"ON THE MARGINS": THE EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS IN CAPE TOWN, 1939-1960

By

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

ANC  African National Congress
APO  African Peoples’ Organisation
AWC  Administrasie Wes-Kaapland
CAFDA Cape Flats Distress Association
CCC  Cape Town City Council
CE   City Engineer
CLPP  Coloured Labour Preference Policy
CPSA  Communist Party of South Africa
CYL  Congress Youth League
DIVCO Divisional Council of the Cape Peninsula
FSAW  Federation of South African Women
GES  Files for Department of Health
IMR  Infant Mortality Rate
MM   Mayor’s Minutes
MNA  Manager of Native Administration
MOH  Medical Officer of Health
NAC  Minutes of Native Affairs Committee (of Cape Town City Council)
NAD  Department of Native Affairs
NCSR  Native Commissioner, Salt River (Cape Town)
NP    National Party
NEUM  Non-European Unity Movement
NLL   National Liberation League
NTS   Files for Department of Native Affairs
RVC   Retreat Vigilance Committee
SABRA South African Bureau of Racial Affairs
SAIRR South African Institute of Race Relations
SAP   South African Police
SHAWCO Students’ Health And Welfare Centres Organization
TC    Town Clerk
UP    United Party
NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Terms that have historically been utilized in South Africa for defining peoples according to racial categories have in some cases been retained in this dissertation. Their appearance in this work in no way, should be construed as an effort to condone or perpetuate their use. It is, however, difficult to discuss in a meaningful way, discrete social groups in South Africa without acknowledging that people’s lives were directly impacted by the social, legal, and political force of these racial categories. In conformity with standard scholarly convention, the term “Africans” refers to the Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa who have were more commonly known as “Natives,” “the Bantu,” or “kaffirs” (a highly pejorative racist epithet) during the 1939-1960 period. The term “Coloured” encompasses a wide range of peoples with many disparate national, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds (as of course is true of Africans too). Many people designated by the term Coloured, however, reject it, and resent being depicted as a mixed-race or mulatto people. In recognition of the fact that the term is fraught with ideological difficulties, some scholars refer to Coloureds as “so-called Coloureds” or encapsulate the term in quotation marks. In a related fashion, the term appears in the present work as Coloured, setting it apart from its more standard spelling in American English without a “u,” and at the same time, removing any ambiguity to which this word’s past application to Americans of African descent may give rise. The term “Indian” describes those people
whose ancestors came from India, primarily in the latter half of the nineteenth century
(although this group can also be referred to in South Africa as “Asian”). Collectively,
Africans, Coloureds, and Indians are referred to as “black.” Where potentially offensive
terms such as “Native,” “Bantu,” “kaffir,” “non-white,” or “non-European” appear in
quotes or quotation marks, they are included for the sake of accuracy.
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“ON THE MARGINS”: THE EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE GREATER CAPE TOWN AREA, 1939-1960

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This dissertation explores how African squatters overcame the interrelated evils of poverty and state repression to transform their squalid settlements into vibrant and cohesive communities in the Cape Town area during the 1939-1960 period. Migrating to Cape Town in search of better employment opportunities, new African arrivals were relegated to the city’s periphery without benefit of the most basic municipal services. From social, legal, and spatial perspectives, squatters were marginal.

The presence of numerous, densely populated irregular squatter settlements just beyond the jurisdictional control of municipal authorities, caused widespread alarm among officials and the white public. Although a coherent, well-coordinated strategy to eradicate squatters failed to emerge until the mid-1950s, from the early 1940s forward, local and government authorities repeatedly sought to reassert control over this seemingly ungovernable population which defied state hegemony by its very existence.
The state’s repressive measures proved short-sighted, and more importantly, self-deceiving. In attempting to limit the growth of squatter settlements, the state inadvertently encouraged Africans to converge in large numbers on the borders of Cape Town. The tens of thousands of Africans who massed on the city’s boundaries not only succeeded in creating an island of relative freedom for themselves, their very presence underscored the limits of state power.

In opting to evade the repressive scrutiny of state-sanctioned townships in favor of squatter camps, Africans were often animated by a desire to preserve a semblance of a normal home environment. Since it was difficult otherwise for an African woman to cohabit with her husbands in Cape Town, squatter camps offered Africans a unique opportunity to maintain the integrity of family life.

The intense insecurity to which squatters were subject, however, not only rendered life exceptionally precarious and stressful, it undermined the potential militancy that squatters might otherwise have exhibited in response to municipal neglect, police harassment, forced removals, and abject poverty. The widespread discontent surrounding these hardships rarely coalesced into mass protest since squatters were generally too harried and concerned with the more immediate task of preserving their tenuous foothold in Cape Town to embrace militancy, and thereby jeopardize their status.
1 INTRODUCTION

The present work examines the lived experiences of urban African squatters and traces the cultural landscape of the squatter communities that arose and spread out over the Cape Town region during the 1940s and 1950s. Although its emphasis favors an interpretation of squatting with respect to its social, cultural, and spatial dimensions, it also recognizes the inherently political and economic facets of squatting. While, in many instances, individual squatter camps are discussed with a view to highlighting their unique specificities, this work’s focus is directed toward elucidating the general nature of the squatting phenomenon among Africans throughout the Cape Town area.

The dissertation seeks to offer insight into several inter-related questions concerning the nature of squatting in Cape Town. For instance, what factors accounted for the rapid growth of squatter camps in the Cape Town area? Why specifically did Africans take up residence in substandard structures amid the horrid conditions that characterized squatter camps? What strategies did they employ to transform these squalid camps into close-knit and orderly societies? How did state officials respond to the threat squatters ostensibly posed and how effective was this response? Did squatters resist their oppression and what forms did this take within the context of squatter camps? Finally, in reference to this work’s sub-title, in what ways did squatters live “on the margins”?

1
In seeking recourse in squatting, African migrants opted for an explicit and well-considered strategy of eschewing state supervision over their lives in favor of personal autonomy. Despite all the liabilities of squatter life, squatter settlements offered Africans space for a range of activities either severely curtailed or altogether prohibited elsewhere in Cape Town. For example, in squatter camps Africans could engage in the informal economy, with beer brewing, the itinerant hawking of foodstuffs and items of convenience, and prostitution serving as the most common economic pursuits of this sector.

The unintended consequence of the state’s ongoing efforts to rid Cape Town of squatters was the emergence of the very predicament officials so zealously sought to forestall. Numerous, densely populated irregular squatter settlements sprang up just beyond the jurisdictional control of municipal authorities, causing widespread alarm among officials and the white public. Although a coherent, well-coordinated strategy to eradicate squatters failed to emerge until the mid-1950s, from the early 1940s forward, local and government authorities repeatedly sought to reassert control over this seemingly ungovernable population which defied state hegemony by its very existence.

In utilizing slum clearance and police harassment to hound squatters out of the numerous enclaves they inhabited, officials produced an unforeseen result. Although the initiative achieved a reasonable measure of success in cleansing the city of many squatters, the remedy it effected proved more objectionable than the original problem. Instead of a scattered presence of squatters throughout Cape Town, authorities had to contend with large concentrations of squatters massed in overcrowded settlements not readily amenable
to state control. Efforts to regulate the lives of Africans in the Western Cape would continue to prove abortive as long as Africans could seek refuge in irregular, poorly policed settlements adjoining Cape Town’s municipal boundaries. Instead of eradicating squatter camps, such clumsy state attempts at social engineering greatly acerbated the problem by providing Africans with a powerful incentive to settle just beyond the ambit of the City of Cape Town’s control.

In escaping to the relative haven of the squatter camps, Africans were animated partly by a self-conscious strategy to evade state supervision, and partly by the simple necessity of locating a place of habitation. Taking up residence in a shack on the periphery of Cape Town was often the only choice available to squatters who endured abject poverty and lacked the economic means to rent an apartment or room in the built environment. The latter option was normally not open to Africans, who in most cases, lacked the legal right to reside in the Cape Town area outside of state-sanctioned townships, hostels, and locations. As well, for thousands of African women and men anxious to live together in family units under a single roof, squatter camps offered virtually the only alternative in the urban landscape.

The price paid by Africans who resorted to squatting as a strategy to elude state surveillance and to cohabit with their spouses and children was high. In economic terms, the price was inflated as a result of the exploitative practices of rapacious landlords and local shop owners, combined with the prohibitive costs of public transport to places of employment. In other, non-monetary terms, the cost included exposure to the sometimes harsh natural elements and highly unsanitary conditions which significantly compromised
the physical health of squatters. Their psychological well-being also came under direct assault in the face of an unceasing attempt by state officials to induce a sense of impermanence. Through a calculated program of harassment, principally in the form of police raids for liquor and pass law violations and of forced removals, the state created a tense climate of uncertainty among squatters.

Curiously, this incessant onslaught did not serve as a catalyst for widespread protest and resistance. Although Africans bitterly resented the inhumane and demeaning harassment to which they were subjected, the efforts of political activists to rally Africans in demonstrations of defiance to state oppression were unsuccessful, generally speaking. The failure of squatters to mobilize in a concerted manner to express their discontent and to effect relief from their oppression was an indication of the profound insecurity that squatters experienced. Fearful of imperiling their already tenuous claims to residence in the city, African squatters, as the most vulnerable of Cape Town’s inhabitants, studiously avoided conflict with the authorities. The outcome of such a clash could entail dire consequences, both for the active participant and his or her family.

While state repression and the dehumanizing squalor of squatter camps did not actuate well-coordinated mass resistance, these conditions did promote a pervasive sense of mutuality among squatters. This found expression in mutual aid societies dedicated to offering fellowship, a means by which to save money, and a network of support to which squatters could turn in times of crisis. Even where formal associations were not in place, squatters who shared experiences of deprivation and oppression, frequently came to each others’ assistance. This prevailing ethos of neighborliness was instrumental in muting the
harshest features of squatter life and transforming haphazard patchworks of shacks into communities bound together by ties of affection and a sense of common affliction.

The hardships and sordidness of squatter life were further mitigated by the numerous expressions of urban culture that squatters adopted. Based in large part around liquor, music, sport, and fellowship, Africans from many parts of southern Africa created syncretic forms of entertainment, recreation, social organization, and religious worship that borrowed from many varied cultures. Despite their many ethnic, regional, and language-speaking differences, squatters demonstrated considerable mutual toleration, and for the most part, camps were notable for the high degree of social cohesion among inhabitants.

In short, although faced with insurmountable odds, Africans managed to carve out a unique space for themselves in the Cape Town area. Despite the polluted and appalling conditions of camps, squatters succeeded in making them livable environments, remarkable for their cultural vitality and the close-knit relations enjoyed by inhabitants. Squatter camps were not merely labor reservoirs or human rubbish heaps; they were communities purposely sited in spaces beyond the purview of the state.

The spatiality of squatting often serves as subtext for much of the dissertation. Squatters were marginalized as Africans, as urban proletarians, as rural migrants, and where it applied, as women. In the most obvious sense, they suffered spatial marginalization, as their settlements progressively were extruded to the periphery of Cape Town and various others cities in South Africa. This marginalization was more than symbolic--it negatively affected the everyday lives of Africans in a multitude of ways, and
made problematic their very existence. The resulting physical isolation that they endured greatly heightened their immiseration, as they lacked access to affordable and efficient transportation and basic services such as water, waste removal, and electricity. It also served to reinforce their status as third-class, quasi-citizens, banished to the outer boundaries of the built environment.

Squatters were also marginal in a legal sense, in that they were denied the statutory right to reside on the land which they occupied and constantly lived under the threat of expulsion and police raids. Periodically, land owners who rented to squatters were prosecuted for this land-use violation in an ongoing attempt to discourage the practice. More to the point, squatters might be awakened in the middle of the night, hauled off to the police station, and subsequently fined. The uncertain and precarious nature of squatter life exacted a high toll in terms of psychic unease, social dislocation, and personal humiliation.

As an illegal act, squatting represented a manifest defiance of state efforts to impose control on the movements and living circumstances of Africans. The periodic outbreaks of protest and violence that arose among squatters articulated a vehement rejection of their subordination, and a refusal to acquiesce quietly to the destruction of their shacks and to their own physical relocation. Additionally, the dynamic cultural life that took root in the city’s many squatter camps gave expression to a spirit of defiance, one that subtly manifested itself in Africanist churches, music, sport, criminal gangs, and social organizations. Since most avenues for formal, mass-based resistance were
unattractive to squatters owing to the prohibitive risks involved, protest was channeled into covert, less confrontational forms.

Although resistance can certainly be read into the efforts of squatters to evade government control through the act of squatting, the thrust of this dissertation does not deal directly with African resistance as such. As a subject of inquiry, the scholarly literature on African resistance is more ample than in most fields and a number of works have addressed this issue with respect to Cape Town already. Perhaps owing in part to the undue amount of scholarly attention focused on resistance and political mobilization among urban Africans, the social and cultural dimensions of African urban communities cannot claim an especially rich historiography.¹

The marginalization of squatters was also a gendered process. Most shacks were home to women squatters, whether they functioned as the heads of households, or were in the company of a husband or male companion. As the pace of African urbanization accelerated from the late 1930s onward, women came to comprise a disproportionately large percentage of the newcomers to Cape Town. They were drawn to cities like Cape Town in search of employment, better health care and education, excitement, and greater personal autonomy. Moreover, African women and men resorted to squatting in Cape Town as a conscious strategy to preserve the integrity of their families. As housing accommodation for Africans in the city diminished during the 1940s and 1950s, the only viable option left open to African migrants wishing to cohabit with their spouses was to

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take up residence in one of the city’s squatter camps. Not coincidentally, the Native Affairs Department (NAD) and local Cape authorities, associated increased immigration of African women with the growth of squatter camps, and took active measures to limit the number of women filtering into Cape Town.

**Parameters of the Study**

The primary chronological focus of the dissertation is bounded by the years 1939-1960, although Chapter 2 provides an overview of squatting in Cape Town prior to 1939. While partially arbitrary, the choice of the years 1939 and 1960 as starting and ending points is informed by a coherent set of reasons. Massive African urbanization and its concomitant, squatting, began in earnest in the late 1930s, partly as a result of the huge surge in employment opportunities created by the outbreak of World War II. For the first time, squatting among Africans became a widespread phenomenon, one that excited genuine concern among several political elements within Cape Town.

Several factors recommend 1960 as a natural watershed that offers a measure of closure for the present subject. By that year, the vast majority of squatters had been relocated to the newly constructed townships of Nyanga and Guguletu, and squatter camps, insofar as they still existed, had lost their vibrancy and sense of community. As well, from the perspective of political developments, 1960 represented an unmistakable turning point. In the aftermath of the Sharpeville and Langa riots, the apartheid government stepped up state repression, and with the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress, a relative political quiescence among black
opposition groups settled over South Africa during the 1960s. The black opposition movement, which drew much of its strength and militancy by harnessing the discontent of the African masses inhabiting squatter settlements, was undermined significantly through the systematic neutralization of its squatter constituency.

As the term is employed in this dissertation, squatting refers to the occupation of a makeshift structure in violation of municipal housing codes. In the vast majority of cases, squatters did not own the land on which they erected their shacks (or as most South Africans say, “pondokkies”). They either paid a rent to the owner of private land, or simply established themselves on unoccupied public land. To avoid a connotation of illegality and the normative judgments that attach themselves to that kind of conceptualization of squatting, some commentators who write on squatting prefer to employ the term “informal settlements.” The latter term, however, tends to broaden the scope of what could be included under that heading, and also glosses over what was an essential component of squatting, namely its illegality. Not only were African squatters violating municipal housing ordinances, in many cases, they lacked the statutory right even to reside in the Cape Town area owing to restrictive laws governing the presence of Africans in cities.

This work further narrows its focus to a consideration of squatting primarily with respect to sizeable squatter camps in the Cape Town area. African and Coloured people lived in shacks at various locales, most notably in the backyards of residential lots, small vacant parcels of land within the city, and on the slopes of local mountains. While the persons inhabiting the irregular structures in these pockets were undoubtedly squatters,
they did not represent a significant numerical portion of the overall squatter population. More fundamentally, this dissertation is primarily concerned with exploring the social and cultural dynamics of squatter communities. The ephemeral, tiny enclaves of squatters that periodically sprang up and just as quickly disappeared, in sundry quarters of the Cape Town area do not lend themselves as well to a study of this kind.

