"Listen, Whiteman, you have launched a war you cannot win": forced removals and the outbreak of riots in Natal, 1959-1963

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Introduction

The late 1950s were a watershed in African popular resistance and protest, especially in Cato Manor in Durban. The African National Congress became highly influential in shantytown societies, assisting residents to resist forced removals. It was during this decade that the National Party government implemented coercive removals of Africans from inner-city shantytowns to newly created townships, "far afield, where they would be cheaply housed, physically controlled, and politically contained."

In terms of the Durban City Council Group Areas proclamation, Cato Manor was earmarked for White occupation in 1958. As for the shantytown dwellers living in the area, they had to be removed to new apartheid townships, zoned far away from the White areas.

Certainly, the urban riots of 1959 were the most acute expressions of deep-seated shifts in the structure and organisation of urban African society - shifts, moreover, for which the state had been largely responsible through racially defined policies. This article analyses some struggles from below, people's history; it is about how "ordinary" people resisted apartheid policies, and explains their perceptions and experiences. It is primarily concerned with the outbreak of riots and violence in Cato Manor from 1959 until 1963, during which period Durban experienced a sustained era of urban conflict. It also examines Cato Manor's past which has recently again come into the limelight. Since the 1960s the area has been largely undeveloped and vacant, despite some minor Indian housing developments that occurred during the 1980s. Recently, African people began their migration back to the area, claiming ownership rights over it and building their shacks, particularly in the Wiggins and Cato Crest area. The new shack residents justified their return by reaffirming their history based on their 1949 and 1959 struggles. The future of Cato Manor remains one of political controversy. It is its cruel past which makes it a fiercely and often violently contested area and it is only through analysing the historical context in which the riots took place that one can fully understand the controversy surrounding Cato Manor today.

The Outbreak of Violence

During the late 1950s, the municipality of Durban began to remove Africans forcibly from Cato Manor to KwaMashu. The removal process began in March 1958 and for a while did not face any serious challenge from the residents of the area. In August 1958, the municipality made an attempt to demolish the shack settlement of Thusini, where most of the mobile workers had lived for several years. Very little resistance was offered and most people simply moved away and re-erected their shacks elsewhere. The local advisory board, the Cato Manor Welfare and Development Board, under the chairmanship of Isaac Zwane, could not take any
A large proportion of these women were brewers of beer, decisive action for it was divided over the issue of removals.

During these early removals, the ANC launched an anti-municipal campaign and the Director of Bantu Administration, S.B. Bourquin, was called "the Satan of the Bantu people." The whole issue was viewed by Albert Luthuli, the ANC President General, as an opportunity to gain followers, thereby leading to a growth in ANC membership. Although the ANC had support in the shantytown of Cato Manor, some members of the community remained indifferent to politics. It was only during times of trouble that they tended to rally behind political parties.

Trouble began in earnest when the municipality attempted to clear Mnysana, the most notorious shack area in Cato Manor. It was dominated mainly by a large number of Mpondo migrant women, most of whom were "illegal" residents and who were well known for beer brewing, illegal trading and prostitution. It was there women who championed the struggle against the municipal removals and took it onto the streets on 23 February 1959, supported by women from other shack areas of Cato Manor. The women staged a demonstration at Bourquin's office and were assisted by Aaron Gumede, A.C. Shangase and J.J. Shabalala, ANC stalwarts and members of the "General Committee" of the Location Advisory Boards.

The demonstrating women were also led by members of the ANC Women's League (ANCWL), including Gertrude Kweyama, T. Mazibuko, Dorothy Nyembe, Florence Mkhize, Ruth Shabane, Florence Mwelene and Lucy Mazibuko. The woman told the authorities that they failed to understand why they were being removed from Cato Manor, their home, which "they fought for... that they have split their blood for...and having conquered the Indians they will never give Cato Manor back to the Indians." The women demanded an immediate meeting with Bourquin and informed him that "since Africa belonged to them [his] office was part of it and belonged to them... and that when Africa returned to them they would in any case sack [him]." The involvement of women had far-reaching political implications for the ANC and the ANCWL gained great support from those women whose livelihoods were on the verge of destruction. As rightly noted by Edwards, shebeen queens who had previously shunned politics, saying "this thing with politics", flocked in numbers to join the women's league.

