MUNICIPAL HAWKING: JOHANNESBURG’S MOBILE MARKETS, 1944—1952*

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Markets, market-place trade, and food distribution in general are subjects of long-standing academic interest. Economists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and geographers have contributed to a burgeoning literature concerning, *inter alia*, the organisation and role of periodic and daily markets, their spatial and temporal synchronisation, and debates on the advantages of municipal as opposed to spontaneous markets. The historical evolution of markets and of systems of food marketing also has received considerable attention. Most recently, concern for understanding food distribution systems has channelled a growing stream of research into the ‘informal sector’ in general and into street hawking in particular. In South Africa, there have appeared recently a series of studies seeking to probe facets of the organisation and functioning of street trading in both historical and contemporary contexts.

It is the aim of this paper to contribute to this emergent literature by investigating the mobile food markets which were features of several South African cities during and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Specifically, attention is focussed on the municipal mobile markets of Johannesburg and on the rise and fall of the phenomenon of municipal hawking there. Mobile marketing (like municipal fixed suburban markets which came to nothing) is an aspect of retail marketing history, which may be traced to the marked changes in the availability and cost of consumer goods that occurred during the period of the Second World War. Evidence given by the Minister of the Interior showed that percentage price rises in the period August 1939—April 1944 had taken the following course: clothing 64%, footwear 39%, fresh milk 36%, beef 44%, mutton 40%, pork 74%, fresh fish 12%, potatoes 86%, other vegetables and fruit 64%, certain grades of butter and cheese 13%, groceries 57%. As is typical, inflated food prices most seriously affected the living standards of the poor. National and municipal governments as well as private individuals responded in various ways to this situation. Efforts of the national government included the regulation of both food supplies and prices. In 1942 the State formed the Food Control Organisation which later assumed responsibility for initiating food depots and mobile markets established in Pretoria and Cape Town. Two years later the position

BACKGROUND AND PLANNING

The origins of mobile food marketing in South Africa may be traced to the marked changes in the availability and cost of consumer goods that occurred during the period of the Second World War. Evidence given by the Minister of the Interior showed that percentage price rises in the period August 1939—April 1944 had taken the following course: clothing 64%, footwear 39%, fresh milk 36%, beef 44%, mutton 40%, pork 74%, fresh fish 12%, potatoes 86%, other vegetables and fruit 64%, certain grades of butter and cheese 13%, groceries 57%. As is typical, inflated food prices most seriously affected the living standards of the poor. National and municipal governments as well as private individuals responded in various ways to this situation. Efforts of the national government included the regulation of both food supplies and prices. In 1942 the State formed the Food Control Organisation which later assumed responsibility for initiating food depots and mobile markets established in Pretoria and Cape Town. Two years later the position

We thank Mr P. Stickler for preparing the diagram which accompan


*The Star*, 11.11.1944.

*Pretoria News*, 20.1.1945 and 5.7.1948; *The Cape Times*, 20.2.1945.
of Food Controller was created. At the municipal level, mobile markets were introduced in Johannesburg, Durban, Germiston, and East London. These last-named markets under municipal aegis must be distinguished from those state-sponsored markets operating in Cape Town and Pretoria. Functioning also at the local scale to temper the effects of price increases, the Johannesburg Social Welfare Department launched vegetable clubs, communal restaurants, and canteens in 1944. In addition, it was responsible for distributing surplus produce from the wholesale market at Newtown and dispensing state-aided milk, butter, fruit, and vegetable supplies through the food depots. Paralleling these attempts by national and municipal governments were the spontaneous privately-organised efforts, articulated through the People's Food Clubs; they sprang up in Johannesburg during the 1940s and sought to harness the advantages of bulk purchase of foods from the wholesale market.