This dissertation confines itself to an exploration of the squatting experience of Africans. Although there were only a mere handful of white and Indian squatters, Coloured people comprised an appreciable percentage of squatters in the Western Cape. Although Coloured squatters are discussed in the context of their relations with their African counterparts, the focus of the study is directed toward Africans. Two considerations, one conceptual and the other logistical account for this approach. First, African and Coloured squatters were not confronted with the same social, legal, and political realities. Despite the common bond they shared as squatters, the Coloured population had access to superior opportunities at the work place, the polling station, and with respect to a wide range of rights and liberties. Second, expanding the scope of the study to include Coloured squatters would not have allowed adequate space for a full examination of the African experience.

This work is also limited by lacunae in archival and oral sources; hence some issues do not receive the attention they might otherwise warrant. For instance, this dissertation can provide little exposition of class differentiation among squatters. While it seems reasonable to assume that varying degrees of wealth and status were meaningful to squatters of the 1940s and 1950s, such divisions and gradations are difficult to chart some
40 to 60 years later, particularly since the archival record provides only scant evidence of these variations. The testimony of squatters did little to elucidate this field of inquiry, since most former squatters tended to stress solidarity across class, ethnic, and race lines. If at times, it appears that the dissertation treats squatters as a uniform mass in economic and class terms, it would be useful to bear in mind that historically such was not the case.

Other differences, for instance, those relating to culture, degree of assimilation, education, and town-rootedness are better borne out in source materials, and for that reason, tend to be highlighted more fully in the dissertation.

This dissertation does not devote very much attention to the ideological and jurisdictional tensions animating relations between the local authorities--i.e., Cape Town City Council (CCC) and the Division of the Cape Peninsula (Divco)--and the central government. Their relationship was fraught with discord and stress as members of these two power blocs advocated conflicting prescriptive remedies concerning the appropriate policy in response to Cape Town’s burgeoning African population. Residents of Cape Town proudly regarded their city as more tolerant and progressive regarding relations among South Africa’s different peoples. Although problematic, the myth of Cape Town’s putative liberal nature still exercised a powerful hold on how local authorities perceived themselves and their popular mandate. The shaping of policy toward African squatters followed a torturous and inconsistent path owing to the struggle among different authorities to formulate a coherent program of action.

In studying African squatters, the temptation to chronicle the state’s response to this “problem” was difficult to resist. The overwhelming weight of the archival evidence
provided abundant insight into how officials perceived squatting and what measures they undertook to limit and regularize the phenomenon. The perspective, however, offered by hundreds of memoranda, letters, reports, and minutes of commission reports was strait-jacketed in a narrow discursive paradigm that designated rapid African urbanization as pathological, undesirable, and always, profoundly alarming. Embedded in the correspondence of government officials (primarily with respect to the departments of Native Affairs, Health, and the South African Police, and among local authorities--the Manager of Native Administration, City Engineer, Medical Officer of Health, and City Councillors) was an unmistakable discourse that addressed “the Native problem” in a manner that was meaningful to the men who conversed in the idiom. The officials who participated in this ongoing conversation took for granted that a large African presence in Cape Town was an unwelcome development, only to be tolerated insofar as African laborers continued to be necessary in meeting the needs of industry for inexpensive, unskilled labor.

Archival records are useful in locating where squatters resided, the scale of squatting (however unrealistically low such estimates invariably were), and how squatters interacted with officialdom. But of their lives, at least when squatters were not being harassed for erecting their shacks illegally or arrested for pass law or liquor infractions, official records reveal little despite the volume of data documenting urban Africans. Had the present dissertation been centrally concerned with squatting from the perspective of how the state tackled the phenomenon, then the archival materials at hand would have been admirably suited to the task. Instead, the study’s orientation aims at shedding light on
the everyday lives of squatters, while tracing the social and cultural contours of squatter communities. For this task, much of the written record was unhelpful, although it did serve to provide a skeletal outline of the historical development of squatting in the Cape Town region.

Comments on Oral Histories

To track how squatters actually lived, how they contended with the series of structural disabilities that they faced, and what kind of associations and institutions they formed, the oral testimonies of former squatters proved invaluable. Informants offered insights into aspects of squatter life on which archival documents were silent otherwise. Armed with a background knowledge of the chronological sequence of events with respect to the emergence of squatter camps from written sources, it was possible to determine the relative accuracy and faithfulness of oral evidence supplied by interviewees.

Locating informants involved drawing on the network of contacts among individuals who worked for philanthropic organizations and were engaged in outreach among Cape Town’s townships and present-day squatter camps. After having chanced upon one informant, the “snowball method” of finding additional informants was employed: that person was asked for the name of another potential interviewee and invariably complied with one or two prospects. As well, recourse to inhabitants of the various institutions for the care of Cape Town’s elderly proved an especially worthwhile source of informants. Most of the former squatters were very pleased to contribute to the research project and expressed satisfaction with the goals of the study that were explained
to them and spelled out in the document of consent, which they signed to release rights to publish the interviews, and where desirable, their names.\textsuperscript{2} They believed that their accounts, detailing how they, as the first generation among their families to establish a permanent abode in Cape Town, were important and ought to be preserved for posterity. For most, posterity seemed to be conceptualized first and foremost to include their families, and after that, the greater South African community. The desire to have their narratives recorded in a written history, to be published at a later date, appeared to be a less direct, somewhat abstract, and possibly dubious goal.

Invariably the elderly women and men interviewed lamented the fact that their children and grandchildren did not know how they struggled against considerable obstacles as pioneers forging new lives in the city, never asked them about their plight, and generally were indifferent to such histories. The opportunity to offer their observations and the particulars of their personal experiences appealed to many who were anxious that the telling of their stories be accurately recorded. In an inchoate manner, their participation acknowledged that the history of the period under examination mattered, and that they were determined to construct that history in a fashion faithful to their experiences.\textsuperscript{3} The permission of most informants to have their photographs taken and published in this work (or in a future publication) further underlined their commitment to

\textsuperscript{2} A copy of the Consent Document is available in Appendix II.

\textsuperscript{3} Informants were not offered any compensation, except where they agreed to be photographed, a framed copy of the photograph was provided to them.
contributing their voices to their histories, and being active participants in its making.\textsuperscript{4} This willingness to be associated personally with their testimony and their participation as squatters also indicated a great deal of pride in their resourcefulness and perseverance against the formidable challenges that they encountered in Cape Town.

When exploring certain topics related to the day-to-day lives of squatters, sometimes this study privileges oral history sources. This tendency owes less to an ideological bent of the author than to the paucity of written primary sources concerning the lives and struggles of squatters. It often proved next to impossible otherwise to elucidate certain subject areas without heavily relying on the testimonies provided by informants (and to a lesser extent, material gleaned from the autobiographies and works of fiction of African writers).\textsuperscript{5} At times, the official records that address the subject of squatters tend to obfuscate rather than illuminate what really transpired in squatter camps.

\textbf{Review of the Literature on African Urbanization and Squatting}

Within the context of Africa, the historiographical literature on South African urbanization is unusually well developed. Although prior to the 1970s, a small portion of

\textsuperscript{4} A table detailing personal data of informants appears in Appendix II. It contains information concerning place of origin, date of arrival and place of residence in Cape Town, and nature of employment.

\textsuperscript{5} Colin Bundy warned the author in the early stages of pre-dissertation research that writing a history of Cape Town squatters by drawing upon official records would be like hunting chameleons from a helicopter. Personal communication, July 1996. Among the more illuminating works of fiction discussing African informal settlements are: Peter Abrahams, \textit{Mine Boy} (London, 1946); Sindiwe Magona, \textit{To My Children's Children} (Cape Town, 1990); Mark Mathabane, \textit{Kaffir Boy: The True Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa} (New York, 1986); and Ezekiel Mphahlele, \textit{Down Second Avenue} (Garden City, NY, 1971).
scholarly works treated African issues in a sympathetic light, some early sociological and anthropological works published between the late 1940s and early 1960s detailed the process of acculturation whereby rural migrants assumed a decidedly urban existence. For instance, Ellen Hellmann's pioneering study of a slum yard (or "black spot") in Johannesburg provided considerable insight into the squalid social conditions confronting Africans who lived in peripheral communities and the economic strategies they adopted to survive. The sociological studies of Philip Mayer and B.A. Pauw further served to highlight the gradual, if uneven process of urbanization among Africans of the Eastern Cape in East London. As well, several other texts dealt with the same process in different settings.

This early body of literature includes several works of special value concerning Cape Town: Monica Wilson and Archie Mafeje analyzed the divisions among different social groups living in the Langa location as they formed along the fault line of degree of urbanization; Sheila van der Horst investigated the working conditions of Africans in Cape Town; Phyllys Rabkin examined the living conditions of inhabitants of the Parkwood Estate squatter camp from an economic perspective; and perhaps of greatest value, based

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on their 1952 study of the Eureka Estate squatter camp, M. Lipschitz and N.M. Greshoff produced an insightful commentary on the desperate lives of the camp’s inhabitants.9

While there is a sizeable body of more contemporary scholarly works on diverse aspects of African urbanization in South Africa, a disproportionate amount of it is limited to developments on the Witwatersrand. Figuring prominently in this literature are numerous edited volumes that have emerged out of the University of Witwatersrand History Workshop Project and related collaborative efforts.10 The scholarship of key individual Witwatersrand academics such as Charles van Onselen, Belinda Bozzoli, Susan Parnell, Alf Stadler, Hilary Sapire, and Philip Bonner has also significantly contributed to an understanding of African urbanization in South Africa.11

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For the purposes of this dissertation, the writings of Bonner on urban South African history speak most directly to the issues under discussion. He has concentrated on African migrants of the Witwatersrand, exploring such topics as squatting, beer brewing, trade unions, and political mobilization. Although Bonner occasionally includes a smattering of oral evidence, he tends to privilege archival materials. This reflects the bias of his work, which tends to delineate the contours of protest movements and delve less into dense social histories. In this present study, reference to Bonner’s analyses occurs mainly in order to contrast the very different ways in which African squatters mobilized on a political and organizational bases on the Witwatersrand and in the Western Cape. In broad terms, squatters on the Witwatersrand were organized as semi-coherent collective movements, whereas in Cape Town, they lacked institutional structures and inhabited various pockets in an ad hoc, individual manner.

The most thought-provoking and incisive published literature from scholars within the Cape Town “school” has been produced by University of Cape Town academics, most notably Christopher Saunders and Vivian Bickford-Smith. Early articles by Saunders

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13 It seems appropriate to speak of Witwatersrand and Cape Town schools since the scholars associated with the universities of both centers tend to produce histories primarily concerned with their
effectively traced the roots of segregation in Cape Town in highlighting the emergence of Ndabeni and Langa, Cape Town’s first two locations. These studies have been complemented by the research of Bickford-Smith, who focuses primarily on nineteenth-century Cape Town. He has punctured, if not completely debunked the widespread popular notion of Cape Town’s more liberal past with respect to black-white relations and explored the process whereby racism became an integral reality in the social and political life of the city.

The studies of Doug Hindson and Yvonne Muthien have been helpful in tracing state efforts to stem the flow of Africans in Cape Town and to control their movements. Although Hindson examines the evolution of pass laws in controlling the flow of Africans throughout South Africa, his succinct and well-informed analysis is particularly valuable in understanding the logic and prevailing mechanisms of control exercised on African movement. Muthien, on the other hand, concentrates exclusively on the Western Cape, and situates the question of influx control in the wider debate of state repression and own specific geographic locale.


16 Doug Hindson, Pass Controls and the Urban Proletariat (Johannesburg, 1987). Yvonne Muthien, State and Resistance in South Africa, 1939-1965 (Aldershot, UK, 1994). Hindson has also published a more recent work on squatting. However, the edited volume in question is solely concerned with the phenomenon during the 1980s and 1990s in KwaZulu Natal—where dynamics are very different than those found historically in the Western Cape. Doug Hindson and Jeff McCarthy, eds., Here To Stay: Informal Settlements in KwaZulu-Natal (Dalbridge, 1994).
African resistance. Although Muthien’s work provides a wealth of useful references to resistance and official measures to curb African migration to and within Cape Town, it is short on analysis, and tends to chronicle facts and events in a disjointed and bland fashion.

None of these monographs on varied facets of the African presence in Cape Town directly deal with squatting, but they offer worthwhile insights into related issues. Despite the dearth of published material on the early trajectory of African squatting in Cape Town, more recent developments among squatters, particularly from the mid-1970s, has received greater attention in books by Josette Cole, K. Kiewiert and K. Wiechel, George Ellis et al., and Andrew Silk. Their respective studies, however, sketch the political dynamics of squatter camps in Cape Town in the latter half of the 1970s and early 1980s, while addressing minimal attention to their social and cultural dimensions.\footnote{Josette Cole, \textit{Crossroads: The Politics of Reform and Repression, 1976–1986} (Johannesburg, 1987); K. Kiewiert and K. Wiechel, \textit{Inside Crossroads} (Johannesburg, 1980); George Ellis; Delia Henrie; Alide Kooy; and Johann Maree, \textit{The Squatter Problem in the Western Cape: Some Causes and Remedies} (Johannesburg, 1977); Andrew Silk, \textit{A Shanty Town in South Africa: The Story of Modderdam} (Johannesburg, 1981).} During this latter period, squatting in Cape Town exploded as a news item of international proportions, as the fate of the Crossroads squatter camp drew world attention. The related forced removals and bulldozing of Crossroads and other squatter camps depicted in these studies and the media aroused widespread indignation at the harsh and inhumane treatment of the unfortunate people compelled by circumstances to take up squatting.

Contrasting the relative paucity of published work on the earlier history of Cape Town’s African population, there is a reasonably ample body of unpublished literature, upon which this dissertation is greatly indebted. Most of these unpublished theses and
dissertations were undertaken at the University of Cape Town, and to date, virtually none of them has been published.\textsuperscript{18} A number of these (M.A. and B.A. Honors) theses and conference papers are unusually good and have proven singularly useful, especially those by Budow, Greenback, Musemwa, Sayers, and Swart.\textsuperscript{19} Promising titles notwithstanding, some of the theses that explicitly explore social and cultural subjects of Africans in Cape Town are of mixed quality.\textsuperscript{20}

Curiously, the theses that proved most insightful were those which do not deal with squatting as such. For instance, Hildegarde Fast’s dissertation on the history of Nyanga township in the period 1946-1970 presents a careful analysis of how the state relentlessly herded Africans into the township.\textsuperscript{21} In placing the discussion of African

\textsuperscript{18} These theses have usually been completed under the supervision of Vivian Bickford-Smith, Helen Bradford, Colin Bundy, Bill Nasson, and Christopher Saunders in the Department of History.


housing within the context of the state’s attempts to control the African population, it
offered a useful model. Barry Kinkead-Weekes’s unpublished work represents probably
the single most comprehensive and authoritative account available on Africans in Cape
Town. Kinkead-Weekes’s painstaking sifting of the archival record has produced a body
of literature that serves as an exceptional resource for understanding the broad outlines of
the African presence in Cape Town, and for unpacking the details of both state repression
and African opposition.

Synopsis of Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation contains seven other chapters, a bibliography and two
appendixes. Chapter 2 provides an overview of how squatting evolved in Cape Town
starting in the nineteenth century carrying forward to 1939. In addition to outlining the
early growth of squatting communities in Cape Town, it also examines some of the
legislative and social levers introduced to circumscribe the rights of Africans throughout
South Africa in the early decades of the twentieth century. In particular, attention is
directed toward the ideological framework surrounding early attempts to insinuate spatial

22 Barry Kinkead-Weekes, “Africans in Cape Town: The Origins and Development of State
Policy and Popular Resistance to 1936,” Department of Sociology, University of Cape Town, 1985; and
Squatter Problem in the 1950’s,” paper presented at the Fourth Annual Cape Town History Workshop,
University of Cape Town, Cape Town, June 3-4, 1983. The paper is useful in pointing out the broad
dynamics of African squatting settlements, but for the most part, is of a preliminary nature, and should be
seen as a work in progress.