The tense atmosphere created by the women's revolt was associated with many complex issues and evolved a wide range of emotions. At a later meeting addressed by Bourquin, a number of complaints were raised. The women demanded that forced removals be stopped and Council beerhalls be closed and voiced their concern also over lack of transport, and housing, influx control, the inability to keep livestock, the destruction of family life, illicit beer and poor wages. However, the central issue was that women wanted permanent residential rights in Cato Manor because shack demolition and mass removals meant the end of their economic existence in the urban area. New houses in KwaMashu and Umlazi were occupied only by legal male tenants or prospective buyers with their recognised wives and children and single women were automatically disqualified from the new set-up.

In pursuit of their struggle against removals, a sizeable number of shebeen queens invaded the Cato Manor beerhalls on 17 June 1959 chasing men away. The riots which erupted were led by thousands of embittered women who faced deportation to rural areas owing to their lack of legal documents. Serious disturbances began the following day when women blockaded the beerhalls, warning men not to try to enter. Thousands of African women from various parts of Cato Manor, fittingly described as "one of the largest and most horrifying slums on the continent", were armed with sticks, hatchets and pieces of wood. They marched, danced and "shook sticks in dazzling defiance at the whole edifice of white apartheid authority". The ANCWL took an active part in this women's struggle; Dorothy Nyembe and other Women's League members organised marches to the Victoria Street beerhall and the Mobeni area.

A large proportion of these women were brewers of beer, the sale of which was a source of livelihood to them and their children. Women who failed to secure formal employment often made ends meet in this way. This conflicted with municipal controls over such activities, since the municipality had its own beerhalls which were supposed to generate revenue. There is no doubt that the overriding factor to the conflict in Cato Manor was economic and its crux, according to Bourquin, was poverty:

I wish to make bold and say that whatever reasons have been advanced are of a purely superficial nature. Even the women who started off the tragic course did not express their grievances in terms of bare, basic and intrinsic facts... The basic and ultimate reason is an economic one. The poverty of the urban Bantu; the discrepancy between his earning capacity and his cost of living; his inability to meet the demands of modern times in a city modelled on the western ways of life; his inability even to meet the barest necessity of life, to feed, clothe, educate and house himself and his family.

While poverty constituted a major problem in Cato Manor, the liquor question was an issue in its own right. Councillor Mervyn Gild saw the area as "an illicit brewer's and a prostitute's paradise" which needed to be cleansed.
The demands presented by the African women were rejected by the municipality on the grounds that they were "quite impossible". Meanwhile, the women sang, danced and chanted: "The Boers are using us as a ladder to climb on"; "When you strike the women, you have struck a rock"; "Luthuli, give us Luthuli. His is the only voice we will hear." The presence of the police led to a direct confrontation with the masses. Riots broke out. The "liberation of Mkhumbane" began as large groups of Africans of both sexes gathered in the streets, erecting barricades.

Violence shifted from persons to property, the main target being the property of the Durban Corporation - community halls, trading centres and buses. The crowd became jubilant with the collapse of burning buildings, shouting "Africa, Africa" and attacking all the "concrete symbols of domination and indeed any of the accessible works of the white man". While the destruction of property was widely condemned, Kuper maintained that though "...the behaviour is senseless...it is perfectly intelligible". A similar perspective was adopted some years earlier, by British social historian E.P. Thompson who noted that "behind every such form of popular direct action some legitimising notion of right is to be found". Nonetheless, the consequences were regrettable; four people died during the clashes, while many women and ANC leaders were arrested.