The introduction of mobile markets under municipal control was, perhaps, the most notable of several responses to the inflation of food prices which occurred during the Second World War. In March 1944 the Johannesburg City Council decided to inaugurate a novel scheme for selling fruit, vegetables, eggs, and butter from a mobile van. The scheme was to be financially self-supporting, with produce priced at a little over the daily wholesale market price so as to cover operating costs. In the first instance the mobile market was to serve poor Whites unable to attend the wholesale market in Newtown and obliged to purchase supplies at inflated prices from the limited stocks held at suburban shops or peddled by hawkers. It was anticipated that if the mobile market was a success, others would enter service, and that mobile marketing would be extended to include middle-income suburbs. Also the possibility was mooted of introducing municipal mobile marketing into the Black townships where the very poorest section of Johannesburg’s community lived. However, in this regard, the reported remarks of Johannesburg’s Market Master reflect both a patronising attitude and commercial motives: "The market should consider getting lorries or vans to take surplus produce to the native townships. The non-European population provides an enormous field for consumption. Bringing more and better produce to the native would improve their health and happiness and open up valuable new markets for the producer".

The first mobile market was at first to serve selected White suburbs in an experimental weekly cycle of six routes. A motor bus, which had previously been converted from a municipal passenger bus into a medical station for the Civilian Protection Service, was bought for use as the mobile market van; it cost £200, conversion £328. The van was equipped with storage space for...
soon stretched supplies and interrupted the itinerary. Replenishment stocks were taken to the mobile market by a second feeder van. Further sales assistance was called, and officials went ahead of the mobile van to inform others of delay. Trestle tables were set up at the second stop so as to expedite sales of small purchases. At the end of the day the mobile market had made only four of its eleven scheduled stops, serving more than 1 000 people.

The pattern established on the first day of trading was repeated on each of the other routes. Stops varied from between 1 1/2 hours to 5 hours, and the feeder van became a feature of mobile marketing. The number of staff was increased and schedules were redesigned so that successively fewer stops were planned and publicised for each day. Whereas eleven stops had been scheduled for the first and second days, the number planned for the fifth day was four, and for the sixth (a half-day) three. The second-day market cycle was to take the mobile market through the southern suburbs: Glenesk, La Rochelle, Regents Park, The Hill, The Hill Extension, Rosettenville, Townsvie, and Kenilworth. Less ambitious and more practicable routes planned for subsequent daily tours were through Jeppie and Troyville, through Fordsburg, Mayfair, Brixton and Vrededorp, through Doornfontein, Bertrams, Judiths Paarl and Bezuidenhout Valley, and through Forest Hill, Booyens and Ophirton (Fig. 1).

The first week of experimental trading was a resounding success. More than 5 000 people were served and the Market Master was officially asked to prepare a second mobile van for use within a fortnight. The success of the mobile marketing scheme received a wide and very favourable press in which considerable space was devoted to quoting patron reactions and to listing fruit and vegetable prices on the mobile van. Broadly speaking, prices were between 25% and 50% lower than those at which shops and hawkers were selling, and quality was reputedly superior. Prices varied daily in concert with market conditions; those given in Table 1 provide a fair comparison between prices charged by hawkers and the mobile market in the early days of the programme.

Whereas the instant success of mobile marketing received a warm welcome from promoters and patrons alike, others were openly critical of the project. Before the mobile van had even served one person, the scheme

TABLE 1
COMPARATIVE PRICES FOR FRUIT AND VEGETABLES
SOLD BY HAWKERS AND MOBILE MARKETS,
JOHANNESBURG, JULY 1944*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit or Vegetable</th>
<th>Mobile market</th>
<th>Hawkers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beans</td>
<td>4d/1b.*</td>
<td>5d - 9d/1b.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peas</td>
<td>4d/1b.</td>
<td>6d - 9d/1b.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>6d/1b.</td>
<td>6d - 9d/1b.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naartjes</td>
<td>1s/14.</td>
<td>1s/6 - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pineapples</td>
<td>4d - 6d ea.</td>
<td>6d - 9d ea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cauliflowers</td>
<td>1s - 2s ea.</td>
<td>9d - 1s 6d ea. (poor quality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onions</td>
<td>1s/4.5 lb.</td>
<td>1s/2.5 lb. - 5 lb.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Rand Daily Mail, 14.7.1944
**1 lb. = approx. 0.45 kg