23 Since Chapter 1 is only meant to provide a brief overview of the early development of squatting
and covers an extended time frame that, properly speaking, falls outside the chronological purview of the
dissertation, it relies mainly on secondary literature.
and social distance between the African and white populations by way of reference to metaphors of disease and moral contagion. The progress of segregatory measures accelerated during the 1920s and 1930s, as the number of Africans entering the Western Cape escalated. The first efforts of local authorities to impose greater control on the geographic location of Africans in Cape Town proved singularly unsuccessful and inadvertently served as a catalyst for the rapid growth of squatter camps on the city’s perimeter in the latter half of the 1930s.

Chapter 3 examines the factors accounting for the unprecedented influx of Africans into Cape Town and the state’s response to this massive demographic shift. The tens of thousands of Africans, mainly from the Transkeian and Ciskeian territories, who inundated the city, were responding to the dramatic economic upturn in the regional economy, and in short order, came to exercise a profound impact on Cape Town. The state’s sporadic and generally futile attempts to limit the flow of African in-migration betrayed the absence of a coherent and effective policy to either check or cope with rapid African urbanization. An analysis of the government reports that chronicled the mushrooming of squatter camps in the Cape Town area reveals how officials’ obsession with African urbanization, framed in paradigms of miscegenation, control, and disease, influenced the shape of African policy. The chapter covers the period beginning with the outbreak of war in 1939 and extends to 1948, when the rise of the National Party signaled a decided shift in the government’s approach to African urbanization, and specifically, African squatters.

Chapter 4 explores how the specific topography of Cape Town presented unique challenges to Africans in search of shelter. Although confronted by a hostile and sordid
physical environment, Africans en masse took up squatting in the attempt to maintain the viability of the family. Overcoming the disabilities they suffered owing to inhospitable surroundings, poor access to networks of transportation, and unequal employment opportunities, African squatters succeeded in eking out an existence against considerable odds.

Chapter 5 reveals the ways in which squatters not only subsisted, but forged meaningful lives for themselves. In grafting their home cultures onto the urban environment, squatters created heterogenous, yet cohesive communities that demonstrated an enduring spirit of resilience and innovation. Although their varied regional, ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds occasionally complicated squatters’ relations with one another, an overall climate of social harmony predicated on an ethos of neighborliness prevailed. Despite an overriding corporate identity, squatters’ experiences were significantly different depending on whether they were African or Coloured, single or married, short-term migrants or fully urbanized, and women or men. Women in particular, experienced squatting in distinct ways, and had to overcome special societal and economic disabilities. Despite the formidable obstacles, women developed associational links and community networks with remarkable ingenuity.

Chapter 6 explores the uniquely harsh features of squatter life in Cape Town, that seriously compromised both their physical and mental health. The harsh and insanitary conditions of squatter camps translated into a grinding and precarious existence for squatters. Confronted with the alternating risks of fire and flooding, an inadequate supply of water, infestations of insects and rats, and poor to non-existent provision of municipal
services, squatters were under constant assault from many potential threats to their general well-being. When combined with elevated levels of crime, the overall milieu of squatter camps created an overwhelming sense of insecurity and impermanence.

Chapter 7 resumes the chronological narrative from Chapter 3 in discussing the broad outline of developments from 1948 to 1960. Increasingly, state oppression aimed at dislodging Africans from the Western Cape directly contributed to the misery of Africans. Squatters resisted the intensified assault on their tenuous foothold in the city and attempted to evade or defer the apartheid juggernaut as it progressively resulted in the bulldozing of squatter camps and the relocation of inhabitants in official emergency squatter camps and townships. By the end of the 1950s, the triumph of the apartheid state was manifest even though it took another half-dozen years before the region’s squatter camps were completely obliterated from the landscape of the greater Cape Town area.

Finally, in the conclusion, a brief summary of the dissertation’s principal conclusions is offered. As well, some of the lasting ramifications following from the state’s repressive policies toward squatters are considered against the background of the contemporary circumstances among Cape Town’s underclasses.
THE EMERGENCE OF SQUATTING IN CAPE TOWN

This chapter briefly summarizes the early emergence of squatting in Cape Town and situates it within the broader context of African urbanization. Special attention is focused on state efforts to curb the townward drift of Africans by way of legislative and administrative measures. Officials justified the increasingly rigid segregatory controls practiced against Cape Town’s African population on the grounds that the latter, living in unhygienic squatter camps in close proximity to the city center and middle-class suburbs, presented a potent risk to the health of the white and Coloured citizenry. The restrictions that local authorities imposed on the entry of Africans into Cape Town and their residential patterns within the city, not only failed to substantially discourage African immigration, but inadvertently stimulated a mushrooming of sprawling squatter camps on the city’s boundaries by the eve of World War II.

Early Settlements in the Cape Peninsula

Only last night it happened that about fifty of these natives wanted to put up their huts close to the banks of the moat of our fortress, and when told in a friendly manner by our men to go a little further away, they declared boldly that this was not our land but theirs and they would place their huts wherever they chose.¹

¹ Jan van Riebeeck’s journal, Cape Town, February 10, 1655 quoted in John Western, Outcast Cape Town (Minneapolis, 1981): p.277. The “natives” referred to by van Riebeeck were “Hottentots”
This 1655 journal entry of Jan van Riebeeck, the first commander of the Dutch East India Company's tiny settlement in the Cape Peninsula, points to the storied nature of squatting in Cape Town. Van Riebeeck's observation is especially notable for what it discloses of the assertiveness of the indigenes, the arrogance of the European interlopers, and the problematic concept of squatting. Then and for centuries since, the geographic space of the Cape Town area has been an arena of an ongoing contestation of cultural norms regarding land-use rights. These "natives" were exercising a time-honored custom of erecting their huts confident of their right to do so. Conversely, from the beginning, European settlers applied their Western-oriented notions of individual land tenure and sought to exclude the indigenous people from trespassing upon land to which they laid claim. At its heart, the term "squatting" implies a normative judgment, and as European settlers fanned out across the Cape Peninsula and beyond, they imposed a conceptual framework of land use and ownership that was alien to the people who originally occupied the region for hundreds and thousands of years. Europeans would continue to alienate land, with the result that, from a narrow legalistic viewpoint, all the indigenes who resisted or disdained flight were eventually forced to resort to "squatting."

Squatting in Cape Town dates back to at least 1835, at a time when the Cape Colony's slaves were in the process of being emancipated.\(^2\) Inescapably, a certain

(Khoikhoi).

\(^2\) The preamble to Ordinance No. 5 of 1836 alludes to how the Cape Flats "are unlawfully used and occupied by various persons who . . . have caused great damage and injury to the said lands." Quoted in U.G. 18 - 1943, Report of a Committee of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into Conditions Existing on the Cape Flats and Similarly-Affected Areas in the Cape Division, 1942 (Britten Report), p.2 (Paragraph 16). Al J. Venter's Coloured: A Profile of Two Million South Africans (Cape Town, 1974), p.244. During the 1840s, over 3,000 freed African slaves entered Cape Town, residing primarily in the Woodstock.
arbitrariness enters into the attempt to assign a specific date to the first instance of squatting in Cape Town. Regardless of whether one dates the event from 1655, 1835, or another point in time, squatting did not emerge as a significant social phenomenon in Cape Town until the third or fourth decade of the twentieth century. When squatting initially became widespread, Coloured people were the principal social group having recourse to it. Until the late 1930s, there was a relatively small African population resident in Cape Town. According to the national census of 1933, other South African cities such as Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban, Bloemfontein, Pretoria, and Johannesburg boasted larger African populations even though all of them, with the exception of Johannesburg, were less populous.³

The first instance of a sizeable African migration to Cape Town occurred in response to the rinderpest epidemic of 1896-1897. As was true throughout southern Africa, the epidemic decimated herds of cattle among peoples practicing both pastoralism and sedentary agriculture. The plight of African farmers in the Eastern Cape had already been compromised by the passage in 1894 of the Glen Grey Act, which limited the size of land holdings and rendered subsistence farming less viable.⁴ But even these factors did not

³ As a percentage of the total population, Africans represented only 5.8 percent of Cape Town inhabitants, as compared to 20.8 percent in Port Elizabeth, 45.9 percent in East London, 24.7 percent in Durban, 48.9 percent in Bloemfontein, 31.5 in Pretoria, and 35.9 percent in Johannesburg. Department of Health (GES) 2012; 78/33, Union of South Africa Population and Vital Statistics for the Principal Urban Areas by Race and Sex, 1933.

initiate a large migratory flood. In the last years of the nineteenth century, the African community living in the greater Cape Town area was never great. Official census figures indicate that while in 1865 approximately 707 Africans resided in Cape Town, by 1891 the number had remained relatively stagnant, having only risen to 781. By 1904, the African population had grown to 7,492, but by the following census in 1911, it had dropped back down to only 1,581. The small number of Africans in Cape Town was due principally to the great distance (approximately 400-500 miles) that separated the city from the African reserves of the Transkei and Ciskei. Blips in the levels of African migration to Cape Town were significantly affected by boom economic conditions, most notably during the 1890s and the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). But more fundamentally, the waxing and waning Cape Town's African population reflected the impermanent ties Africans had established to the city (see Figure 1). Urbanization and proletarianization among Africans from the Eastern Cape were uneven, fluid processes that took place over the course of several decades and more than one generation. Africans retained close connections to the rural environment, even as they increasingly spent greater portions of their lives and productive energies in the city.

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Figure 1 Population composition in Greater Cape Town.

The Growth of Squatter Communities in Cape Town

Squatting among Africans came to be perceived by citizens and city officials as a problem of some magnitude by the 1890s. Accounts in the city's newspapers describe with concern how Africans were erecting makeshift shelters around the city, including on the slopes of Table Mountain, in caves, and on the Cape Flats (see Figure 2). In 1892, the Cape Register advocated action to deter Africans from building "shanties and pondokkies where'er their sweet will, and funds, allow them." Partly in response, the Cape government passed the Public Health Act No. 23 of 1897, which empowered local authorities to enact by-laws "for preventing overcrowding and the erection or the use of unhealthy and unsuitable huts and dwellings." Two years later, the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) estimated that 1,600 Africans were residing in the Municipality of Cape Town in 80 different tenements spread throughout the city. Based on the results of a survey he conducted of African housing, the MOH recommended that a location be

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7 Saunders, "The Creation of Ndabeni," p.168 (footnote #19). The Cape Flats is the flat tract of land bounded by Table Mountain to the south, and the Atlantic and False Bay coasts to the west and east. All told, it encompasses approximately 700 square miles of mainly sandy terrain. U.G. No. 18 - 1943, Report of a Committee of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into Conditions Existing on the Cape Flats and Similarly-Affected Areas in the Cape Division, 1942, p.1.


10 Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, p.2.
Figure 2 African Settlements in the Cape Peninsula, 1952

established outside the city to accommodate Africans and to remove the health risk their un­sanitary living conditions ostensibly posed to the other residents of Cape Town.11

The growth of Cape Town’s African community further accelerated as a result of circumstances arising from the Anglo-Boer War. The city benefited from being the principal port of entry for troops and goods from Britain. With its emergence as a naval and military base, Cape Town came to offer Africans many opportunities for unskilled work. A considerable number from the Eastern Cape entered Cape Town for the first time. Generally, these new arrivals, numbering about 8,000, took up residence in slums or in shanties scattered throughout the city, its suburbs, and at the foot of Table Mountain.12 As well, by 1900, the docks housed an additional 1,500 African workers.13 Dr. A.J. Gregory, the MOH, described the typical housing conditions of Africans as “a matter of the gravest scandal. . . . The practice was to pack them so full that there was no further room on the floor, and you could not get the door open until you had pushed and until the native who was lying down behind it got up. The atmosphere was suffocating.”14

11 Quoting the MOH, Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, pp.2-3. Saunders, “The Creation of Ndabeni,” p.169. Locations were fenced-in settlements under Department of Native Affairs (NAD) supervision, and contained houses rented to Africans who were entitled to reside in the city.


13 Kinkead-Weekes, “Africans in Cape Town to 1936,” pp.46-56. Already in 1884, the Harbour Board had established a compound at the city docks for African workers, who were primarily Mfengus. The arrival of the Mfengu from the Eastern Cape in the late 1830s represented the first significant influx of Bantu-speaking Africans into Cape Town. Saunders, “The Creation of Ndabeni” p.165.

14 Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, p.1. Taken from Evidence before Select Committee on Native Reserve Location Bill, A. 22-1902 §167. Simons Collection, BC 1081; H1, Unpublished Manuscript on Health, Chapter 3, Tuberculosis, F2, p.2.
The miserable, unhygienic living conditions of Africans increasingly became the focus of public attention. especially in light of two medical onslaughts to which the city was subjected. In the wake of the outbreak of the bubonic plague in February 1901, a Peninsula Plague Advisory Board was established.\textsuperscript{15} For a year, the plague ravaged the city and Africans became scapegoats for the city’s anxious white citizens. Dr. E.B. Fuller, the city’s part-time MOH, blamed the “uncontrollable hordes of aborigines” who he imagined were contributing to the spread of the deadly disease.\textsuperscript{16} According to beliefs current at the time, the plague was transferable through humans and their possessions, with the result that measures of isolation, quarantine, and disinfection of goods were adopted by health authorities.\textsuperscript{17} In response to the plague and the targeting of Africans as potential purveyors of the contagion, a plague camp was hastily erected at Uitvlugt Forest Reserve, which then bordered the city’s outskirts.\textsuperscript{18} Africans residing in various city neighborhoods such as District Six, Woodstock, Maitland, and Mowbray, were ordered to remove to the Uitvlugt location. There they were housed in temporary structures, usually tents until wood and iron buildings could be erected.\textsuperscript{19} When rent was assessed against

\textsuperscript{15} Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, p.5.


\textsuperscript{17} Simons Collection, BC 1081; H1, Unpublished Manuscript on Health, Chapter 3, Tuberculosis, F2, p.2.

\textsuperscript{18} Even though some of the plague’s first victims were African dock workers, in total, the disease proved more fatal to the white and especially the Coloured communities of Cape Town. Saunders, “The Creation of Ndabeni,” pp.171,173.

\textsuperscript{19} Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, p.6; and BC 1081; H1, Unpublished Manuscript on Health, Chapter 3, Tuberculosis, F2, p.43.
them after three months, many inhabitants refused to pay since they were being forced to live in Uitvlugt against their will. Altogether, 5,383 people were isolated, and of these, only 64 people developed the plague.\(^\text{20}\)

Already in the closing years of the nineteenth century, city officials had been anxious to segregate Africans through the establishment of an African location. This initiative came to naught owing to government inertia and the concerted objections of homeowner associations to proposed sites. Foiled in the attempt to situate a location in the city, the Cape Town City Council (CCC) entered into protracted negotiations with the central government to set up a location on the city’s margins.\(^\text{21}\) According to Saunders, even had the excuse represented by the plague not presented itself as a pretense under which to sweep Africans out of the city, officials would have established a location for Africans in the near future.\(^\text{22}\)

As the plague dissipated, the government realized that it lacked the legal authority to keep Africans at Uitvlugt. Moreover, with the threat of the plague diminishing, restrictions were not as rigorously enforced. Alcohol became common in Uitvlugt, many Africans left the camp with rents unpaid, and squatted in various locales around the city.\(^\text{23}\)

\(^{20}\) Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, (Johannesburg, 1995), pp.206-207. Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, p.6; and BC 1081; H1, Unpublished Manuscript on Health, Chapter 3, Tuberculosis, F2, p.43.

\(^{21}\) Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, p.157. In 1898, the proposed site of the municipal quarry at the top of Strand Street was withdrawn in the face of spirited opposition from neighborhood property owners. Saunders, “The Creation of Ndabeni,” pp.169-170.


