

**MKHUMBANE OUR HOME**  
**AFRICAN SHANTYTOWN SOCIETY**  
**IN CATO MANOR FARM, 1946-1960**

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## Preface

Research commenced in 1980 as a Master of Arts thesis. Against my initial intention to research aspects of African rural life in the Natal midlands, the area of research rapidly changed. The stimulus for the present research thesis came from the work of the Killie Campbell oral history projects, which, from the late 1970s through to the early 1980s, were engaged in collecting oral testimony from African residents of Durban and the immediate surrounds.

The research was initially focussed around analysing central and local state attitudes towards African housing in Kwa Mashu. Alongside the increasing academic interest in social history, the value of much of the oral information then being collected served to alter the focus of research. It became clear that it was impossible to study housing in Kwa Mashu without dealing with the African shacklands of Cato Manor Farm; it was indeed necessary to undertake a social history of these shantytowns.

These important changes were mainly due to the encouragement of two researchers involved in the Killie Campbell oral history projects. Ms Deanna Collins first suggested the research topic and compiled a bibliography of key texts on urban history for an as yet unconvinced researcher. Although probably not aware of the implications, during the course of very many tea-time conversations, Mr Colin Shum's often very personal recollections of life in the shacklands served as an immense stimulus and a reminder that the complexities of social relations can make the task of oral historians almost endless.

In 1984 the thesis was re-registered as a Ph.D. under the broad title 'A social history of African life in Cato Manor Farm and Kwa Mashu township, 1946-1972'. The presented thesis is concerned specifically with analysing the history of Mkhumbane shantytown society.

During the course of this research financial assistance was provided both by the Human Sciences Research Council and the University of Natal. In addition, a most generous award from the Urbanization Committee of the University of Natal was of considerable assistance during the later stages of writing. For their technical skills and patient diligence, the support of Mrs Charmaine Trzcinski and the staff of the Trade Union Research Project was of the utmost value.

During the early stages of the research not only was it necessary to begin the task of collecting additional oral information, but to locate and gain access to the relevant municipal files. No matter how liberated particular areas within a city are, no matter how much information can be gleaned from newspapers and available documentation from, say, trade unions and political organizations, the key files are those which reveal the policies of state and capital. In this respect, the only substantial documentation on the central issue of state planning available at the beginning of research were the file sequences on the building of Kwa Mashu which had been photocopied during the course of the Oral History project.

Apart from the municipal files lodged in the Natal Archives Depot and those few files which a somewhat reluctant municipality eventually made available from the municipal Records Room, the main set of official documentary sources used in this project is derived from the municipal documents held by the

now defunct Port Natal Administration Board. This whole collection is now available on microfilm at the Killie Campbell Africana Library. I am grateful to Mr 'S B' Bourquin, Ms E Law, Mr D McCullough, Ms Jenni Duggan and Professors Andrew Duminy and Jeffrey Horton for their assistance in making this collection available for wider research.

For their continual willingness to assist in both locating sources and suggesting additional material, by far the greatest thanks must be extended to Ms Anna Cunningham, in charge of the Church of the Province of South Africa collection at the University of the Witwatersrand, and Ms Anita van Gylswyk of the University of South Africa. Their assistance not only broadened the nature of my documentary sources but indirectly added new dimensions to oral interviewing.

For assistance in locating further information thanks must be accorded to the staff of the following libraries and institutions: the E G Malherbe and Killie Campbell libraries of the University of Natal, the municipal Don Africana Library, the municipal Records Room, the Johannesburg and, then existing, Natal branches of the South African Institute of Race Relations, the Natal Archives Depot, Natal Estates, the Institute for Commonwealth Studies, University of London and the British Museum.

In any context, itinerant researchers with clip-boards and tape recorders are neither a familiar nor particularly well-appreciated sight. Difficulties inherent to any such project are immeasurably increased by the nature of township life, my desire to explore often off-beat issues, politics, and always the certainly less public features of shantytown life. For their eagerness to assist thanks are due to those staff members of Kwa Muhle who, despite considerable public curiosity and humour, combed the queues at the labour bureaux in search of informants.

Nevertheless, the greatest assistance came from within Kwa Mashu and the neighbouring residential surrounds. Recalling memories of their lives in the city from a township later excised from Durban, many were to contribute enormously to this research. In this regard, very considerable thanks must be extended to Mr Charles Mbutho, the late Mr Stanford Mtolo and late Mr Ashmon Nene, Mr Thembinkosi Phewa and the late Mrs Phewa and Mr Thomas Shabalala.