22. The Star, 22.6.1944.
23. Rand Daily Mail, 22.6.1944.
26. Ibid.; see also The Star, 24.6.1944, 25.6.1944 and 27.6.1944.
27. The Star, 27.6.1944.
28. The Star, 22.6.1944; Rand Daily Mail, 23.6.1944.
was reported to have “caused a flutter in the dovecotes of private enterprise, which sees in it a threat to its livelihood”. From the start, the City Council had indeed been obliged to defend its proposal along the lines that it was not its intention to eliminate private enterprise. Rather, mobile marketing was being introduced to fill a need and to set a fair price which would curb the exploitation of temporary shortages by private entrepreneurs. This defence was to be reiterated on several occasions.

Scurvely three weeks after mobile marketing was launched, a letter to the press pointed out that municipal trading adversely affected ‘hundreds’ of fruit shops and Indian and White hawkers. A survey reported in October 1945 showed that in Johannesburg there were 414 hawkers and peddlars, 27 Portuguese market garden shops, and 137 shops trading in fruit and vegetables. Fruit and vegetable hawkers apparently did not initiate any formal protest about the introduction of mobile markets. A member of the South African Fresh Produce Dealers’ Association, however, did confront the City Council with charges of illegal and unfair competition. Issued after two months of municipal hawking, the charges rested on, inter alia, a claim that the practice was not its intention to eliminate private enterprise. Rather, mobile marketing was being introduced to fill a need and to set a fair price which would curb the exploitation of temporary shortages by private entrepreneurs. This defence was to be reiterated on several occasions.

In their first six months of operation mobile markets made a considerable impact on fruit and vegetable selling in Johannesburg. The value of fresh produce increased to 60% within two months of trading. It was also asserted that in fruit and vegetable selling which “economic experience has demonstrated to be particularly suitable for small scale traders”, it was a safe assumption that costs per unit turnover were higher for the municipality than for private traders. It was suggested that absence of the profit motive in municipal trading meant that there was no incentive to minimise costs. Moreover, the Chamber claimed that it was “not difficult for a municipality to charge prices somewhat lower than those charged by the private trader, for the municipality has the power to debit some of the costs incurred to public funds . . .”. Finally, the Chamber argued that the service of the municipal markets was limited by virtue of their not dealing in all commodities which were scarce (e.g. meat), that they were immune to hawker regulations and that they enjoyed the benefit of free press ‘advertising’. Indeed, by the end of 1944 more than 2 000 lines of single column news reporting had been devoted to local coverage of the proposal and implementation of municipal mobile marketing.

In the first six months of operation mobile markets made a considerable impact on fruit and vegetable selling in Johannesburg. The value of fresh produce which had been purchased for sale in the mobile markets was over £13 000, and sales totalled nearly £16 000; early trading losses had been reversed. Over 100 000 people had been served, the monthly total being highest at the peak of the potato shortage in October when 31 000 patrons were served. Potato availability was indeed key to the success of the mobile markets: a report in February 1945 pointed out that “when potato supplies returned to normal, the patronage of mobile markets dropped to 34% in one month”. Patrons' dislike for queuing. In addition there occurred shrewd marketing practices by some suburban retailers: “many dealers have reduced their prices to those of the mobile market, or even lower, on the day it operates in their area”.

Included in the Chamber of Commerce's statement of November 1944, was the observation that prices at mobile markets were no longer lower than in shops. This was endorsed by another report which revealed that the original markup of between 25% and 30% had increased to 60% within two months of trading. It was also asserted that in fruit and vegetable selling which “economic experience has demonstrated to be particularly suitable for small scale traders”, it was a safe assumption that costs per unit turnover were higher for the municipality than for private traders. It was suggested that absence of the profit motive in municipal trading meant that there was no incentive to minimise costs. Moreover, the Chamber claimed that it was “not difficult for a municipality to charge prices somewhat lower than those charged by the private trader, for the municipality has the power to debit some of the costs incurred to public funds . . .”. Finally, the Chamber argued that the service of the municipal markets was limited by virtue of their not dealing in all commodities which were scarce (e.g. meat), that they were immune to hawker regulations and that they enjoyed the benefit of free press ‘advertising’. Indeed, by the end of 1944 more than 2 000 lines of single column news reporting had been devoted to local coverage of the proposal and implementation of municipal mobile marketing.