\(^{23}\) Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, p.209. Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, p.6, quoting Debates in the House of Assembly 1902, p.144.
To redress the situation, the Cape Parliament passed the Native Reserve Location Act No. 40 of 1902, which required Africans to take up residence in either the docks location or at Uitvlugt, unless they were on the parliamentary voters’ roll, held property of £75, or had permission to reside with their employers. Significantly, and a portent of future developments, the act provided for the establishment of locations outside the city.\(^{24}\) Thereafter, the government of the Cape Colony assumed responsibility for Uitvlugt.\(^{25}\) In short order, it became known as Ndabeni (meaning “the place of talk”).\(^{26}\)

Most Africans resisted efforts to herd them into Ndabeni, where tight control and passes were the order of the day. Some Africans protested the state’s strong-arm tactics by forming themselves into organizations such as the Cape African Congress and the South African Native Congress. Resistance normally took the form of legal challenges or simply evading all forms of state control by living in shacks in Cape Town’s hinterland. In a scenario that was to persistently riddle state efforts at checking the growth of squatter communities, a court challenge by squatters, contesting the CCC’s right to evict them and demolish their shacks, resulted in a decision which stayed action by the CCC. In the following three decades, on numerous occasions, Ndabeni’s residents pursued legal action


to counter municipal and government moves to effect evictions, raise rents, or transfer them to a new location.  

With the end of the Anglo-Boer War, the demand for inexpensive African labor declined. Census figures of the time reflect the close connection between employment opportunities and the size of Cape Town’s African population. Where 7,492 Africans were enumerated in the greater Cape Town area in 1904, by 1911 there were only 1,581. Part of this decline might also be explained with reference to Africans increasingly eluding official detection and residing in shacks off the beaten path. But notwithstanding this possibility, many Africans returned to the Eastern Cape during this period.

The National Convention of 1908-1909 that drafted the constitution for the new Union of South Africa, excluded Africans and other blacks from a direct role in parliamentary politics at the national level. In response, Coloured citizens formed the African Peoples’ Organisation (APO) and Africans the Native Convention. However, their efforts yielded little in the way of tangible results. One development flowing from the creation of the Union of South Africa was the introduction of an intermediate tier of government, the provincial, which mediated government at the municipal and central level.

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28 Wilson and Mafeje, Langa, p.2.

29 In South Africa, the terms “blacks” can be used to refer to any of the “non-white” or “non-European” peoples who would be included in the categories of African, Asian (mainly Indian with a small component of Chinese people), or Coloured.
levels. This new political dispensation impacted on Africans insofar as the overlapping levels of government created confusion and retarded the consolidation of the respective spheres of jurisdiction over Africans. Consequently, a clear and well-coordinated policy regarding Africans in the urban environment failed to materialize until the early 1920s. Even after that time, jurisdictional wrangling continued between the central, provincial, and municipal governments.30

The Sanitation Syndrome

Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, public health officials repeatedly characterized the presence of Africans in South African cities as pathological and potentially threatening to the white urban population. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa in the period between colonial conquest and the World War I, health officials came to exercise considerable influence within colonial administrations as they sought to reduce health risks to white settlers and officials. As Philip Curtin argues, “some form of racial, social, or cultural segregation triumphed everywhere in colonial Africa . . . but with a different mixture of racial, medical, and social justification in each case.”31 At about this same time, as African cities fashioned after European models were being laid out, new ideas concerning town planning influenced colonial planners and became enmeshed with the attempts of health officials to “sanitize” African cities for the benefit of their white

30 Hindson, Pass Controls, p.32.

occupants. In many instances, this involved segregating the indigenous and white communities residually. Curiously, as Marks and Andersson point out, the most threatening diseases were those with which Europeans were intimately familiar: tuberculosis, typhus cholera, typhoid, venereal disease, and malnutrition.

In keeping with the medical ideas of the day, separating whites from the miasmas and contagions supposedly nurtured among Africans offered the most effective form of protection. Colonial town planners could draw on nineteenth century experience in Europe, where cities had been sanitized for the respectable working class by separating them spatially from the urban poor. The earliest introduction within South Africa of large-scale segregatory measures occurred at the mines of Kimberly and the Witwatersrand, putatively to prevent the spread of disease from African miners to the general white population. But in Cape Town, large-scale eruptions of epidemic disease precipitated initiatives to segregate the city’s African population.

In 1918, Cape Town was subjected to yet another epidemic onslaught, when the Spanish influenza pandemic reached the city’s shores. Africans were compelled to take up residence in Ndabeni, the city’s first official location reserved for exclusive African habitation. Town planning policies which resulted in the expulsion of Africans to locations


on the periphery of South African cities were clearly embodied in legislation that followed the influenza epidemic and the large influx of Africans to urban centers in response to the heightened economic opportunities created during the World War I. Three major pieces of legislation [the 1919 Public Health Act, the 1920 Housing Act, and the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act] were enacted to empower municipalities and the central government to control and, if deemed necessary, altogether exclude Africans from the urban environment.36

Two government reports of the period indicate the growing awareness and concern among officials of rapidly growing squatter communities. The 1913 Commission Appointed to Enquire into Assaults on Women alluded to the “miserable hovels and shanties, in which they [Africans] are now frequently compelled to live.”37 The report recommended that “the White man in his own interests should take care that they (Africans) are enabled to live under clean, healthy, and decent conditions of family and social life. . . .”38 And in explaining the conditions that gave rise to exceptionally high rates of tuberculosis infection among inhabitants of the Cape Peninsula, the 1914 Tuberculosis Commission emphasized the role of improper housing: “speaking generally the dwellings are mere shanties, often nothing more than hovels, constructed out of bits of old packing case lining, flattened kerosene tins, sacking and other scraps and odds and

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36 Parnell, “Creating Racial Privilege,” pp.471,484. Parnell argues that the aim of these bodies of legislation to protect the interests of the poor and working class whites is often overlooked.


38 BC 579; J5.1 South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) Memorandum, “Native Housing” by A.J. Cutten, July 1951, p.1. This observation refers to conditions on the Witwatersrand.
ends. They are put up higgledy-piggledy, without any sort of order. The dwellings are low, dark and dirty... altogether one could hardly imagine more suitable conditions for the spread of tuberculosis.\textsuperscript{39} As was true with the 1901-1902 bubonic plague and with the imminent outbreak of the Spanish influenza, the presence of Africans in Cape Town (and in other South African cities) came to be framed in the discourse of disease and disease prevention. With the process of urbanization gathering momentum, the conceptualization of Africans as epidemiological threats to the body politic served as a convenient justification for imposing an ever stricter system of residential segregation.

There emerged a widespread tendency among Health Department and Police officials to frame the presence of Africans in urban centers (especially in the case of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth) in the context of the metaphor of infectious disease.\textsuperscript{40} As Swanson demonstrates, "the 'sanitation syndrome,' equating black urban settlement, labour and living conditions with threats to public health and security, became fixed in the official mind. It buttressed a desire to achieve positive social controls, and confirmed or rationalized white race prejudice with a popular imagery of medical menace."\textsuperscript{41} In response to the Spanish influenza pandemic, which made its way to Cape Town’s shores in 1918, legislation was passed that required Africans to take up residence in Ndabeni. The

\textsuperscript{39} U.G. No. 34, Report of the Tuberculosis Commission, 1914, pp.126.


\textsuperscript{41} Swanson, “Sanitation Syndrome,” p.410.
“Black October” pandemic highlighted the deplorable living conditions of Africans and resulted in a death toll of 254 among Africans.  

**Increased African Urbanization**

South Africa’s participation in World War I produced a spurt in industrial expansion, one effect of which was to stimulate the demand for unskilled labor in urban centers. As a result, a renewed wave of African in-migration swept into the Cape Peninsula. In an attempt to deal with the increasingly intractable problem of slums and squatting in urban centers throughout the country, the government passed Section 15 of the Public Health Act of 1919, which gave local authorities power to prevent “all conditions liable to be injurious or dangerous to health arising from the erection or occupation of unhealthy premises.” Effectively, the MOH could declare a building a nuisance as a result of overcrowding, inadequate water supply or lack of refuse removal. Once so designated, action could be taken against the owner of the building. The Public Health Act also conferred powers on local authorities to regulate town planning, although the government restricted the Divisional Council of the Cape (Divco)’s ability to exercise these powers.

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42 Saunders, “From Ndabeni to Langa,” p.194.


44 Divco administered the territory surrounding the Municipality of Cape Town. Like other divisional councils, Divco exercised jurisdiction over an area that was essentially rural in nature, with some peri-urban enclaves in proximity to the border of the Municipality of Cape Town. Budow, “Urban Squatting,” pp.27-28.
During the course of the late 1910s and early 1920s, the less-than-ideal conditions of Ndabeni had been permitted to deteriorate further.\textsuperscript{45} Following World War I, the government allowed Ndabeni to lapse into an advanced state of dilapidation since it anticipated transferring ownership to the CCC in short order. By the time the CCC did assume authority over Ndabeni in 1925, the CCC was in the process of planning to replace Ndabeni with a new location and was unwilling to expend any funds on refurbishing a location it soon would close.\textsuperscript{46} According to police estimates, in 1923, there were some 5,000-6,000 Africans living in the Cape Town area, outside of Ndabeni, and the docks location.\textsuperscript{47} In a half-hearted attempt to come to terms with this situation, the CCC availed itself of provisions in the Municipal (Provision of Homes) Ordinance No. 23 of 1919 to initiate steps in providing homes for the poorer sections of the community (which, for the most part, meant Coloured people). On the whole, Africans benefited little from the ordinance and the ancillary Housing Act No. 35 of 1920, since as the ultra poor, Africans were not in a position to participate in economic schemes which required incomes in excess of what they typically earned.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Saunders, “The Creation of Ndabeni,” p.186.

\textsuperscript{46} Saunders, “From Ndabeni to Langa,” p.221.

\textsuperscript{47} Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1: Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, pp.9-10. The docks compound was managed by the South African Railway and Harbour Administration and housed approximately 600 Africans. Most of them were casual laborers, who in addition to working for the harbor authority, earned income as stevedores for private companies. Musemwa, “Aspects of the Social and Political History of Langa,” p.29.

\textsuperscript{48} Fast, “Pondoks, Houses, and Hostels,” p.29, citing SAIRR Memorandum RR172 of 1951.
By the early 1920s, squatting had grown in extent. With accommodation capped at 3,000 at Ndabeni, Africans had to improvise in order to provide shelter for themselves. This frequently involved recourse to squatting in such Cape Town areas as Maitland, Vasco, Elsies River, and Kensington Estate. At the latter area alone, approximately 2,000 squatters congregated, although it was a mixed population of Coloured and African squatters.\footnote{Kinkead-Weekes, "Africans in Cape Town to 1936," p.173.} As the local media reported in vivid and melodramatic terms, make-shift homes of “wattle and mud, of battered paraffin tins, or mere sodden bags” formed a “higgledy-piggledy agglomeration of queer-looking lairs, springing up, like mushrooms, overnight, here to-day and gone to-morrow.” According to the report, these “unsightly excrescences on the lone expanse of flat veld” housed “a mixed crowd, cast there by the tide, of ‘dollers,’ vegetable and fish-hawkers, grape-pickers, shebeeners, and petty delinquents . . . shy of the police”--in short, “a pulsating mass of wretched humanity.”\footnote{Cape Times, July 15, 1923, “House Hunger in Tomato Street: How Dwellers on the Cape Flats Live.”}

The police subjected squatters to harassment, evicting them and raiding periodically for liquor. On occasion, this treatment prompted violent responses. Police also charged white property owners for illegally allowing Africans to inhabit their property. According to the police, it was preferable to disperse squatters than allow a large concentration of them to coalesce in one area. Acting accordingly, police kept squatters
on the move, in succession moving them out of the areas of Vasco, Elsies River, and Grassy Park. 51

The major impediment to demolishing shacks was the unwillingness and inability of the police to destroy them or arrest squatters. Local justices refused to uphold such arrests and stayed demolitions in the absence of alternate housing of an acceptable nature. Judges repeatedly ruled that it was pointless and inhumane to turn Africans out of their homes, however inadequate they might be, since to do so solved nothing. African residents would simply be forced to erect or rent another shack or tenement elsewhere, possibly more removed from the city center, and further afield from the watchful gaze of the police and Department of Native Affairs (NAD) officials. 52

State Response to African Urbanization and Squatting

No concerted policy to African urbanization had been formulated by central or local government prior to the early 1920s, which in part contributed to the proliferation of African urban dwellers across the country— a development many whites found profoundly disturbing. In 1922, the Stallard Commission of Inquiry authoritatively framed the manner and form in which future discussions of Africans in the urban setting would take place.

51 Kinkead-Weekes, “Africans in Cape Town to 1936,” pp. 173-175. Kinkead-Weekes cites one example of a liquor raid instigated “hundreds of hostile natives” to attack police, who were forced to draw their revolvers in self defense. In assessing the spread of squatter communities on the Cape Flats, at places like Rylands Estate and Churchill Estate (in Parow), a NAD official argued that “we should do all in our power to prevent [squatters] increasing in numbers.”

52 Budow, “Urban Squatting,” p. 24. In 1930, following two cases of appeal that made it all the way to the Supreme Court, a proclamation was issued to the effect that Section 5 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act could only be invoked in cases where alternative and adequate housing existed for Africans in a location.
The commission report argued that "[t]he Native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man’s creation, when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister." Following close on the heels of the the Commission’s report and embodying many of its core principles, the repressive Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, signaled the government’s intention to adopt a much more aggressive and coercive approach to the process of urbanization among Africans. As of January 1, 1924, the provisions of the act came into effect. It regarded Africans in “white” cities as “temporary sojourners” and empowered municipalities to establish locations in which non-exempt Africans were required to reside. Since the Act of Union in 1910, South Africa’s central government

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54 Cape Town Mayor’s Minutes for the year ending September 10, 1936: Minutes of the Mayor, p.45 from the Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, p.10. Musemwa, “Aspects of the Social and Political History of Langa,” p.22.

55 Davenport, “Historical Background of the Apartheid City to 1948,” p.7. Saunders, “From Ndabeni to Langa,” pp.203,205. Exempted Africans included Registered Parliamentary Voters, owners of immovable worth £75, domestic servants living on their employer’s premises, and others who had obtained permission to live elsewhere. Registered Parliamentary Voters comprised the bulk of exempted Africans, who were significant in number (totaling 4,098 in 1945). Although the restrictions normally placed on the movement, employment, and residence of African did not apply to them, persons who were exempted still were not spared the humiliation of constantly presenting their documents to attest to their special status. 3/CT: 1/1/4/10/1/1/11 CCC Native Affairs Committee (NAC) Minutes, June 5, 1945. Hindson, Pass Controls, p.31.
had exercised control over the housing of Africans.\textsuperscript{56} Now, in tandem with the Housing Act, the Natives (Urban Areas) Act shifted this responsibility to the various local authorities of the country.

Under the provisions of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, it was illegal for Africans to live as squatters or tenants within three miles of the border of an urban area.\textsuperscript{57} However, there were exceptions. This section did not apply to registered voters or to Africans who were housed by their employers (as in the case of domestic workers, or Africans employed at hotels, dairies, and theaters, where unusually early or late hours were required).\textsuperscript{58} The difficulties involved in providing legally admissible proof that Africans were not in the \textit{bona fide} employ of white land owners, upon whose property they squatted, inhibited the efforts of police in prosecuting African squatters.

Following the shift of responsibility for locations to local authorities, the government transferred ownership of Ndabeni to the CCC in May 1925 on the understanding that the land would be utilized for an industrial site upon the removal of the Africans living there.\textsuperscript{59} To supervise Ndabeni, the city appointed George Panton Cook as

\textsuperscript{56}Cited in Fast, “Pondoks, Houses, and Hostels,” p.30.

\textsuperscript{57}By order of Proclamation 135 of 1926, the area was increased to five miles.

\textsuperscript{58}Musemwa, “Aspects of the Social and Political History of Langa,” pp.30,90-91. In order to qualify for the Cape Native Franchise, an African man (women were not eligible) had to be 21 years of age, gainfully employed, a resident of the Cape Province, and own fixed property worth £75, or earn not less than £50 a year. Prior to 1936, Africans could vote for representatives in both Parliament and in the Cape Provincial Assembly. If Africans in the Cape Province owned property of at least £100 in value, they could also qualify for the Municipal Franchise. Budow, “Urban Squatting,” p.25.