Concern of the Durban Corporation was that as the illicit brewing of beer gained momentum, the municipality lost the great profits it used to make. The municipal beerhalls were closed down for a number of days and this was followed by a boycott of beerhalls. During this period, the municipality on average sold only 900 gallons of beer per day at all its beerhalls, against the previous average of 14 000 gallons per day. A partial victory was therefore scored by the shebeen queens who supported "the campaign because they regarded the beerhalls as competitive institutions and a threat to their lucrative business and their existence". The liberation of Mkhumbane was not yet accomplished and the struggle for control over the area continued into the early months of 1960.

Although the main thrust of African resistance during the 1950s came from within the urban ghettos, the struggle was "exported" to the rural areas of Natal by the ANC. It was in the Port Shepstone district that the most serious disturbances took place. Again women were involved. They destroyed dipping tanks and complained about new Bantu Authorities Regulations which stipulated that dipping tanks be refilled by the beneficiaries, although no remuneration was provided for this service. Women also complained against anti-squatter laws and increased taxation. On 21 August 1959 trouble began when Chief Nane banned a woman, Manhlamvu Cili, from his area of jurisdiction, for being a leader and influencing women to fill a dip tank with stones. A large group of women were arrested and fined £25 or 30 months in jail.

Later that month men from Chief Nane's area demonstrated in solidarity with their women who had been convicted for the destruction of government property. The ANC volunteered to pay their fines but the men resisted the idea: "We don't want the ANC to pay their fines because if this happens, they will be absorbed by the ANC and we will lose our control over them." This illustrates a fascinating point about the struggles of the late 1950s and early 1960s: in Natal, and particularly in Durban, men feared that they had lost their traditionally strong control over their women if they entered the political fray.

A considerable number of women, especially the shebeen queens, did become involved in the ANC's political programmes because these seemed to offer assistance in resolving their dilemmas. But, as rightly noted by B. Bozoli: "The women's responses to the new social movements were varied and complex. Many remained apolitical, or even antipolitical, their resilience and defiance contined[ed] on a personal level." However, from June 1959, the ANC gained a considerable number of supporters because of its programme of direct action which addressed the aspirations and frustrations of those women and men who had to leave the city. For instance, on 27 June 1959 over 20 000 people attended the "Freedom Day" rally in Durban organised by the Congress Alliance.

Further struggles between the municipal authorities and the shack dwellers for urban space in Cato Manor continued. By August 1959, most areas of Cato Manor - mainly Raincoat, Thusini, Dunbar Bar and Tintown - were cleared, and about 7000 shacks were demolished. Most of the people who failed to meet the requirements for house allocation in KwaMashu, as well as illegal residents, simply re-erected their shack in other parts of Cato Manor: the masses had resisted the municipal authorities. In the wake of the ongoing disturbances, Bourquin called a meeting with the Minister of Bantu Affairs to inform him of the defeat of the local authority in the area. Bourquin stated that:

The authority of the Durban City Council - the civil government for the area - has been challenged and overthrown...the City Council has been defeated at Cato Manor, and cannot restore its authority without the fullest cooperation and most active assistance of the government.

It was not until January 1960 that the Durban local authorities once again recommenced removals from Cato Manor to KwaMashu although they were warned by the ANC that removals would be greatly resisted. The ANC intervened in the removals on behalf of the shack-
dwellers; it contacted the Mayor of Durban requesting the suspension of the removal programme. The municipality placed notices at vantage points in Ezinkawini and Mnyasana shack areas advising the residents of the impending clearance. The municipality wanted to demolish 100 shacks containing 300 African families in the two areas.

It was in Ezinkawini and Mnyasana that violence broke out on the evening of 24 January 1960, partly provoked by police searching for and arresting illicit beer-brewers. Many arrests took place and violence was sparked off when Constable Biyela trod on a woman's foot. This seemingly minor incident ignited the already discontented and frustrated people into violence against the instruments of the state - the police.

Women were once again back on the streets with their struggle against removals in January 1960 led and championed by, in Bourquin's words, people who had an axe to grind or who had certain interests in the Cato Manor area - particularly the illegal traders, the shebeen keepers, the gambling school keepers etc. Now they were going to lose out on this rather lucrative trade, and they agitated against this removal - they knew that they would not qualify, or be unable to continue their activities in a well controlled township.