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29 Rand Daily Mail. 10.4.1944.
30 The Star. 6.10.1944 and 29.1.1945.
34 Ibid.
36 J.C.C. Minutes. 1945. 182.
37 The Star. 29.1.1945.
38 The Star. 29.9.1944: Letter to editor.
39 Johannesburg’s mobile market, op. cit.
40 Rand Daily Mail. 22.11.1944.
41 The Star. 6.10.1944.
42 The Cape Times. 15.2.1945.
43 Rand Daily Mail. 22.11.1944.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 J.C.C. Minutes. 1945. 181.
47 The Star. 29.11.1945.
48 Ibid.
49 The Cape Times. 15.2.1945.
 Patronage of the mobile markets persisted at a high level in the second half of the financial year 1944/1945. A third van was pressed into service in March 1945, some nine months after it was first announced that a third and fourth vehicle would be quickly converted and equipped.\textsuperscript{50} The third van’s first itinerary took it through the middle-income suburbs of Parktown North, Parkhurst, and Parkwood (Fig. 1);\textsuperscript{51} ratepayers in higher income areas had demanded that their suburbs in addition to lower income areas of the city should be served from municipal markets.\textsuperscript{52} At the close of the financial year in 1945, the mobile markets had served over 172 000 people, incurring a net loss of some £1600 (Table 2). The operating loss led to an objection (which was defeated) by a handful of City Councillors to the mobilisation of a fourth van. Pointing to the cumulative loss in excess of £1 000 by August 1945, introduction of another van was judged “an absurd wastage of public money”.\textsuperscript{53} Mobile marketing continued despite the dim financial record. By contrast the Johannesburg City Council closed its fixed central city retail market which in seven months of trading, beginning in September 1944, accumulated a net loss of nearly £1 500.\textsuperscript{54}

\begin{table}
\caption{Marketing Record, Johannesburg Mobile Markets, 1944/45—1951/52*}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Financial & No. of & Turnover & Net profit & Net loss &
year & customers & £. s. d. & £. s. d. & £. s. d. &
\hline
1944/1945 & 172 216 & 25 947. 5. 5 & 716. 1. 0 & 967. 1. 3 &
1945/1946 & 190 000 & 37 878. 6. 9 & 1 179. 6. 8 & 1 957. 4. 0 &
1946/1947 & 220 000 & 60 979. 9. 0 & 756.17. 6. & 357. 0. 8 &
1947/1948 & 328 758 & 95 573. 5. 1 & 81. 2. 9 & 1 705. 9. 7 &
1949/1950 & 277 634 & 78 287. 3. 2 & 1 762. 12. 3 & 5 862. 0. 8 &
1950/1951 & 220 418 & 71 804. 19. 3 & 1 705. 9. 7 & 5 862. 12. 3 &
1951/1952* & 117 649 & 57 996. 2. 6 & 1 705. 9. 7 & 5 862. 12. 3 &
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

* Johannesburg City Council, Mayor’s minute, 1951/52, p.171
** Ten months only

FROM SUCCESS TO COLLAPSE, 1945—1952

In the period 1945/1948 mobile marketing was financially self-supporting (Table 2) and talk of the death of the scheme following the first year of loss subsided. There were few press reports during these years; it seemed as if something had been for some hope of a revival. Interested in such a revival the Housewives League pleaded for a year’s grace before reconsidering closure, and called on the City Council to equip the mobile markets with more adequate supplies and to operate the vans more punctually.\textsuperscript{60} In addition the Market Master attempted to trim the wage bill and the high operating costs. In March 1951 economy measures reduced the staff complement to seven drivers, twelve Black and nine White assistants.\textsuperscript{61} The large deficit would have been sufficient to drive the mobile markets from the streets had it not been for some hope of a revival. Interested in such a revival the Housewives League pleaded for a year’s grace before reconsidering closure, and called on the City Council to equip the mobile markets with more adequate supplies and to operate the vans more punctually.\textsuperscript{61} In addition the Market Master attempted to trim the wage bill and the high operating costs. In March 1951 economy measures reduced the staff complement to seven drivers, twelve Black and nine White assistants, and reduced the number of vans from seven to six.\textsuperscript{62}