\textsuperscript{59}Cape Town Mayor’s Minutes for the year ending September 10, 1936: Minutes of the Mayor, p.45 from the Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, p.11. The profits from the sale would be equally divided between CCC and the government.
“Superintendent of Natives,” in which position he served until 1938, when he was succeeded by his assistant, Stuart Alexander Rogers.60

It was only three years after the passage of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act that the act became applicable to Cape Town by virtue of Proclamation No. 60 of 1926.61 This represented the first legal step to restrict the movements and residential patterns of Africans in Cape Town.62 Under its terms, all Africans, except those who were exempt, were required to reside in a location and obtain a registered service contract for employment.63 In the first years following the 1926 proclamation, hundreds of Africans were charged and convicted of failing to reside in a location. However, these prosecutions did not serve as an effective inducement for them to take up residence in Ndabeni. Rather, they and the implementation of the act contributed to the tendency among Africans to elude municipal control—which in most instances, meant squatting in Divco territory, just beyond municipal boundaries. By the mid 1920s, squatting among Africans was widespread, especially in areas close to Muizenberg (i.e., Vrygrond and Retreat) and in

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62 Wilson and Mafeje, Langa, p.2. Efforts at controlling the influx of Africans only began in 1937 in some South African cities, and two years later specifically with respect to Cape Town. Davenport, “Historical Background of the Apartheid City to 1948,” p.8.

Divco territory adjacent to Cape Town's boundaries. Exacerbating the situation, according to the terms of the proclamation, all Africans entering the city in search of employment had to obtain a permit for this purpose which limited their stay to a 14-day period. Efforts to register most Africans working in Cape Town except for the estimated 1,800 parliamentary voters, appear to have been relatively successful, with approximately 10,000 Africans having done so by August 1927. But efforts to repatriate Africans who were squatting or otherwise deemed "dissolute" under Section 17 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act yielded less success. Legal appeals by Africans revealed that refusing Council orders to quit Cape Town and return to the reserves did not constitute a punishable offence, so repatriation became essentially unenforceable.

The CCC officially opened the "model location" of Langa in September 1927 on land sited to the northern side of Vijgekraal, on a 400 morgen plot in the government's forest reserve of Uitvlugt. City officials intended Langa to function as a modern location, capable of housing the city's African population while being financially self-supporting through the collection of rentals. For many reasons, the Langa location was an ill-conceived venture. In the most obvious sense, its capacity was inadequate given Cape


67 Report of Native Economic Commission, 1930-1932, p.64 (#425). The name "Langa" was derived from the name of a famous African leader, Langalibalele from Natal who had been exiled to Robben Island and Uitvlugt in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The name initially proposed for the location, "Nqubela" (Xhosa for success) was abandoned in favor of Langa since whites would be unable to pronounce the click sound required by the q in Nqubela. Saunders, "From Ndabeni to Langa," pp.195,200.
Town’s African population. Langa was built to accommodate only 5,000 persons, whereas conservative figures put the city’s African population at no less than twice that number. Significantly, by 1932, only 2,000 Africans were residing in Langa, a telling reflection of its unpopularity among Africans. As many were living illegally in Kensington Reserve alone (later known as Windermere after 1928).

For the first several years of its existence, Langa failed to attract occupants for a number of clearly discernible reasons. Whereas Ndabeni was relatively close to the city and to where many Africans worked (by the late 1920s), Langa, at seven to eight miles outside of Cape Town, was approximately twice the distance to the city center. As the city spread outward and land close to the heart of the city increased in value, pressure to move Langa beyond the city’s limits grew. Owing to its topographic layout, urban sprawl in Cape Town did not follow a coherent, well-planned path. Hemmed in by mountain and ocean, Cape Town’s agglomeration of racially segregated enclaves formed a haphazard patchwork. Successive generations of Africans had been extruded further out from the city center as the property surrounding Table Mountain and in the immediate vicinity of the city (i.e., the City Bowl and the suburbs along the Green Point to Bakoven ocean-front corridor) has been the purview of affluent white residents. Even more compelling than

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70 Wilson and Mafeje, Langa, p.6.
economic considerations, the need to maintain segregation among whites, Coloureds, Indians, and Africans served as a factor in relocating the city’s African location.\(^{71}\)

The residents of Ndabeni strenuously resisted evacuation to Langa owing to the latter’s remote siting, more rigorous measures of control, and significantly higher rents--on average, two and a half times greater than those of the older location.\(^{72}\) One factor accounting for the high rental fees at Langa arose from the fact that homes and barracks were constructed by unionized white artisans who commanded unusually high wages.\(^{73}\) Curiously, the CCC had entertained hopes that the township would be administered from rental fees and no subsidies would be required.\(^{74}\) But the low wages earned by Africans meant that residents were not in a position to make Langa a self-supporting enterprise. Moreover, transport costs from Langa to the city and to the industrial areas where

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\(^{71}\) In a pattern typical of South African cities in the siting of African locations, Langa was located on the city’s margin beside a sewage disposal site. Musemwa, “Aspects of the Social and Political History of Langa,” p.33. Saunders, “From Ndabeni to Langa,” p.200.


\(^{73}\) Report of the Native Economic Commission, 1930-1932, p.65 (#432). According to the terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, only skilled, white workers could construct buildings. Fast, “Pondoks, Houses, and Hostels,” p.32. The Cape Peninsula Joint Council of Europeans and Bantu estimated that rents would could have been lowered by nearly two-thirds (from 14s to 5s per month) had African labor been used to construct the various barracks and ancillary buildings at Langa. Saunders, “From Ndabeni to Langa,” p.211. In Bloemfontein, Africans were allowed to construct their own homes, assisted by the government with respect to construction materials and loans. This approach kept costs low while providing accommodation for Africans. Although CCC initially considered allowing married couples to build their own homes along the Bloemfontein model, the idea was scrapped, since, in the opinion of councillors, Cape Town did not possess a class of Africans ready for such an experiment. Report of the Native Economic Commission, 1930-1932, p.63 (#420-421),72 (#496-502). The “Bloemfontein scheme” of assisting Africans to construct their own homes, contrasted with the more commonly adopted “Johannesburg scheme” of the local authority building housing accommodation and renting it to Africans.

\(^{74}\) Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, pp.12,16.
residents worked, were higher given the greater distance. Langa was only serviced by a branch line of the Cape Flats railway, with no bus service initially offered.\textsuperscript{25}

As much as anything else, the oppressive prison-like atmosphere of Langa was abhorrent to many Africans. It was designed and built with a view to exercising the maximum degree of control over its inhabitants. Although its original plans included provision for a centrally placed tower to afford authorities a panoramic view of the entire township, the innovation never materialized. Furthermore, strict limits were placed on the number of men housed within the barracks, all of which could be sealed off in the event of an emergency or insurrection.\textsuperscript{26} The four blocks of barracks were to be separated from one another by an unclimable fence and accessible from only one point of ingress.\textsuperscript{27} In both its physical layout and its conception of total supervision and control, Langa’s plans anticipated Foucault’s panopticon.\textsuperscript{28} In the early 1930s, restrictions were further tightened so that all visitors entering and exiting Langa had to report to the location authorities.\textsuperscript{29} Owing to tighter municipal supervision, Langa also offered reduced scope for engaging in the production and sale of \textit{mqombothi} or \textit{utshwala} (African sorghum beer, popularly


\textsuperscript{26} Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Western Cape, Segregation and Housing, pp.13-14. See also Barry Kinkead-Weekes, “The Solution of the African Squatter Problem in the 1950’s,” Paper presented at the Fourth Annual Cape Town History Workshop, University of Cape Town, June 3-4, 1983, p.5.

\textsuperscript{27} Saunders, “From Ndabeni to Langa,” p.199.

\textsuperscript{28} Michel Foucault, \textit{Disciplining and Punish: The Birth of the Prison} (New York, 1995).

\textsuperscript{29} Saunders, “From Ndabeni to Langa,” p.219.
known at the time by the disparaging term, “kaffir beer”), which was vital to African social and religious life, and also an important source of income for women.\textsuperscript{80}

To overcome the resistance of African men to move to Langa, the CCC bolstered what it considered the inadequate police campaign to hound Africans out of the city by hiring special constables to aid the police. The main result of this sweep of Cape Town was to push Africans further to the periphery, where they exchanged the squalor of dilapidated and overcrowded tenement slums for the squalor of unhygienic shacks. Africans demonstrated a resolute aversion to acquiescing to the city’s attempt to exercise control over their lives. Rather than relocate to Langa, they chose to live in the less-than-desirable conditions prevailing at the squatter camps, such as those at Athlone, Windermere, Lakeside, Muizenberg, and Retreat on the city’s perimeter.\textsuperscript{81} Recognizing the wrongheaded and self-defeating nature of the city’s attempt to enforce relocation to Langa, the Reverend Abner Mthimkulu commented that “[i]f natives were forced to the bush [to squat] it would be a hard task to get them out.”\textsuperscript{82}

Of course, clearing squatters from Cape Town to only have them resettle near municipal borders in Divco jurisdiction did not represent a real solution to the “squatter problem.” But it did force Divco to come to terms with the situation as best it could. In 1929, at Divco’s request, the Provincial Council passed Townships Ordinance No. 18,

\textsuperscript{80} Simons Collection, BC 1081 E1; Africans in the Wester Cape, Segregation and Housing, pp.15-16.


\textsuperscript{82} Quoted in Saunders, “From Ndabeni to Langa,” pp.212-213. A similar sentiment was echoed by James D. Ngojo of the Cape ANC: “To force a person to a place against his will makes him go and stay in the veld and bush and when you take him out of the veld, he will be wild.”
which gave it authority to prevent the construction of unsanitary and "unsuitably situated" buildings.\textsuperscript{83} Similarly, Ordinance 21 of 1932 enabled Divco to extend authority over buildings erected within 100 yards of a proclaimed road.\textsuperscript{84} Despite these ordinances, Divco still lacked an adequate arsenal of legal mechanisms to control the way planning and building took place in its territory. Recognizing its inability to contend with the growth of squatter communities, Divco approached the CCC in 1930 to offer the transfer of the Windermere area to the jurisdiction of the CCC. The latter body declined, largely in view of the fact that estimates put the cost at £250,000, were it to upgrade Windermere's facilities.\textsuperscript{85} The CCC's reluctance to tackle the problem that Windermere represented, demonstrated a singular lack of foresight and was to prove a costly decision. In addition to deferring what was to become an inevitability--namely, the incorporation of Windermere into the CCC--the failure of the CCC to own up to its responsibilities frustrated its efforts to control the influx, movements, and residential patterns of Africans in the Cape Town area. As long as Africans could escape municipal control by merely erecting shanties across the boundaries of Cape Town, local authorities would continue to fail in the attempt to halt the spread of squatter communities and bring the African community under tighter municipal control.


\textsuperscript{84} Budow, "Urban Squatting," p.28.

\textsuperscript{85} Kinkead-Weekes, "Africans in Cape Town to 1936," p.176.
The Calm Before the Storm: Squatting in the 1930s

By the early 1930s, unmistakable signs that agricultural production among Africans was not meeting their subsistence needs, and that young men were of necessity migrating to urban centers in search of money were clear. The Native Economic Commission of 1932, drew attention to the alarming overpopulation, soil erosion, and declining agricultural conditions in the African reserves. Diminished crop yields, successive years of drought, and the increased tempo of capitalization of farming throughout South Africa's countryside had forced many Africans to relocate in the city. The Commission published an influential report on issues related to Africans, including urbanization. As it observed with considerable understatement: "[t]here has been for some time a considerable measure of disquietude about the drift of Natives to the towns." The report was critical of the failure of NAD policy to recognize and make special provision for the growing class of Africans who were urbanized and essentially permanent fixtures within South African cities. Addressing housing policy and the extension of social services, the report commented that "[t]o continue employing Natives in urban areas, but to treat them as if they should not be there, is both illogical and shortsighted."

The findings of the Young - Barrett Commission also urged recognizing the right of Africans to reside in the cities and even argued that African men should be allowed to

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86 Report of Native Economic Commission, 1930-1932, p.61 (#402). In its survey of the Kensington, Windermere, and Elsies River areas in Cape Town it declared: "Your Commission inspected some of these slum properties and found very disagreeable conditions. . . . Frequently there are as many occupants per room as could be accommodated on the floor."

live there with their families. In the opinion of J.M. Young and A.L. Barrett, two senior NAD officials, the underlying principles of Stallardism which had informed the government’s “native policy” since 1923, were fundamentally flawed and out of touch with the reality of South Africa’s urban centers. As a partial solution to the housing shortage confronting Africans, it recommended that employers either house African employees on their premises or pay their rent in locations. The report pointed to the extremely low wages of Africans as the major cause for their squalid living circumstances and the inability of municipal housing schemes to charge anything more than sub-economic (i.e., subsidized) rents. Even where they managed to find a place to live in the city, African tenants were assessed exorbitant rents by rack-renting slumlords.

Irrespective of the recommendations of the Native Economic Commission and the Young - Barrett Commission, the government continued to apply draconian measures to stem the flow of Africans to urban centers and to limit their mobility once they entered the urban arena. This path was chosen despite the manifest failure of repressive tactics in curtailing African influx and circumscribing the tendency of Africans to flout local urban authorities by squatting in illegal settlements. As an example, the government passed the Slums Act in 1934. The act gave local authorities power to require the owner of a slum to remove the “nuisance,” failing which, the local authority could demolish the offending

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88 Young - Barrett Report, pp.6,13 (#26,55).
89 Davenport, “Historical Background of the Apartheid City to 1948,” p.10.
90 Young - Barrett Report, p.7-8 (#29-30).
structure or nuisance, or even expropriate the property. The act gave further teeth to the local authority by removing the extenuating plea of inadequate accommodation as an excuse to stay action.⁹² Subsequently, the CCC set up a Slum Clearance Committee and significant housing projects were undertaken in the Bokmakierie and Alickedale areas of Athlone to complement slum clearance programs in the District Six and Malay Quarter quarters. But these slum clearance and council housing projects were primarily geared toward the Coloured population, and even the narrow focus on this one segment of the city’s population proved inadequate. Between 1920 and 1939, only 1,756 houses and apartments for Coloureds were built as part of public housing schemes.⁹³

In 1936, the most repressive body of legislation since the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, was enacted. With the passage of the Representation of Natives Act, even those Africans who fulfilled the property requirements in the Cape were removed from the common voters’ roll.⁹⁴ The loss of direct franchise rights in the Cape Province was a pivotal event in the sphere of African political life, since it shocked Africans into action, resuscitated the moribund African National Congress, and prompted several other black

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⁹⁴ Fast, “Pondoks, Houses, and Hostels,” p.35. By way of compensation, Africans who met the property qualifications were placed on a separate roll which gave them the right to elect three white Native Representatives to the House of Assembly and two white representatives to the Cape Provincial Council. Presumably, these whites would champion their interests, and in practice did, albeit from a paternalist point of view. Additionally, African voters could elect four whites senators and an advisory council comprised of prominent African leaders who were indirectly elected to advise the NAD was established. Musemwa, “Aspects of the Social and Political History of Langa,” pp.117,192.
opposition organizations to form. A radicalization of political organizations was also evident within the Coloured community, since it too was profoundly affected by the passage of the legislation. The National Liberation League (NLL), led by Cissie Gool, and other prominent communist Coloured intellectuals like James La Guma, Johnny Gomas, and Goolam Gool, came into being in December 1935 to champion both Coloured and African rights. However, as Kinkead-Weekes demonstrates, within the Western Cape, the effectiveness of black political groups was severely hampered by infighting and ideological discord.

Adding to the pressure exerting on Africans in Cape Town, Ndabeni was finally deproclaimed as a location in 1935 and its last residents evicted. Some inhabitants moved to Langa, more took up residence in shacks. Already in early 1932, all single males in Ndabeni, totaling 900, had been forced to leave the location. Of these, only half reported to Langa as required, while the remainder disappeared into the bush to squat. The most common site of squatting became the Kensington-Windermere area. The growth of African squatting in their midst prompted the Kensington Ratepayers’ Association to appeal to the CCC to expel all Africans from the area. Partly in response to the pressure

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95 Although he acknowledges the emergence of several political organizations in response to the legislation, Kinkead-Weekes argues that “Local Africans made little fuss about finally being deprived, by means of the Representation of Natives Act of 1936, of their remaining limited political rights.” Kinkead-Weekes, “Africans in Cape Town,” 1936-73, p.52.