However my greatest appreciation of all must certainly go to the very sadly now late 'e-Brush': Mr Charles Khumalo, who from our first rather merry meeting at Mr John Mzame's house, gave to my research his complete enthusiasm with the days of Mkhumbane. Not only eager to talk and to chivy or otherwise encourage an ever broadening circle of informants, Mr Khumalo treated a researcher with that measure of respect which for so long has been denied to those whose lives I sought to study. Through such bonds, informants became friends, interviews became conversations and academic study came to be enhanced by and very much influenced by a more deeper empathy and understanding. It was through such friendships that I came to understand more fully the importance of social history: the 'bottom up' or 'grassroots' approach so long appreciated in academic circles, and the very constraints which daily life places on the lives of those people whom informants were so readily willing to discuss.

In our very conversations lay the roots of a frustration: a concern over the relationship between particular forms of housing and its effect on social structure, notions of class, community, ethnicity and politics

and an eagerness to learn from memory and discussion. Apart from the very correctly growing academic historiography of these very issues, the major issues within this research project have been highly influenced by such questions which the ex-shantytown residents have posed for themselves.

I thus hope not to have romanticized the days in the shacklands. This would be a disservice. Nor, I trust, have I found in various structural analyses the means to either harshly comment upon or depersonalize those stories which were told to me in the belief that there was a history which lay beyond the scope of the existing written texts on South African history.

Hopefully this research must be viewed as an encouragement. There is surely a greater need for considerable reflection on the history made and struggled for by the residents of the shacklands. As was often pointed out during the course of talking to Kwa Mashu residents, the 'children of Kwa Mashu', the generation born in the township, know little about that past so essential to the history of Kwa Mashu. However as many will recall, during the 1980 Kwa Mashu schools boycott many youths blamed their parents for past political failures. Yet during interviews many of these 'children of Kwa Mashu' were listening, often for the first time, to their parents' stories and reflections on life in Mkhumbane. The people of Mkhumbane were constantly endeavouring to comprehend, take advantage of and struggle against established power within the city. For such people, and the generation born in Kwa Mashu, this is a battle that is still very far from over.

Academic studies seem always to have an uneasy relationship with current issues. For young researchers the 1976 Soweto revolt, the growing power of non-racial trade union structures, and events such as the 1980 Kwa Mashu schools boycott, were of profound influence. Yet this was also an intellectually challenging period. Those legitimating strands in post-independence African historiography seeking the roots of modern nationalism and state formation, the desire to assert an 'African voice' and a quest for relevance appeared narrow and inappropriate if not contradictory. Contemporaneously came critical comment on earlier radical structural analyses of South African society. Such work had focussed too greatly on questions of the state and power and on class relations as embodied in the changing nature of the South African state. Along with some substantial analyses of the capitalist labour process came an interest in a social history heavily influenced by developments within marxist socialist history in Britain.

Such concerns produced varying results. Valuable texts on 'peoples' history' dealt less with the exploited and the oppressed than state and capital. However for others, questions of relevance, politics, class and gender became focussed around the very important need to explain and analyse those aspects of life in South Africa which had for so long been ignored. Within such studies lay a very genuine belief in social history and the need to direct intellectual energy towards analysing or explaining the daily lives and struggles of the oppressed and exploited.

And yet in the South Africa of the mid-1980s, such a social history could not escape critical comment. From nascent contemporary political debate and intellectual concern came a desire to reflect more on the problems of class, struggle, resistance, the problems of a structuralized society and socialist transformation. For many the methodology of social historians' had not, in spite of their use of valuable and new sources of evidence, produced those advances in knowledge which come from seeking out the tensions between social

theory, macro-analysis and empirical evidence. For others, social history lacked any notion of political economy. The search for relevance and an 'African voice' has indeed changed.

Over the years of research and writing I have received much intellectual support and friendship. As both research assistant and interpreter and for his careful, reticent but nevertheless firm guidance and wisdom in the ways of township life, Charles Ndlovu has been a loyal companion and masterful researcher. Special thanks must also go to Rowley Arenstein, 'Natoo' Babenia, 'S B' Bourquin, Andrew Duminy, Doug Hindson, John Morison, Paul la Hausse, Irna Senekal, Ari Sitas and Harold Strachan.

Over the last decade numerous research projects have focussed on important aspects of the history of African life in Durban. For encouraging this work considerable thanks are due to Paul Maylam, who, as my supervisor provided insights into the practicalities of research, an ability to isolate analytic and empirical weaknesses and a very considerable patience and optimism when faced by an unbridled enthusiasm and scorn for deadlines.