These were the people in the forefront attacking the police and chanting "Mayibuye i Africa" and "kill the Dutchmen". The violence that followed claimed the lives of nine policemen and one resident and a sizeable number of African residents were arrested for murder. In response, the Minister of Justice banned all political meetings in the locations for four weeks and, for a while, the situation was normalised.

During March and April 1960, there were organised demonstrations in the townships against the detention of Chief Albert Luthuli and other African leaders. On 31 March 1960, the residents of Cato Manor erupted violently and destroyed government property. Buses and lorries were stoned. The ANC organised marches into the Durban city centre demanding the release of their leaders. On 1 April the residents of Cato Manor, led by ANC stalwarts and the Protest Action Committee, also marched into town and clashed with the police.

During this period, most of the areas in and around Durban - particularly Clermont, KwaMashu, Cato Manor and S.I. Smith hostel - were rocked with unrest. Violence continued for several days at S.I. Smith hostel and in Lamontville township. It was only after the arrest of the leaders that this resistance movement was greatly weakened.

Meanwhile, the municipal authorities avoided further criticism from central government circles which felt that the city fathers were failing to implement tougher removal policies. They relaunched the removal programme, and the residents of Mnyasana, who earlier had resisted by simply re-erecting their shacks after the demolition, were served with eviction notices. The demolition of shacks remained in force, with some women opposing it although they were fighting a losing battle. Some women spread propaganda about KwaMashu in order to persuade others to continue resisting the removals alleging that KwaMashu was deliberately constructed on a swamp that was likely to subside and drown all the African people - a somewhat contorted story. Nevertheless, some residents decided to brave the swamp and made their way to the newly built houses of KwaMashu township. Those Africans who could afford to pay rent or purchase freehold land and who qualified for the privileges of urban residence in terms of Section 10 of the Amended Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1952, simply moved into their new houses in the townships. Even the Mpondo women from Matatiele district who were based in Cato Manor hardly resisted the removals. In the late 1950s, the Mpondo community was known for fierce resistance to the removals, but this time they simply volunteered to move out and they erected their shacks in the Newlands area.

Results of Forced Removals: The Birth of New Shanties

The survival of the newly "cleansed" apartheid city was threatened by the explosion of shantytowns which re-emerged soon after the removals from Cato Manor. Quite clearly, the new shackland cities - like the old provided women - unmarried, widows, divorcées and prostitutes - with the necessary freedom they wanted, unlike the conservative rural setting, which imposed normative restrictions and social control over them. It was unthinkable for most of these women to migrate back to their rural homes; in fact, they had their own aspirations in the city.

The new shanties were erected mainly by those who were unable to afford rent or purchase payments for houses in the new townships. Workers who felt that they could not pay to live in the new township, together with illegal residents, made their way to the newly created shantytowns of Malukazi and Magabangenjubane and built themselves different cities. By the 1960s vast shack settlements had re-emerged around the Durban metropolitan area.

The new Mkhumbane, Tintown, was erected in the Malukazi area in 1960. The area The area had fallen under the jurisdiction of the Makhanya tribal authorities at the beginning of the nineteenth century and had became part of the urban squatter fringe of metropolitan Durban. It was located on the southern border of the Umlazi township and fell within the decentralised industrial zone, which attracted a drift of mobile workers to the area. The tin shacks were erected on Indian land.
and the shack dwellers paid a rent of one pound a month. Most of the people who erected shacks in the area, particularly the Mpondo of Transkei, were from Cato Manor. It was estimated that 10,000 African dwellers lived in Malukazi shantytown in 1961 and a large proportion were legally employed in Durban and qualified for house allocation in the townships.