96 Musemwa, “Aspects of the Social and Political History of Langa.” pp.152-153. The NLL (1935-1943) was a breakaway faction of the African Peoples’ Organisation (APO), which broke with the APO over the latter’s failure to fight for the rights of Africans as well as those of Coloureds.


brought to bear, the police and municipal inspectors carried out a number of raids in search of Africans living in the area in violation of the Native (Urban Areas) Act. The prevalence of squatting in the area grew, and with it, the militancy of the association. In 1938, it again sent a deputation to the city’s Native Affairs Sub-Committee in the attempt to force the CCC to take action against the squatters. The growing presence of Africans in Cape Town resulted in white ratepayer associations from several sections of the city agitating for the city to take measures against Africans entering their neighborhoods.

In an effort to encourage municipalities to undertake housing schemes for the poor and thus come to terms with the large-scale emergence of squatting endemic in many South African cities, the central government offered a sub-economic interest rate of 0.75 percent (adjusted downward from the rate of 2 percent offered in 1934). Responding to this reduction, the following year the CCC drew up plans to undertake an ambitious 12-year housing project, involving the construction of 11,619 units at a projected cost of £6 million. However, a host of factors conspired to frustrate this plan: the onset of the war, escalating building material costs, scarcity of skilled labor, difficulty in securing monies from the central government, reluctance of the CCC to commit itself to further debt, and

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100 Kinkead-Weekes, “Africans in Cape Town, 1936-73,” pp.16-17. By 1938, there were approximately 2,000 Africans in the area, prompting an article in the Cape Argus to observe that they were “beginning to swarm into the slums or to drift over the City boundaries into the no-man’s land of Kensington and Windermere.”

resistance among squatters to vacate land earmarked for development. By 1948, only 2,618 of the proposed 11,619 sub-economic housing units had been completed by the CCC.\textsuperscript{102}

As a concomitant to its intensified efforts to provide housing for Africans whose labor was needed in industry and commerce, the government also embarked upon a policy of implementing more stringent restrictions on Africans in cities. In 1937, the Native Urban Areas Amendment Act was introduced to fortify the provisions of the 1923 act and its 1930 amendment. Under its terms, Africans could not enter an urban area except under a certain specific set of circumstances; namely, if they had a job specifically waiting for them, or if they were \textit{bona fide} visitors. Additionally, African workers were required to register for service contracts so the local authority could verify that they remained employed while in the city.\textsuperscript{103} The amended act also made it compulsory for all African men—including parliamentary voters—to carry passes, while African women needed permits. Furthermore, Africans could henceforth only purchase land in the cities with written authorization from the Governor-General.\textsuperscript{104} This amendment only came into


\textsuperscript{103} In areas like Cape Town that had been proclaimed, registration of service contracts was mandatory. Since the service contract incorporated the Masters and Servants Acts, African workers who broke their contracts with their employers were subject to fines and hard labor. Hindson, \textit{Pass Controls}, p.41.

\textsuperscript{104} The Native Economic Commission Report of 1932, p.75 (#519). Previously there had been no restrictions on Africans to purchase land in an urban area, but they were unable to occupy the land under the provisions of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act. Although the Natives Land Act of 1913 and the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 had previously circumscribed the ability of Africans to buy land, prior to January 1, 1938, when the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1937 came into force, not all avenues had been closed off.
effect for Cape Town with the promulgation of Proclamation 105 on June 9, 1939.\textsuperscript{105} The CCC’s initial reluctance to pass the proclamation was eventually overcome by the NAD, which threatened to act unilaterally failing to win the Council’s acquiescence.\textsuperscript{106} Most threatening, if the NAD were compelled to enforce the proclamation without Council cooperation, the latter would effectively forgo the registration fees collected and channeled into the Consolidated Revenue Fund.\textsuperscript{107}

Shortly thereafter, South Africa was drawn into World War II and the proclamation and the Native Urban Areas Amendment Act it ushered in became dead letters. The war effort’s demand for unskilled labor effectively neutralized the potential impact of Proclamation 105. But the proclamation served as an ominous portent of the intensified efforts on the part of the central government to closely delimit African access to cities and to tightly monitor their lives within the urban setting.

Prior to World War II, attempts to stem the tide of African migration to Cape Town, and to control Africans and their place of residence once they had settled in the city, had for the most part achieved modest success at best. The incremental growth of illegal squatting, which by the latter half of the 1930s was gaining substantial momentum, was an important indicator of this failure. Oscar Wollheim, the director of the Cape Flats Distress Association (Cafda), a philanthropic organization operating in the Retreat area where squatting was rife, estimated that by 1939, there were some 50,000 squatters in the

\textsuperscript{105} Fast, “Pondoks, Houses, and Hostels,” p.35.

\textsuperscript{106} Budow, “Urban Squatting,” p.34.

\textsuperscript{107} 3/CT; 1/4/6/6/4/1/2, CCC NAC Minutes, April 21, 1939, “Application of Section five \textit{bis} of the Natives Urban Areas Act, 1923, to Capetown.”
Cape Town area. Beyond merely having failed to achieve their stated objectives, the repressive measures that the government had introduced to tighten the noose around African urban influx and to regulate mobility, had actually contributed to the very situation officials sought to thwart in the first place. Anxious to avoid the attempts of the police, municipal officials, and inspectors of the NAD to harass and supervise them, Africans filtered out of Cape Town and established residence in peri-urban areas surrounding the city, where authorities were largely powerless to exercise meaningful control. Curiously, squatting, which as a flagrant manifestation of the loss of state control and unregulated African existence in the urban environment, was at one and the same time anathema to the government and the direct, but unintended result of it own policies.

South Africa’s entry into World War II resulted in unprecedented numbers of Africans from the Transkei and Ciskei flooding into Cape Town in search of the employment opportunities opening up in the city’s booming war-time economy. The rapid inflow of African men and women caused widespread concern among officials and the city’s white inhabitants. Invariably, these anxieties were expressed with reference to the threat of miscegenation between the city’s African and Coloured populations, and to the so-called sanitation syndrome. Although officials deplored African influx and the spread of squatter camps in a series of government reports, state efforts to check African urban migration failed to coalesce into a well-coordinated strategy. The limited measures fitfully undertaken prior to the advent of National Party (NP) rule in 1948 to stem the flow of African in-migration and control the growth of squatter camps vacillated between policies of repression and indecision and ultimately proved ineffective.

**The Attraction of Cape Town**

During the course of World War II, the phenomenon of squatting among Africans in Cape Town became widespread for the first time. While the war was by no means the sole catalyst for the large surge of Africans taking up residence as squatters, it was
certainly the most important. Although Africans from the eastern Cape Province began migrating to Cape Town in large numbers already by the mid-1930s, the real “take-off” in terms of a large-scale movement only occurred with the onset of the war. As alluded to in the last chapter, the primary push factors related to successive years of drought in the countryside, and were compounded by overcrowding and soil erosion. These ecological developments, combined with the shortage of arable land in the Transkei and Ciskei, and the magnetic appeal of urban employment opportunities translated into a widespread exodus of young African men and women to Cape Town and other South African cities.

A variety of factors drew migrants to Cape Town away from their home districts. African high school students who completed one-page assignments in 1941 in response to the topic, “Why My Parents (Uncle/Mother/Father/Sister) Came To Cape Town” provided some insight into the reasons. A few key reasons from the 50-odd reports emerge: students cite the lack of land in the Transkei, the need for money to buy cattle, better schooling and medical facilities, and more nutritious, less expensive food.¹ The Cape Peninsula also offered Africans the added advantage of a social environment where the strictures of segregation were less rigorously applied than in other major industrial centers like Durban and the Witwatersrand.

The principal dynamic, however, impelling Africans to take up residence in Cape Town was the city’s burgeoning demand for unskilled labor, required to fuel the rapid acceleration of industry and commerce that developed in response to the withdrawal of

¹ Jack and Ray Simons Collection, 1930s-1980s, BC 1081; E2.6, “Why families came to Cape Town.” The compositions are dated June 17, 1941.
foreign manufactured goods and the subsequent emergence of local import substitution industries during the war years. The Cape Peninsula offered good employment opportunities, while by contrast, regular wage employment was difficult to locate in the Transkei and Ciskei, and the range of jobs extremely limited. In addition to the city's voracious demand for unskilled work in numerous fields, pay levels were in excess of those found in other regions of South Africa.

The obligation to support family members living in the Eastern Cape often pushed young, able-bodied Africans to urban centers like Cape Town. In cities they could earn sums of money that they would otherwise be unable to amass in the rural environment. Right until the late 1950s, a large percentage of Africans lived and worked as migrant workers with the ultimate aim of retiring to their homes districts in the Ciskeian and Transkeian territories. Often this meant that they might spend two-thirds of their working lives in Cape Town. One study found that on average, Africans came to Cape Town at the age of between 23 to 25, and proceeded to spend the majority of their most productive years there.

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2 Where testimony from oral informants is cited, the person's surname and the page number(s) from transcribed interviews are provided. Audio cassettes of recorded interviews and their transcripts are available in the University of Cape Town’s Manuscripts and Archives Library. A list of all informants, interviewers, and the dates of the interviews appears in the Bibliography, under the subheading of Oral Histories. Photographs of many informants also appear in Appendix I. Mrs. F, 1; Koto, 1; Mr. M; Makele, 1; Mehlwena, 1,5; Mr. N, 1; Nondzaba, I, 1; Ngquitse, 1; Ntsababa, 1; Oniwe, 2; Richards, 1; Mrs. S, 2.

3 Department of Native Affairs (NAD) Annual Report, “Review of the Activities of the NAD for the Year 1943-44,” p.23. Monica Wilson and Archie Mafeje, Langa: A Study of Social Groups in an African Township (Cape Town, 1963), p.54. This was normally attributed to the fact that Coloured people commanded higher wages, and African wages were affected in an upward fashion as Africans progressively displaced unskilled Coloured laborers.

4 Sheila van der Horst, African Workers in Town; A Study of Labour in Cape Town (Cape Town, 1964), pp.12,46.
Family ties in one way or another drew many Africans away from the countryside into the cities. Of course, ties were rarely severed by those who ventured into urban centers. Few migrants failed to maintain some measure of contact with their families and friends in their home districts. This was especially true of urban dwellers who lived together as a family unit in Cape Town. Of a sample group of 631 African workers, only 145 stated that they viewed Cape Town as their home, while the remaining 77 percent (486) of respondents continued to regard their home villages as their true homes, to which they planned returning. Among the same group, only 25 percent (159) intended to remain in Cape Town. Further emphasizing the manner in which they saw themselves as impermanent sojourners in Cape Town, only 32 percent (131) of the men wished to have their wives join them in Cape Town. At least half the men working in Cape Town sent sums of money to their homes in the Eastern Cape. Furthermore, they might return to their rural homes for the plowing season, or otherwise to attend to family matters. The duration of stays in the rural areas was often of a protracted nature, on average somewhere in the neighborhood of 12 months.5

In interviews with former squatters, all the above reasons for migrating to Cape Town emerged. In the wake of her husband’s death in a gold mine on the Witwatersrand, Agrinet Mnyatheli came to Cape Town in order to support her children in the Transkei.6 Likewise, Mrs. F sought work in Cape Town to provide for her younger siblings following

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6 Mnyatheli 1, 2-3.
the death of her parents.\textsuperscript{7} Part of Michael Mehlwena’s purpose in settling in Cape Town was to remit a portion of his wages back to his family in the Transkei.\textsuperscript{8} At the opposite end of this kind of relationship, Wilson Kolo sought work in Cape Town precisely because his father “was not coming back home and he was not maintaining the family.”\textsuperscript{9} As early as 1925, Gertrude Fukusana also traveled to Cape Town to join a parent, in her case, her mother, who was then living in Ndabeni.\textsuperscript{10}

In some cases, migrants came to Cape Town specifically to preserve the integrity of their families which were at risk, most notably in the instance of wives joining errant husbands.\textsuperscript{11} Usually when a wife choose to live with her husband in Cape Town, this move involved leaving children in the care of grandparents.\textsuperscript{12} Frequently, wives wanted to ensure that their husbands had not established liaisons with other women, a development which among other things, would jeopardize the financial input of the husband. Many times, the interruption of remittance payments to wives in the countryside was the catalyst for women to seek out their husbands in Cape Town.

Alternatively, women might flee to Cape Town in search of greater personal autonomy and to escape unhappy marriages. In Cape Town they were afforded much

\textsuperscript{7} Mrs. F, 1.

\textsuperscript{8} Mehlwena, 4.

\textsuperscript{9} Kolo, 1.

\textsuperscript{10} Fukusana, 1,4-6. They lived in Ndabeni until 1928, when they were forced to move to Langa.

\textsuperscript{11} Mrs. E, 1; Foloti, 2; Gontsana, 1; Lucwaba 2, Mabija, 1.

\textsuperscript{12} Van der Horst, \textit{African Workers in Town}, p.43.
greater freedom than they would have otherwise exercised in their homesteads under the
watchful gaze of family and community members. For instance, Susan Tshapile migrated
to Cape Town to begin anew after she became estranged from her husband, an older man
who was a close friend of her father, and who had been foisted upon her. In a related
fashion, Nozpitho Yoyo came to Cape Town simply in search of excitement and “to seek
new adventure.” After leaving Bhaziya (close to Umtata, the capital of the Transkei) at
age 19 to work as a nurse at a hospital in Alice, she was reluctant to return to her small
hometown since “going back to a rural area is difficult” and settled in Cape Town.
Already in the early 1930s, the Native Economic Commission had recognized the allure
that city life held for many rural Africans, when it observed (in a predictably
condescending fashion) how young Africans were drawn to the excitement of cities, which
offered “potent drink, amours, fine clothes, better opportunities of education, contact with
civilization.”

Opportunities for relatively high-paying employment, however, were the main
factor in accounting for the townward drift of Africans from the Eastern Cape. Like other
urban centers in the Union of South Africa, Cape Town’s economy was booming

13 Belinda Bozoli, Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South

14 Tshapile, 1. Bonner attributes broken marriages as an impetus for women to migrate to towns
on the Witwatersrand. Philip Bonner, “African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930s and 1960s:

15 Yoyo, 2.

beginning with the onset of World War II. In the words of one commentator writing years later, this period “was in a sense Cape Town’s ‘Industrial Revolution’ as it had all the attributes of this phenomenon such as large numbers of squatters living in insanitary conditions, poor transport facilities and a high crime rate.” Ambitious defense projects designed to boost South Africa’s preparedness for war required a vast reservoir of unskilled labor throughout the Cape Peninsula. As the principal port near at hand to the vital waterway surrounding the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Town more than any other Sub-Saharan city was vulnerable to attack by the Axis Powers. The relative proximity of the former German colony of German Southwest Africa (modern-day Namibia), which still boasted a sizable population of people of German extraction, heightened the potential risk to Cape Town, and South Africa at large. Additionally, Japan’s imperial navy posed a threat to South Africa’s coastal cities and the sea lanes that linked them.

