959-1960," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Natal, Durban 1975.
84. Maasdorp and Humphreys, *Shantytown*, pp. 63-64.
85. Manson, "From Cato Manor," p. 12.

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[Footnotes]

¹ **Birds in the Cornfield: Squatter Movements in Johannesburg, 1944-1947**

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