The residents of Malukazi formed a Residents Association and were organised at grassroot community level by leaders who, having mobilised a large following, organised invasions of the "unoccupied lands". The Association was led by David Gasa. Though this Association was not recognised by the local authorities, it presents an important point about the way in which the residents collectively defended their integrity as urban residents. During these years, residents intensified their group activities as people affected by government policy: they coped with the hardships of urban-cum-industrial life by forming associations. It was in this respect that Malukazi emerged as a major shack area in the 1960s.

In 1961 the Bantu Administration and Development officials suggested that the squatters of Malukazi should be allocated houses in Umlazi township. Those who qualified for the allocation were the residents who had previously been shifted from the area to pave the way for the construction of a township, and also all the Zulu-speaking people in the squatter camp who were employed in the southern part of Durban. The remaining residents who did not qualify were to be evicted from the area.

Despite the accelerated construction of houses in the new townships, the housing shortage remained critical which, in turn, led to the growth of the African population in the squatter camps. By 1962, another new shantytown had come into existence on the outskirts of the Umlazi-Glebe areas. This was Magabangenjubane, and it fell under the leadership of J.B. Matonsi. The area was occupied by almost 10,000 people but was dominated mainly by women. In June 1962 this area too faced demolition by the local authorities, with those people who were legally employed being temporarily accommodated in Cato Manor emergency camp and KwaMashu township. On this occasion there was no resistance, and most women who were illegal residents moved away quietly and re-erected their shacks in the Malukazi shantytown. But their stay in Malukazi was to be short-lived: by January 1963 that shantytown was also demolished.

Although the municipal authorities had succeeded in clearing most of these peri-urban shantytowns for a while, the struggle for shelter in the urban area continued throughout the 1960s. These squatter struggles are crucially important in the history of South Africa for they represent the birth of modern urban townships and the type of industrial proletariat which they accommodated.

The demolition of shantytowns by the municipal authorities intensified during the 1960s as new shacks emerged on the borders of the townships, where there was access to water and other facilities. In June, conflict arose between the legal township residents and the illegal shack dwellers. By 1963, Cato Manor had a squatter population of 20,000 Africans who still had to be resettled in the townships and in the middle of that year the Benoni, Kumalo and the Dabulamanzi areas of Cato Manor were demolished. Those residents of these areas who were regarded as illegals made their way into the valleys and re-erected their shacks. Thus creating a new squatter belt in the Mariannhill-Thornwood-Dassenhoek area extending to the Umgeni River and Inanda district north of KwaMashu.

Although at times intense, murmuring of the masses, dovetailing with strikes, marches and meetings did not last for very long. After the massacre at Sharpeville in March 1960 and the consequent banning of the ANC and the PAC, resistance faltered and urban removals became frequent and aggressively executed all over South Africa. From this time onwards, the state employed considerably expanded repressive powers to suppress any form of resistance, particularly from Africans. In Cato Manor, removals continued under police protection and the municipal authorities did not face any real challenges.

The municipality of Durban was pressured by circumstances to intensify the removal programme and by July 1960 all the scattered settlements in Cato Manor had been destroyed. The total number of shacks demolished at that date stood at 1,972 and the Cato Manor Emergency Camp created by the municipality as transitional accommodation hosted almost 55,000 people.

The banned ANC operated through Ruth Shabane who in March 1960 had been elected as the chairperson of the Cato Manor Advisory Board. The ANC's Emergency Committee worked underground, attempting to influence people from the emergency camp not to leave Cato Manor. Pamphlets were distributed by ANC stalwarts, urging people to continue with their resistance. But the movement was already fragmented and disorganised; very little support was given by the remaining people in the camp. Lacking a very clear organisational structure and facing a state determined to proceed, resistance fizzled out. With the State of Emergency in place, shack removals in Cato Manor continued unhindered and by the mid-1960s, the municipal authorities had managed to clear away all shanties in Cato Manor.
Conclusion.