During the later periods of this research and through the period of writing I have also been privileged to have benefited from the personal friendship and intellectual incisiveness of Bill Freund, Baruch Hirson, Tom Lodge and Mike Morris. In their various ways, both personal and academic, all have given more to this research than any researcher could have either expected or warranted.

In any research project such as this, there are so many who give both of their time and encouragement and thereby assist in making a lonely and thus socially dislocating task rather more tolerable and meaningful. To those numerous persons who helped in such ways, my profound gratefulness.

Through the period of research and writing I have gained from and tested the seemingly limitless support and encouragement from my parents, Eleanor and Ian Edwards, and Deanna Collins, whom, having suggested the topic, became ever more centrally and unselfishly committed to the personal and academic implications of this research project.

## **Abbreviations**

ANC African National Congress  
ANCWL African National Congress Womens' League  
ANCYL African National Congress Youth League  
CKM Carter and Karis microfilm collection  
CMWDB Cato Manor Welfare and Development Board  
CPSA Communist Party of South Africa  
KCAV Killie Campbell Audio Visual  
MNAD Municipal Native Administration Department  
NIC Natal Indian Congress  
PNAD Port Natal Administration Board  
SACTU South African Congress of Trade Unions  
SATLC South African Trades and Labour Council  
TCF Town Clerk's Files  
TUCSA Trade Union Council of South Africa



## Glossary

### 'Cato Manor Farm'

The official title for all the land bordered by the White suburbs of Bellair and Seaview, White residential areas along the Berea Ridge, the Indian residential areas of Sydenham and the African township of Chesterville and the African freehold areas of Chateau and Good Hope Estates.

### 'Mkhumbane'

The name given by African shantytown residents to the area of densest shack settlement. This was the area which lay each side of Booth Road from the intersection of Booth and Bellair roads up to Chesterville. The name Mkhumbane came from the Mkhumbane stream which flows through the area. The precise reason for and time when the stream became known as the Mkhumbane are not known. However it is of interest to note that the remnants of a pre-Shakan iron foundry and Shakan-period pottery have been located in the area. Furthermore, there is another Mkhumbane river : where the Zulu clan settled in northern Zululand.

With regard to the shantytowns, the term Mkhumbane is often used not only to describe a particular spatial location, but also the specific significance which Africans attach to shack settlements in this particular area. Mkhumbane was not just a place, but a word which evoked and came to symbolize Africans' desire to live permanently in this area unfettered by any unwanted external authority. The difference is probably rather pedantic, but this research uses the word in both ways.

### 'Cato Manor'

Again ambiguous. Simply an abbreviation of Cato Manor Farm, the term is most popularly used to refer to African shack settlements in the broader area of Cato Manor Farm. However, the shack settlement of Tintown was sometimes also referred to as Cato Manor. Many will also use Mkhumbane and Cato Manor interchangeably.

### 'Kwa Muhle'

A commonly used term amongst Africans in Durban referring to the municipal Native Administration Department. The term originated in the early years of the twentieth century during the tenure of J S Marwick, Durban's first manager of municipal Native Administration and attempted to express the benign nature of White paternalism and control. The term was soon rejected by A W G Champion who suggested a more appropriate sobriquet should be 'Kwa Mube', the evil place. Marwick successfully sued Champion; Kwa Muhle it remains despite considerable African feeling to the contrary.

## Introduction

The study is concerned with the material structures of everyday life and the nature of power in the African shacklands of Cato Manor Farm. Originally owned by George Christopher Cato, the first mayor of Durban, the area of Cato Manor Farm comprised about 4 500 acres of land between the Berea Ridge, the White residential areas of Malvern, Bellair and Westville and the predominantly Indian area of Sydenham. Within this area came also the African freehold areas of Chateau and Good Hope Estates and the municipal African township of Chesterville. By the later 1930s when Cato Manor Farm was incorporated into the city of Durban, most of this land was owned by Indians. By the early 1940s the relative calm and secluded nature of this residential area in which Indian market-gardening activities flourished was somewhat disturbed by the increasing prevalence of African shantytowns. Many Indian landowners became shacklords.