Resuscitation of the mobile markets failed, and a record massive deficit loomed in 1951/1952. Finally, in March 1952 the decision was taken to discontinue mobile municipal marketing. Heavy financial losses were given as the prime reason. These were attributed to high and rising operating costs, to more plentiful supplies of fruit to, those operated by the City Council. This practice was apt to be confusing for patrons of municipal vans, and the City Council was sometimes wrongly criticised for selling items only on condition that others were purchased as well, a practice which the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce nonetheless asked the Price Controller to investigate.\textsuperscript{55} Moreover, there were (reportedly) mid-directed complaints of high prices, inferior produce, and indifferent service on the municipal vans.\textsuperscript{57} The generally changed circumstances at the turn of the decade were summarised as follows by Johannesburg’s Market Master: “The time has now passed when housewives and their servants queued up for the arrival of the mobile markets — the mobile markets now have to look for customers in keen competition with shopkeepers, market gardeners, and hawkers, and it is only by improving efficiency and constant supervision that the service continues to operate. It is felt that the mobile markets are playing their part in keeping down the cost of living as they are still regarded as a barometer for retail prices of fruit and vegetables. It is apparent, however, that many housewives still prefer to have their fruit and vegetables delivered to them and to pay their accounts monthly irrespective of the prices charged ...”\textsuperscript{59} The useful role of the mobile markets as an index of fair selling prices was cited frequently. For example, as early as February 1945 it was countered that “a price corrective for the retail trade ... could be achieved just as effectively and much more cheaply in another way.”\textsuperscript{59}

The net financial loss in 1950/1951 was more than £1 700. Unlike the previous financial year in which there had been four months of loss and eight of profit, in 1950/1951 there were ten months of loss. During that year there were seven vans in operation, attended by a staff of eight drivers, seventeen Black and fifteen White assistants.\textsuperscript{60} The large deficit would have been sufficient to drive the mobile markets from the streets had it not been for some hope of a revival. Interested in such a revival the Housewives League pleaded for a year’s grace before reconsidering closure, and called on the City Council to equip the mobile markets with more adequate supplies and to operate the vans more punctually.\textsuperscript{61} In addition the Market Master attempted to trim the wage bill and the high operating costs. In March 1951 economy measures reduced the staff complement to seven drivers, twelve Black and nine White assistants, and reduced the number of vans from seven to six.\textsuperscript{62}

50. The Star, 29.6.1944.
52. J.C.C., Mayor’s minute, 1950/51, p.164.
55. Libertas 7(2), 1947, p.5.
58. J.C.C., Mayor’s minute, 1949/50, p.184.
59. The Cape Times, 15.2.1949.
60. J.C.C., Mayor’s minute, 1950/51, p.165.
and vegetables, to the increased absence of housewives from home, and to the intense competition from private hawkers whose advantages included door-to-door delivery and trade on credit. Not all were content to let explanations rest there, and the Rand Daily Mail, which had consistently championed mobile marketing, submitted that poor patronage was partly the fault of the Council itself: "...The Council conducted the mobile markets in a half-hearted manner, without foresight or business acumen.... the Council is to blame for not 'selling' the mobile markets to the public". The case for terminating mobile marketing was the clearer in view of the pattern of patronage. Fewer than five percent of the White population of Johannesburg were using the service, and of that number eighty percent were from the higher income suburbs in northern and eastern Johannesburg. Outside of these areas, in suburbs which the mobile markets had originally been intended to serve, patronage was highest in Kensington. In a curious turn about, the raison d'être of municipal hawking had been negated. Nothing had ever come of the proposal that the very poorest people in Johannesburg, the Black township residents, should be served by the municipal mobile markets. Indeed, the townships failed to benefit even from the half-hearted proposal to funnel into these areas surplus produce from the mobile markets. Rather, the Johannesburg City Council chose to sell such surplus to farmers for pig feed.