Central to the analysis in this article has been an attempt to demonstrate initial mass opposition to apartheid urban policies in Durban. However, during the 1960s, when mass political organisations and activities were ruthlessly suppressed in every possible way, the resistance movement died out. As a group, Africans in Durban had failed to challenge the apartheid state successfully fearing the state’s retaliation which threatened them with possible expulsion from the apartheid city. However, there was a legacy from this time when a new dimension later emerged in African resistance and community based politics became dominant in apartheid’s own newly established townships.

ENDNOTES

1 The quotation has been taken from an ANC pamphlet, "Listen, Whiteman", Killie Campbell Africana Library (hereafter KCAL), Port Natal Affairs Administration Board (hereafter PNAAB), KCF 30, Roll 13, Pamphlets Distributed in Lamontville, 6 May 1963.
2 B. Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1991), 166.
4 Ibid., 3.
5 Edwards, "Mkhumbane Our Home", 309.
6 KCAL, KCM 55171, Dept. of Bantu Admin., 4 March 1959, "Memo on Events Arising out of the Clearance of Native Shacks at Mnyasana, Cato Manor, Feb. 1959."
7 Ibid., 9.
8 KCAL, KCM 55169, "Meeting of African Women Representatives With Mayor, 27 Feb. 1959". The 1949 riots resulted in the destruction of Indian-owned property and the displacement of Indian residents from Cato Manor. The riots were then viewed by the African women as the "liberation" of Mkhumbane - "Cato Manor was now ours through right of conquest". See Edwards, "Mkhumbane Our Home", 50.
10 Ibid., 5.
14 KCAL, KCM 55178, Cato Manor Riots, June 1959; Blumberg, "Durban Explodes", 10.
15 Edwards, "Mkhumbane Our Home", 316.
17 KCAL, KCM 55181, Bourquin to the Town Clerk. See also Kuper, "Rights and Riots", 23.
18 KCAL, KCM 55184, Councillor Mervyn A. Gill to Bourquin, 25 June 1959.
19 Blumberg, "Durban Explodes", 13.
20 Ibid.
22 The Natal Mercury, 19 June 1959. See also KCAL, KCM 55204, Memo to the Dir., 8 July 1959.
25 Ibid.
27 KCAL, KCM 55218, Notes for Meeting With Minister of Bantu Admin and Dev., Pretoria, 3 Aug. 1959.
29 Natal Archives (hereafter NA), Senior Inligtings Beampte and Bantoe Kommissaris (Bantu Affairs Commissioner's Files) (hereafter BAC), O/3, Cato Manor, Bantu Unrest, BAC to the Chief BAC, 1 Sept. 1959. See also BAC, A/4, ANC, A.J. Luthuli, "Word of the President-General Concerning Riots which Occurred as a Result of the Resistance Staged by Women in Natal, 17 Aug. 1959".
30 Ibid., NA, BAC, O/3, BAC to the Chief BAC, 1 Sept. 1959.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng, 167.
34 The New Age, 28 July 1959.
35 The New Age, 28 July 1959.
36 KCAL, KCM 55218, Notes for Meeting With Minister.
37 Ibid., 2.
38 Ibid.
41 Ibid. See also SAIRR, Days of Crisis in South Africa (SAIRR, 1960), 3.
44 KCAL, KCM 55224, Extract From Report, 15.
45 NA, BAC, O/3, Chief BAC to the Secr for BAD, 27 June 1960.
46 For the proceedings of the case, see Supreme Court Records: Manor 158.
47 SAIRR, Days of Crisis, 4.
48 Ibid., 18.
50 SAIRR, Days of Crisis, 23
51 See the debate which took place soon after the Cato Manor June riots in The House of Assembly Debates, 25 Jan 1960.
53 KCAL, KCAV 174-75, S.B. Bourquin by Mason and Collins.
54 Ibid., 9.
57 Ibid.
58 SAIRR, A Survey of Race Relations, 1962, 150.
60 SAIRR, A Survey of Race Relations, 1962, 150.
62 Ibid., 30 June 1962.
64 Ibid., 23 Mar. 1963.
65 Maasdorp and Humphreys (eds), From Shantytown, 70.
69 Ilanga Lase Natal, 12 March 1960.