During the war years, Cato Manor Farm was not however the major African shantytown area in the city. The rapidly increasing numbers of African men, women and children who moved into the city during the war years settled not in Cato Manor Farm, but in shack settlements closer to the expanding industrial and commercial areas within the city. Shack settlements appeared close to the city centre, along the Sea Cow Lake and Umgeni roads, and particularly to the south of the city in the Bluff area. However, by the late 1940s very large African shack settlements proliferated in the Cato Manor Farm area. The densest African shantytowns in this area were in what became known as Mkhumbane, the land stretching on either side of Booth Road from the intersection of Booth and Bellair roads up to Chesterville township. Not only were these shantytowns more populous than previous African settlements in this area. By the late 1940s, the very nature of shack society in the area had changed.

Amidst a period of steadily rising African proletarian militance throughout the city, the Mkhumbane shack residents became united in the desire to establish and maintain a powerful proletarian sense of communal unity in the shacklands. For the Mkhumbane shack residents of the later 1940s, the focus of struggle was based around gaining permanent legal land rights in Mkhumbane and in gaining improved access to the material and political fruits of the industrializing city in which they considered themselves to be permanently resident. During the later 1940s, the ever-growing shantytown population in Cato Manor Farm was indeed struggling to make their own city society, both materially and imaginatively.

However, during this same period, both capital and state were endeavouring to formulate policies aimed at transforming the nature of African employment and residence in Durban. In some ways, these policies, which aimed in essence to create a new African working class in the city, complemented the already emerging indications of growing class differentiation amongst Durban's African proletariat. Yet many of the principles which underlay state and capitals' attitudes towards Durban's African population, and the very means whereby these parties sought to restructure African life went totally against the desires of Mkhumbane shack residents. For the government, the municipality, local industry and commerce and the African residents of

Mkhumbane, the 1950s were to be a decade of continuous, bitter and violent struggle over the abilities of the various parties to succeed in transforming African shack life in particular ways.

The first substantial analysis of the African shantytowns of Cato Manor Farm appeared in 1952 with the publication of the Durban Housing Survey.<sup>1</sup> This work was part of a large series of detailed academic reports which aimed to provide useful information on various key changes which had occurred within city society. Reports dealt with the relationship between Durban and African reserve areas, the characteristics of Durban's African labour market, trade unionism in Durban, the nature of the local economy and the problems of providing housing for the city's growing population. In many ways the policy suggestions made in much of this work must be viewed as part of a general concern over the need to develop a viable and broad-ranging plan of future city growth. The social engineering policies of the newly elected National Party government were merely one, albeit highly influential, aspect of an increasing concern in White society with the questions of post-war reconstruction and the need for planned economic and social change.

The Durban Housing Survey is however of limited use. Although providing many statistics gleaned from mainly reliable sources and providing vital comparative information on all of Durban's African residential areas, the work lacks any real perspective on the character of the Mkhumbane shack community. Furthermore, being published before the main struggles over future African residence in Mkhumbane really occurred, the work has strictly limited use. For present purposes, the Durban Housing Survey can safely be treated as a primary source.

Amidst the events which saw the handing over of Kwa Mashu to the KwaZulu government in 1975, Maasdorp and Humphreys edited a collection of essays which dealt with the ways in which African shantytown society changed with the relocating of shack-dwellers to the newly built township of Kwa Mashu.<sup>2</sup> Although clearly having access to important municipal files, the work provided little historical perspective on shack life in the area, and in certain cases is uncritical of municipal policy. Nevertheless the work is of immense importance. The work provides seminal statistical data and analysis on the nature of the shantytowns' internal economy, which the authors refer to as the "informal sector". Yet conceptually the work is of restricted use, through too narrow economic focus, an inability to understand shantytown society and an absence of analysis on what is a major theoretical issue: the relationship between state policy, racial segregation and economic growth.

Contemporaneously, Ladlau's research thesis presented an account of the destruction of the shantytowns of Mkhumbane, the 1959 Cato Manor beerhall riots and the 1960 killing of nine policemen in Mkhumbane.<sup>3</sup> Making valuable use of much oral information and important municipal files, Ladlau's work is essentially aimed at providing a chronological sequence which is then placed in the context of the increasingly more militant African political activity of the period.

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1. Natal Regional Survey, Additional Report No 2, The Durban Housing Survey, (Pietermaritzburg, 1952).
  2. G Maasdorp and A S B Humphreys, (eds), From Shantytown to Township, (Cape Town, 1975).
  3. L K Ladlau, "The Cato Manor Riots, 1959-1960", (MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1975).

Immediately after the Kwa Mashu schools boycott of 1980, Manson published a brief article which attempted to provide a broad analysis of the historical origins of contemporary conflict in Kwa Mashu.<sup>4</sup> From his own involvement with the Killie Campbell oral history project, Manson's work gained from access to certain key municipal files and much useful oral testimony. A main feature of this work was the stress on the changing nature of Kwa Mashu society and the growing influence of a Kwa Mashu trading class having its origins in the Mkhumbane shantytowns.