To guard against the prospect of naval and air assaults, the Defense Department under the lead of the Prime Minister, General Jan Christian Smuts, undertook many projects to shore up Cape Town’s ability to withstand and repel such attacks. In addition to blackouts (following German U-boat attacks on merchants ships off South Africa’s coast in October 1942) and the installation of anti-aircraft artillery, the Defense Department initiated a series of defense works in the Cape Town area. African men were


instrumental in meeting the vast labor requirements for these projects, which included improving the harbors of Cape Town and Simonstown (site of South Africa’s main naval station and a British Admiralty base); augmenting, refurbishing, and maintaining the naval fleet, and establishing strategically located artillery bunkers overlooking access to Cape Town’s harbor and the surrounding hinterland. When South Africa declared war against Germany on September 5, 1939, the South African Navy found itself in the curious position of possessing no ships. All suitable merchant trawlers and whalers were either purchased or chartered by the newly formed South African Naval Service and outfitted with gunnery in Simonstown’s Admiralty dockyard. With Mediterranean shipping lanes closed off by the Axis Powers, 60 percent of the Allies’ ship repairs were undertaken either in Cape Town and Simonstown, or Durban. By late 1941, somewhere between 3,000 to 4,000 African men were employed by the various war camps situated at Pollsmoor, Wingfield, and Brooklyn within the greater Cape Town area. Among the many private concerns aiding the war effort, the Cape Explosives Works factory in

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19 Several hundred men also worked for the Admiralty dockyard in Simonstown as riveters, caulkers, and drillers. Natives in Cape Peninsula: Report of Mr. C.W. Slarke, Inspector of Native Locations (Slarke Report), May 12, 1943, p.8. Altogether, there were approximately 800 Africans working in the Simonstown dockyard. Department of Native Affairs (NTS) 4504; 581/313 vol.III, March 4, 1941, Minutes of the meeting on “The Influx of Natives into the Cape Peninsula” held on March 3, 1941, p.2.

20 Joel Mervis, South Africa In World War II: 50 Years (Johannesburg, 1989), p.87.


22 NTS 4504; 581/313 vol.III, March 4, 1941, Minutes of the meeting on “The Influx of Natives into the Cape Peninsula” held on March 3, 1941, p.2. Additional camps were also located in Wynberg and Ottery. Slarke Report, p.16.
Somerset West, a town immediately outside Cape Town’s borders, was the largest, employing 3,300 Africans.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{State Response to the “Augean Muddle”}

All told, tens of thousands of Africans arrived in Cape Town in the space of a few years following the declaration of war. The relatively sudden appearance of this flood of Africans from the Eastern Cape was a source of consternation and concern among many white Capetonians. Their unease was increased owing to the sprawling and uncontrolled nature in which a large percentage of the newly arrived African migrants took up residence, namely in shacks in “black spots” throughout the city and on its boundaries. Capturing the sense of revulsion expressed by many observers at the haphazard and unsanitary conditions prevailing in these shack settlements, the \textit{Cape Times} referred to the situation as an “Augean muddle.”\textsuperscript{24} In an attempt to come to terms with this perceived invasion, the Minister of the Native Affairs Department (NAD), Mr. H.A. Fagan, compelled the Cape Town City Council (CCC) to agree to the imposition of Proclamation 105 of 1939, which came into force July 1, 1939.\textsuperscript{25} Under its terms, the only Africans who were permitted entry to Cape Town were: 1) those who came with an offer of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Slarke Report, p.3.
\item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{Cape Times}, August 13, 1941, “Augean Muddle.”
\item \textsuperscript{25} NTS 4504; 581/313, Pt. II, December 30, 1940, “Re: Native Labour,” from Rogers, the Manager of Native Administration (MNA) to The System Manager, South African Railways and Harbours, p.1.
\end{itemize}
employment; 2) *bona fide* visitors; and 3) those exempted by the CCC (i.e., registered voters).26

Fagan’s principal stated concern in pushing for the proclamation centered on the putatively negative implications for the employment opportunities of Coloured workers if the influx of Africans went unchecked. Initially, the CCC evinced reluctance in lending its support to the proposed proclamation. In December 1938, councillors had rejected it by a vote of 21 to 8. Significantly, no Coloured councillor voted in favor of the proclamation even though its ostensible aim was to protect the interests of the Coloured community.27 Abdullah Abdurahman and his daughter, Zainunnissa “Cissie” Gool, two of Cape Town’s most prominent Coloured activists, were at the forefront of the opposition to the proclamation.28 They rejected the contention that African workers posed a threat to jobs occupied by Coloured men and women.29

26 NTS 4504; 581/313, Pt. II, undated, from D.B. Molteno, W.G.A. Mears, and H.J. Simons, p.1. Africans were statutorily exempt from the requirement to reside at a location or hostel if they were registered parliamentary voters, or property owners. 3/CT; 1/4/6/6/4/1/2, May 8, 1939, “Accommodation of Natives, Urban Area of Capetown,” to the Chairman and Members of the Native Affairs Sub-Committee, p.1.


28 NTS 4504; 581/313, Pt II, May 9, 1939, p.2. Abdurahman (1872-1940) served on Cape Town’s City Council from 1904 to 1940 (except for 1913-1915) while Gool (1900-1963) was a councillor from 1938-1950s. Among their many political affiliations, Abdurahman was most closely associated with his leadership of the African Peoples’ Organisation (APO) and Gool with the National Liberation League (NLL). Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter, eds., *From Protest To Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964, Volume 4* (Stanford, 1977).

29 The Coloured Advisory Council did express anxiety about the influx of Africans into Cape Town and argued for preferential treatment of Coloured workers. *Cape Argus*, October 4, 1943, “The Influx of Natives”. However, it is unlikely that this council was a representative voice of popular opinion among Coloured citizens, since it was arbitrarily established by the Departments of Social Welfare and
Coloured workers increasingly disdained to perform the primary employment assumed by Africans--heavy manual labor for men, and domestic work for women. Moreover, employers frequently expressed the view that Africans made superior laborers. White employers regarded Coloured men as less physically robust and unreliable owing to their alleged penchant for liquor. Benefiting from these popular stereotypes and preferences, Africans succeeded in making significant inroads into the unskilled labor market. The absence of approximately 20,000 Coloured men, of whom a large portion were unskilled laborers, on active military duty during World War II further facilitated the relative ease with which African men supplanted unskilled Coloured laborers.

In the early 1940s, politicians, civil servants, ratepayer associations, and journalists devoted a great deal of attention to the potential problems that the presence of squatters posed to Cape Town. The preeminent source of alarm was the unprecedented and mass

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31 NAD Annual Report (Review of the Activities of the Department of Native Affairs for the Year 1943-44), p.23.

32 NTS 4504; 581/313, Pt II, May 9, 1939, p.2.

33 As Rogers, the MNA, observed: “There is no doubt that owing to the absence of a large number of Cape Coloured men on Active Service the Native has to a certain extent encroached in spheres of employment normally occupied by the Cape Coloured.” 3/CT: 1/1/4/10/1/11 CCC NAC Minutes, June 5, 1945. NTS 4523; 602/313, “Control and Housing of Natives: Western Province,” January 21, 1943, p.5. NTS 4504; 581/313, vol.III, Draft speech by D.L. Smit, NAD Secretary, to the conference of local authorities at Cape Town, p.1, April 28, 1943. According to the CCC Finance and General Purposes Committee, there were approximately 30,000 Coloured servicemen on duty. NTS 4504; 581/313, Vol.III, “Report of the Native Affairs Committee,” p.5, June 2, 1944.
scale of the influx of Africans into Cape Town. The most visible manifestations of this alarm were evident in local newspaper coverage, memoranda circulated among government and municipal officials, and the official reports generated by the departments of Native Affairs, Health, and the South African Police (SAP) (see Figure 2).

Reflecting this official disquiet, no less than three government reports narrowly focusing on the Cape Town area appeared in the three-year period of 1941-1943. Official concern with issues related to Africans in an urban setting was not entirely new. The apprehension with which Native Affairs officials viewed African urbanization had been repeatedly reflected in NAD annual reports and other occasional government reports, most notably those of 1922 and 1932. Moreover, in 1937, a Union-wide report on the process of urbanization among Africans was commissioned by the NAD and undertaken by two Chief Native Commissioners, J. Mould Young and A.L. Barrett. But in the early 1940s, the tone regarding the existence of rapidly increasing numbers of Africans in South African cities grew shriller and Cape Town became the focus of considerable government attention.

For the remainder of the 1940s and 1950s, no further reports appeared despite the burgeoning African population and the periodic high-profile media attention that focused on the plight of Africans in the Western Cape. It was the rapidity and scale of the initial


Figure 3 Two officials survey the Cape Flats with Table Mountain in the background. *Cape Times*, September 3, 1949. (Courtesy of the South African Library, Photographic and Special Collections)
major wave of arrivals of African migrants during the war years that caught officials and white Capetonians off-guard, and some sense of this collective discombobulation is captured in the three NAD reports and newspaper articles of the time. Since these reports encapsulate official perceptions and prescriptive remedies concerning African urbanization and squatting so effectively, an examination of their findings and the changes in policy directions flowing from their recommendations will prove instructive. Of the three reports, one was a full-blown government report, commissioned by the Department of Health, while the other two were interdepartmental reports researched and written by senior Inspectors of Urban Locations within NAD ranks, P.G. Cauldwell and C.W. Slarke respectively. Both men had extensive experience with “the Native problem” in the Cape Town area, and in each instance, the appearance of their reports within official circles occasioned well-publicized conferences convened by the NAD and attended by key Cape Peninsula local authorities.

Assessing the Problem: The Cauldwell Report

The Cauldwell Report was the first comprehensive account to detail the extent and nature of African urbanization in Cape Town. Apparently, its graphic depiction of the squalid and overcrowded manner in which African squatters subsisted shocked its dismayed contemporary readers.\(^{36}\) Although it was blandly entitled “Natives in the Cape

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\(^{36}\) Even H.R. Storey, an official with the Department of Public Education, who gave evidence about African education, found the report “an eye-opener.” NTS 4504 581/313 vol.III, October 3, 1941, Letter from Storey to Cauldwell.
Peninsula," a large measure of its attention focused specifically on the issue of housing accommodation for Africans.\textsuperscript{37}

According to the 1938 census, the municipality of Cape Town was home to a population of 15,679 Africans, of whom only 3,855 were inhabitants of Langa Location.\textsuperscript{38} Four other sites of accommodation, which collectively housed approximately 800 Africans were sanctioned by City Council.\textsuperscript{39} However, the remainder of Cape Town’s African population had taken up residence outside of approved accommodation. Most of these people inhabited city slum tenements, and more typically, shack communities scattered around the greater Cape Town area.

As many officials acknowledged, the census and official estimates were flawed, and that in all probability, the number of Africans was significantly in excess of these estimates—the only question was by how much? Given the covert nature of squatting, its actual extent was difficult to gauge with any accuracy. Clearly, it was in the best interests of African squatters to erect shacks in areas not readily visible or accessible to patrolling police.

\textsuperscript{37} In the course of his research, conducted over two months, Cauldwell visited three squatter camps, all in the southern end of Cape Town, close to the False Bay coast: Blaauwvlei, Hardevlei and Vrygrond. Interdepartmental Report on Native Squatting in the Cape Peninsula, Department of Native Affairs, 1941 (Cauldwell Report), pp.998,1005. NTS 4503; 581/313 vol.1, Minutes of a Conference of Representatives of Local Authorities, May 7, 1941, p.4.


\textsuperscript{39} The four sanctioned sites of residence were the Docks Compound, St. Columbus Home, the Stakesbury Hostel in Cape Town, and the Cape Marines Suburbs Limited Compound in Camps Bay. Cauldwell Report, pp.1003-1004.
police officers and NAD officials. The topography of the Cape Flats area served this purpose well since it was characterized by undeveloped parcels of sand and bush with few viable hard roads. Commenting on the clandestine nature of squatting and the advantages that accrued from their relative invisibility, Cauldwell noted the reasons why outlying regions beyond the city’s borders were ideal for Africans seeking space to erect makeshift homes: “The nature of the terrain in these areas affords an excellent opportunity for Natives to hide away from the Police and Municipal officials whose task in this sandy country is an unenviable one. It is a comparatively easy matter for Natives, who have, for example, been refused permission to enter the urban area, to seek refuge here and remain undetected for a time at any rate.”

For Cauldwell and the NAD, the primary danger arising from the presence of tens of thousands of Africans squatting in and around Cape Town related to the loss of control by government officials over the African population. To remedy this development, one which he regarded as highly undesirable, Cauldwell proposed several solutions. Most significantly, he argued that the informal township of Windermere [located adjacent to the city’s main industrial area in Divisional Council of the Cape Peninsula (Divco) territory] needed to be incorporated within the City of Cape Town. The greater Cape Town area fell under the jurisdiction of two authorities: the CCC and Divco. The former administered the City of Cape Town and the adjoining suburbs, as well as a corridor of land extending

As Cauldwell observed: “That no one knows the exact number of such dwellings or how many persons are housed in them is not surprising, for this portion of the urban area is covered with sand dunes and thick bush.” Cauldwell Report, pp. 1004-1005.

Cauldwell Report, pp. 1005. Cauldwell refers specifically to the Retreat and Vrygrond areas of Cape Town, where shack settlements flourished.
down to the False Bay coast (see Figure 3). The CCC had jurisdiction over the city proper and the most densely populated areas radiating out from its center. Divco, by contrast, was a rural authority with limited powers. Most of the territory it administered was undeveloped or agricultural land, and included much of the tract of land known as the Cape Flats. Over the course of the twentieth century, most of the land abutting CCC territory became increasingly peri-urban or urban in nature, as in the case of Windermere. Although the two authorities operated as separate entities, on occasion they coordinated efforts to deal with issues that transcended their respective boundaries.

Windermere was the area’s largest and most visible shantytown. It had grown by leaps and bounds in the late 1930s and early 1940s as a result of its proximity to the city, major industrial enterprises, and the nearby Wingfield airport. During World War II, Windermere benefited from the military activity at the Wingfield facility, which was a key military base in the Western Cape and by 1943, engaged approximately 5,000 African men. The main attraction of Windermere followed from its location immediately outside CCC jurisdiction. Divco lacked the personnel and the clearly defined authority to restrict the erection of irregular structures like shanties. African and Coloured squatters were generally free to build them unmolested by city officials. More than any other squatter

42 Slarke Report, p.7.
Figure 4 Jurisdictional Boundaries of the Cape Peninsula

area, Windermere was home to a multiracial population, with Africans and Coloureds living in close proximity, and with a smattering of whites and Indians present as well.\textsuperscript{43}

Cauldwell suggested that failure to bring Windermere under municipal administration was tantamount to turning a blind eye to the squalid conditions of the squatter camp, especially with regard to haphazard housing, rudimentary sanitation, and inadequate drainage. Administrative soothsayers warned of dire consequences concerning the loss of control of the African population, potential health threats, and chaotic urban sprawl if the CCC failed to intervene. It was obvious that administrative inertia, as well as lack of an adequate revenue base and the necessary coercive apparatus prevented Divco from implementing the far-reaching changes needed to transform Windermere from an uncontrolled peri-urban slum into a residential neighborhood serviced with proper sanitation, roads, lighting, water supply, and public facilities. Cauldwell’s urging for incorporation echoed a similar recommendation tendered by the Urbanised Areas Committee in its report of 1939, and one voiced by numerous commentators on Windermere’s appalling conditions.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} 3/CT; 1/4/9/3/1/1 CCC Housing Committee Minutes, February-August 1945, May 16, 1945, “Memorandum by Shadick Higgins, the Medical Director of Social Services on the Windermere Housing Survey”, p.5. Also quote Sean Field, “The Power of Exclusion: Moving Memories from Windermere to the Cape Flats, 1920s - 1990s,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Essex, 1996, p.172-173.

\textsuperscript{44} U.G. No. 8 - 1940, Report of the Committee to consider the Administration of Areas which are becoming Urbanised but which are not under Local Government Control, 1938-39 (Thornton Report). Paragraph 98, p.24. Already in 1931, City Council and Divco had held discussions concerning the city’s incorporation of Windermere, but these did not come to fruition in light of the CE’s recommendation that the required capital outlay of £250,000 to bring this development about was prohibitively costly. NTS 4504; 581/313, vol.III., Draft speech by D.L. Smit to the conference of local authorities at Cape Town, April 28, 1943, p.3.
Another key suggestion that Cauldwell made was to establish a hostel in the city center for single men, and another in the Retreat area of the Southern Suburbs for both single men and married couples. Establishing a hostel in Cape Town proper accorded in spirit to a resolution the CCC had passed on August 31, 1939. Given that the municipal area encompassed some 78 square miles and was over 30 miles in length, several councillors argued that an unnecessary hardship was imposed on Africans in requiring them to reside in Langa (which was approximately 10 miles outside of the city center) and commute long distances. Others however, were reluctant to permit the establishment of a hostel in the city since many of its potential inhabitants were engaged in the affluent, outlying white residential areas between the city and Camps Bay, where they worked as gardeners, chauffeurs, and “kitchen boys.” While the City Engineer (CE) cautioned against locating a hostel in the heart of the city and suggested that the industrial area of Woodstock offered a more appropriate alternate site, the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) approved the city’s Old Somerset Hospital as suitable. Stuart Alexander Rogers, the CCC’s Manager of Native Administration (MNA), also backed the idea. The NAD

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45 NTS 4503; 581/313 vol.1, Minutes of a Conference of Representatives of Local Authorities, May 7, 1941, pp. 5-6.