CONCLUSION

The bold experiment of municipal mobile marketing in Johannesburg was unique in South Africa when it began in 1944. Municipal hawking as practised in Johannesburg had few, if any, parallels elsewhere. In the course of eight years of operations, the mobile markets served upwards of 1 740 000 customers and turned over more than 469 000 of produce. Introduced so as to make scarce fruit and vegetable supplies more available and accessible to the city's poor Whites, the mobile markets had a chequered history. Patronage rose steadily for five years, then declined sharply. Financial performance oscillated, being best when produce (especially potatoes) was particularly scarce. Opinions on the desirability of municipal hawking were sharply divided: users and officials were ranged against shopkeepers and private hawkers and their representative organisations. It was ultimately the City Council's insistence that mobile marketing be financially self-supporting and not a social-benefit programme that put an end to the project. As one of the several attempts to counter the high prices of food, the mobile markets were survived by the state-subsidised food distribution scheme managed by Johannesburg's Social Welfare Department. The six mobile markets in Johannesburg made their last trips on April 30, 1952.

In 1965 Hans Fransen and Mary Alexander Cook's pioneering attempt to compile a full survey of early Cape architecture was published as The old houses of the Cape. This book went out of print many years ago, but it was systematically revised and augmented by the original authors and a new edition, now entitled The old buildings of the Cape, was published in 1980.

As the subtitles suggest, the latest edition has a much wider scope than the first, being a survey and description of old buildings in the Western Province over an area of about 230 000 square kilometres; this extends from Cape Town to Calvinia in the north and to Graaff Reinet, Colesberg, and Uitenhage in the east. The 18th and 19th century buildings dealt with in this publication are mostly in the Cape Dutch, Cape Regency, Georgian, and Victorian Styles.

The introductory chapter deals with general subjects, such as the Cape Dutch ground-plan and the origin and development of the Cape gable; there is a more informative Glossary of eleven pages; and 32 chapters are devoted to an inventory of monuments, each chapter dealing with a specific area, e.g. Cape Town City, Paarl, Paarl District, Oudtshoorn, and Graaff Reinet.

The monuments are divided into three categories, indicated as such in the text: major monuments, of which there are some 200, and minor monuments (2 000). Not all the buildings in the inventory still exist, but have been included to prevent often interesting information from falling into oblivion and to indicate the rate of destruction of old buildings.

The authors set themselves the goal of giving an architectural description of each building: its type, style, kind of ground-plan, outstanding architectural features, etc. These descriptions are augmented with at least 80 photographs. Major monuments such as Government House (Tuynhuys), have understandably been described in more detail than minor monuments such as 186 Bullekeif Street.

Regional maps and town plans add to the usefulness of the publication to those who want to use it as a guide-book on a hunt for monuments.

The buildings are not listed in alphabetical order: in each chapter and sub-section public buildings are dealt with first; these are followed by private buildings arranged street-wise and according to street numbers. The somewhat exhaustive Index on architectural objects, streets, squares, towns, etc. is a valuable aid to those looking for something specific. The Bibliography, however, does not reflect all the sources consulted by the authors, as no unpublished records are listed.

Everybody interested in our South African heritage will derive as much pleasure from this beautiful publication as the serious researcher will gain information.

A.G. OBERHOLSTER
Human Sciences Research Council


In vergelyking met die meeste ander lande het Suid-Afrika 'n betreklike jong geskiedenis. Tot dan het dit 'n verre ryk aan gebeurtenisse en heldadie – drie eeu waarin manne en vroue deur valharding en mord vir hulle 'n bestaan aan hierdie Suidland onwensel en die gebied oog- gestel het. Die materiele nalatenskap van die pioniers is uiteraard beheer en in gedagtes te bewaar en in die vergetelheid te verdwyn. Op die nageslag van hierdie baanbrekers rus derhalwe 'n dure pog om hul erfenis te bewaar en in gedagtes te bou.


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