The main themes in this present research concern questions of political power and social transformation. This work is not intended to be merely a history of an as yet under-researched but important residential area of Durban. It is important for intellectual enquiry to understand the need to focus on areas and issues so patently lacking any suitable treatment in established historical work. But there is surely more at stake. Much local history does not challenge historiographical practice.<sup>5</sup>

However nor is this work concerned with presenting a social history of Mkhumbane shackland society severed from those broader structural forces and contradictory processes which in central ways have fashioned industrial capitalist growth in South Africa. The character of those sources of evidence so sought after by social historians can often be rather beguiling, with issues of broader political economy left untouched.<sup>6</sup> All society is structured in ways which require analysis. In the same way as the intentions of state and capital are never far from the minds of the proletariat, so proletarian society is also structured in particular ways. For social history, what is surely the most pressing need is analysis of the inter-relationships between various structures, both material and political.<sup>7</sup>

Yet before these relationships can be analysed, researchers require a clearer idea of the nature of proletarian life. This present research is heavily based on the idea that tape recorders and interview notes are essential tools for historical enquiry. For uncovering the nature of African proletarian life, there can often be few other resources which have the potential to yield such valuable information as can be gained through talking to people. A simple reliance on the written word is insufficient.

Yet oral history is nothing more than another research technique. Within the very practice of oral history does not lie a radical academic outlook which allows 'people', particularly the subjected and oppressed, to speak the truth in ways which allow for enhanced democratic links between intellectuals and subjects.<sup>8</sup> Interviews are nothing more than conversations between an interviewer influenced by particular views of the past and present and informants whose recollected memories are filtered through similar personal ideas of both

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4. A Manson, "From Cato Manor to Kwa Mashu", *Reality*, March 1981.

5. G McLennan, *Marxism and the Methodologies of History*, (London, 1981), p 118.

6. For similar comments see W M Freund's book review of B Bozzoli, (ed) *Class, Community and Conflict*, (Johannesburg, 1987) in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, vol X (1987).

7. For similar analysis see W James, "Materialist history, materialist theory: A response to Charles van Onselen", *Social Dynamics*, vol 9, no 1 (June 1983).

8. P Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, (Oxford, 1982).

past and present. In the same way as documentary sources have particular characteristics, advantages and limitations, so the peculiarities of oral evidence come from the nature of the evidence rather than its supposed political implications.<sup>9</sup>

However orally transmitted evidence does not just provide texture, nuance and empirical detail, with the heavy stuff coming solely from census returns, other documents and computed ratios between, say, fixed capital and machinery, plant and tools. Oral history can provide information on both structure and process as well. Recorded memory can easily discuss social structure. Jokes about male migrant workers from northern Zululand are not merely anecdotal. In the joke are observations about the relationship between city and countryside, characteristics of the city's labour process and perceptions of social distinctions within the proletariat. Similarly the word 'flatirt' is not only used to show how nuclear relationships could change fairly often but alludes to power relations between men and women in the shacklands. Detecting such significance and following up such issues is the task of the interviewer or researcher. Oral history has particular limitations, just as does any other source material, but correct dismissal of oral history's larger political and methodological pretensions must not lead to a derision of this vital source of evidence.

Proletarian life must not merely be understood as being the histories of those organizations, movements and groupings which were important aspects of proletarian life. There must be a larger canvas to proletarian history. Only through an analysis of daily life and work can a clearer perspective of class formation, class struggle, resistance and the often so evident constraints which proletarian life in industrializing environments imposes become apparent. Worlds made by slave owners or mining capitalists are in continual conflict with worlds made by slaves and miners. Similarly, at its most simple, despite a considerable disparity in relative access to power, during the later 1940s and 1950s, state, capital and shack residents were continually in conflict over their various views of how a city society, over which none ever had complete control, could be restructured. In the same way as this conflict produced contradictory forces in relationships between state and capital, racial policy and particular patterns of economic change, so structural features of everyday proletarian life provide the bases for conflicts which are very inter-twined with broader structural changes.<sup>10</sup> It is these conflicts, both within the Mkhumbane shacklands and between the Mkhumbane residents, the state and capital which are the central concern of this research.

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9. See McLennan, Marxism, p 116-119 and A Portelli, "The peculiarities of oral history", History workshop, vol 12 (1981).

10. A Callinicos, The Making of History, (Oxford, 1987).