48 Of all the officials who dealt with Africans in the Cape Town area, Rogers commanded a more thorough understanding of the issues that confronted them than any other official. From December 1938, he served as Superintendent of Natives, and subsequently, MNA. He occupied this post throughout the 1940s and 1950s. 3/CT; 1/4/6/6/4/1/2, May 8, 1939, “Accommodation of Natives, Urban Area of Capetown” to the Chairman and Members of the Native Affairs Sub-Committee, p.3. 3/CT; 1/4/6/6/4/1/2, CCC Native Affairs Committee, February 14, 1939, “Appointment of Mr. S.A. Rogers as Superintendent
likewise supported the proposal and looked favorably upon CCC’s negotiations for the acquisition of the site occupied by the hospital. Since 1924, the NAD had consistently “expressed the view that it was unreasonable to expect all Natives employed in greater Cape Town to be compelled to reside at one spot” and advocated the establishment of a hostel for African in the city center.

Cauldwell attributed the growing problem of inadequate housing available to Africans to the application of Proclamation 105 of 1939, which he contended had the effect of driving Africans to seek refuge on the outskirts of the city in the attempt to evade municipal detection and harassment. But as the Minister of NAD admitted, by 1940, the proclamation and the restrictive measures contained within the updated Urban Areas Act (of 1937) had become “a dead letter in consequence of the demand for labour for military contracts.”

of Natives”.


50 In a letter to Council, the Secretary of NAD stated that “To this Department it appears unreasonable to require Natives who are working at Camps Bay to make the long journey from Ndabeni to that place every morning and return in the evening. . . . It is impossible to expect that all Natives employed in the Greater Capetown can be compelled to reside at one spot.” 3/CT; 1/4/6/6/4/1/2, November 23, 1938, “Accommodation of Natives: Urban Area of Cape Town,” from the Town Clerk (TC) to the Chairman and Members of the Native Affairs Sub-Committee, pp.3-4. The Secretary offered two alternatives: either establish locations in outlying areas of the city or require employers of 25 or more African employees to provide accommodation on site. He urged that employers be required to provide accommodation on site for certain classes of African workers. Cauldwell Report, pp.1006.

51 Cauldwell Report, pp.1009,1021.

52 GES 621; 113/13B, May 3, 1945, “Re: Conference on Windermere: Collaboration with Department of Public Health,” from Major van der Byl, NAD Minister, to H.G. Lawrence, the Minister of Welfare and Demobilization, p.1.
Cauldwell, however, was not in favor of relaxing state control over the lives of Cape Town’s African population. Rather, he preferred that the government and local authorities (i.e., the CCC and Divco) take proactive measures to curtail the scale of African influx into Cape Town given the inadequate accommodation for Africans. Moreover, he urged that those Africans who were discovered in Cape Town in violation of Proclamation 105 be “repatriated” to their reserves. To ease pressure on both the government and local authorities to provide subsidized housing, Cauldwell proposed requiring employers of sizable African work forces (of more than 25 employees) to provide housing accommodation for them.

As an urban authority, Cape Town possessed the necessary legal mechanisms to restrict squatting among Africans within its borders. The provisions of Section 5(1) of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act gave the city the power to prevent Africans from residing in areas other than those sanctioned by Council. The terms of Section 6 of the Act further empowered officials to remove all Africans living within 5 miles of the city’s boundaries. This last provision had become a moot point since it had never been enforced. As a matter of fact, it was precisely within five miles of Cape Town’s borders that many of the largest

53 Cauldwell Report, p. 1009.

54 Under Section One (1)(e) of the Urban Areas Act, employers were legally bound to comply. NTS 4503; 581/313 vol.1, Minutes of a Conference of Representatives of Local Authorities, May 7, 1941, p.7.

55 Natives (Urban Areas) Act, No. 21 of 1923.

56 In the original legislation, Africans were prohibited from residing within three miles of the boundaries of Cape Town. Section 6 was subsequently amended in 1937 to apply to a distance of within 5 miles of the boundary. NTS 4504; 581/313 vol.III, September 29, 1941, “Natives in the Cape Division,” p.2, from G.O. Owen, Secretary, Divco. NTS 4503; 581/313 Vol.1, Minutes of a Conference of Representatives of Local Authorities, May 7, 1941, p.7.
and most disorderly squatter settlements arose. And virtually all the squatter settlements in Divco territory arose within 10 miles of the boundary. However, during the war, it was the NAD’s position to dissuade its local officials from applying the terms of the Act until such time as adequate housing accommodation was made available for Africans in Cape Town. This policy accorded with Cauldwell’s recommendation that prosecutions of this kind “would result not only in the upset of the labor force but also in the affliction of untold hardships on the Natives and their families.” Irrespective of the NAD position, local judges routinely refused to find Africans guilty of squatting in prohibited areas as long as no alternate accommodation at Langa was available, on the grounds that evicting Africans from their miserable shacks would be inhumane.

In 1943, acting in concert with the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General, Douglas Smit, the NAD Secretary, sent out a circular advising all NAD officials, magistrates, and justices of the peace to stay prosecutions against white landowners and African tenants without first consulting the local Native Commissioner or presiding NAD officer. Similarly, it was the policy of the SAP to refrain from actively seeking out African squatters in violation of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, although it did pursue

57 NTS 4504; 581/313 vol.III, September 29, 1941, “Natives in the Cape Division,” p.2, from G.O. Owen, Secretary, Divco.

58 NTS 6482; 77/313 (S), November 30, 1942, Letter from Donald Molteno to D.L. Smit.

individual cases that were brought to its attention as a result of complaints.\textsuperscript{60} Not only was the lack of alternate accommodation a restraining factor, but there was a general understanding that African labor was necessary to the war effort in the Cape Peninsula. Many observers believed that the presence of large numbers of African workers was only a temporary war-time phenomenon, and that with the cessation of hostilities, Africans would return to the their rural homes.\textsuperscript{61}

There were, nevertheless, instances when landowners were prosecuted. Mr. Cook, the owner of the land on which one of the largest squatter camps (called Cook’s Bush) in the Cape Town area flourished, was fined £5 for being in violation of Section 6 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act.\textsuperscript{62} Charges were also brought against 3 farmers in the Noordhoek area (immediately outside the residential community of Fish Hoek, a commuter suburb of Cape Town) who allowed Africans to squat upon their land. One of the farmers was charged £3 and, in this case, even his African tenants were charged £2.\textsuperscript{63} Most of the Africans squatting on land in Noordhoek worked nearby for either the

\textsuperscript{60} NTS 6482; 77/313 (S), November 30, 1942, Letter from Donald Molteno to D.L. Smit.

\textsuperscript{61} NTS 6482; 77/313 (S), December 19, 1942, “Prosecutions under Section 6 Act 21 of 1923,” from the Acting Additional Native Commissioner to D.L. Smit, p.2.

\textsuperscript{62} NTS 6482; 77/313 (S), December 19, 1942, “Prosecutions under Section 6 Act 21 of 1923,” from the Acting Additional Native Commissioner to D.L. Smit, p.1. £4 of the £5 fine was suspended subject to the condition that Cook evicted his African tenants within 14 days.

\textsuperscript{63} NTS 6503 319/313 (S), undated, “Natives squatting at Noordhoek,” from the Secretary, Divco, 1942. Under Section 5(5) of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, 1923, it was an offence on the part of an owner of premises within a proclaimed area, such as Cape Town, to allow an African to reside on those premises without a permit from an urban authority. Cape Times, August 8, 1939, Letter to the editor from the President and General Secretary of the NLL.
Admiralty in Simonstown or for the Defense Department at Pollsmoor. However, at both sites, Africans lacked proper accommodation and although African workers were essential to the defense works undertaken in the Cape Peninsula, neither the Admiralty, the government, nor its military contractors provided adequate accommodations for them. Even the Town Clerk (TC) of Fish Hoek found himself in the unusual position of pleading to have the charges against these African squatters dismissed. Although, clearly unwilling to acquiesce to the establishment of African squatter communities close to his municipality, he thought it “not right that these unfortunates should be so dealt with but rather the owners of the land should be severely punished.” Technically the farmers in this case were free to apply to a magistrate under Act No. 32, 1909 for a Private Location Licence (which would then require the consent of both Divco and the Governor-General), but it was obvious that this permission would not be forthcoming. As the National Liberation League (NLL) had already argued a few years earlier, it violated the spirit of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act to prosecute African tenants since the relevant clauses were meant to penalize landlords who exploited Africans for exorbitant rent.

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64 Pollsmoor is an agricultural community on the outskirts of Cape Town, at the foot of Table Mountain. NTS 6482; 77/313 (S), December 11, 1942, Memorandum from Donald Molteno to D.L. Smit.

65 NTS 6503 319/313 (S), December 3, 1942, “Re: Natives squatting on land at Noordhoek,” from A. J. Wright, the TC, Fish Hoek to Donald Molteno. In defense of “the unfortunates”, Wright pointed out in a condescending manner that “[t]he native is no doubt quite ignorant of the Law...”

66 NTS 6503 319/313 (S), undated, “Natives squatting at Noordhoek,” from the Secretary, Divco, 1942.

67 Cape Times, August 8, 1939, Letter to the editor from the President and General Secretary of the NLL.
In response to Cauldwell’s recommendation that a coordinating committee composed of local authorities be assembled to grapple with the ostensibly urgent crisis that they faced, a conference was convened on May 7, 1941 by Smit. A fundamental issue that underpinned the conference and threatened to rent it apart was the question of who was to accept blame for the desperate state of affairs that had been permitted to develop on the Cape Flats. As G.O. Owen, Divco’s Secretary, argued, given that the squatter “problem” had emerged in Divco territory within five miles of Cape Town’s border, and that the provisions of Section 6 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act specifically prohibited this development, the fault should lay with the government (specifically the SAP and the NAD) for failing to enforce the provisions of the act. Indeed, it seemed doubly unjust and preposterous that financial and administrative responsibilities should devolve to Divco and taxpayers living under its authority, when a large portion of the Africans residing within Divco jurisdiction worked in Cape Town and generated wealth for industrial, commercial, and municipal concerns in the city. Effectively, Divco would be providing for the social reproduction of a work force from which it derived minimal benefit and considerable annoyance. Moreover, as a rural authority, Divco was unable to contend with a problem that over time had become urban in nature. Divco’s original administrative mandate merely had been to provide and maintain roads. At a later date, in the 1930s, the government had also invested it with the duty of safeguarding public health. But owing to a modest tax base, which accrued primarily from rates on immovable property, Divco

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68 The NAD could also act on the basis of the Natives Land Act of 1913, or the Private Locations Act. NTS 4504; 581/313 vol.III, March 4, 1941, Minutes of the meeting on “The Influx of Natives into the Cape Peninsula” held on March 3, 1941, p.1.
lacked the financial resources to assume the responsibility of restricting African influx or providing adequate infrastructure for properly planned housing estates.\textsuperscript{69}

\textbf{Tightening the Screws: The Slarke Report}

Tellingly, within two years of the release of Cauldwell’s report, the NAD recognized the need to commission an additional report. Slarke’s report investigated similar terms of reference and discussed many of the same issues.\textsuperscript{70} The principal factor accounting for this second NAD report following so closely on the heels of its predecessor was obvious. As Slarke noted, the deplorable conditions among squatters and slum dwellers described by Cauldwell had grown appreciably worse, and had mushroomed dramatically in scale. Statistics gathered by the NAD indicated that where only 7,484 Africans inhabited areas under the authority of Divco in 1941, two years later, the African population had surged to 29,373. In Windermere alone, their numbers had supposedly increased from 2,146 to 19,000 in this short interval.\textsuperscript{71} The African population in the CCC would have likewise underwent a huge increase, especially in the larger squatter camps of Retreat and Cook’s Bush. While estimates had placed the joint African population of

\textsuperscript{69} NTS 4504; 581/313 vol.III, September 29, 1941, Memorandum from G.O. Owen, Secretary, Divco, “Natives in the Cape Division,” pp.3-4. It was not until 1944, that with the proclamation of Proclamation No. 248, that Divco became an Urban Local Authority with adequate powers to legislate and enforce regulations governing housing codes. GES 2975; PS3, “Re: Control and Accommodation of Natives at Bellville,” from A.P. Tuenrich, the TC and Treasurer to the NAD Secretary, p.1.

\textsuperscript{70} Specifically, its terms of reference were to “review the present conditions of Natives in the Cape Peninsula, to arrive at some estimate as to their numbers, to consider means of checking their influx to the area and of meeting the problems which their presence had created.” Slarke Report, p.1.

\textsuperscript{71} Slarke Report, pp.10-11. Slarke seems to have drawn upon estimates from Divco’s MOH and the police stationed in Windermere. 4/CT; 1/1/1/64, March 20, 1943, p.186, Divco Council Minutes January - June 1943.
Epping Forest and Blauuwvlei (a section of the Retreat area) at 9,800 in 1938, apparently it had grown to 23,000 by 1943. Slarke estimated that approximately 23,000 Africans were employed in the Cape Town municipality and that one-tenth of these workers had families. From these figures, one informed observer extrapolated the African population in the municipality of Cape Town to be in the vicinity of 32,000 (assuming an average family of a husband, wife and three children). All told, this meant that even by conservative estimates, an approximate population of 60,000 Africans resided in the greater Cape Town region.

By the time Slarke’s report was circulated, the city had acted on Cauldwell’s recommendation and formally incorporated Windermere. Subsequent to that event, “a marked exodus” had taken place among Windermere squatters. The increased level of municipal control in the area was not the sole factor contributing to the exit of many African inhabitants. A general fear that wartime aerial attacks might be visited on the nearby airfield at Wingfield also accounted for this flight. All the weekly “Mbombela” trains that departed from Cape Town for the Transkei ran at full capacity at this time in response to the movement of Africans back to the Transkei and Ciskei.

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72 Cape Times, April 29, 1943. “Indescribable Squalor of Peninsula Slums.”


74 Windermere was formally incorporated into the Municipality of Cape Town effective May 1, 1943.

75 NTS 4504; 581/313 Pt.II, July 28, 1943, Memorandum from Native Commissioner to D.L. Smit, p.1. Apprehensions about the prospect of the aerial bombardments had been heightened by practice shooting undertaken by the anti-aircraft batteries surrounding the airfield. Also, see memorandum from Native Commissioner to D.L. Smit, p.4. The Mbombela train had capacity for 700 passengers.
For the most part, Slarke proposed a two-pronged attack on the “problem” of African urbanization in Cape Town. On the one hand, he appealed for the provision of sufficient housing for Africans already gainfully employed in the region. Alongside a policy of stabilizing the existing African workforce, Slarke advocated the implementation of stricter measures of control over Africans. In summarizing the report at the conference that was held to discuss the Slarke report’s findings, Smit outlined the gist of its recommendations: “These two questions of housing and control are the key to the whole situation. It is no use providing one without the other.”

As part of his strategy to meet the need among Africans who lacked available and legal housing accommodation, Slarke maintained that official locations should be established in the city center, Retreat, and the Northern Suburbs. Reflecting the NAD’s position, Slarke accepted the obvious, namely that continued industrial and commercial expansion in the Cape Peninsula effectively meant that the presence of Africans in Cape Town would not be a temporary, but a permanent feature of the postwar dispensation.

The step, however, between recognizing the need for accommodation for permanent and semi-permanent African workers and bringing it to fruition was a large one. One of the most immediate obstacles was to overcome the objections of white and

76 NTS 4504; 581/313, vol.III, Draft speech by D.L. Smit to the conference of local authorities at Cape Town, April 28, 1943, p.9. Van der Byl’s speech emphasized the same point: “it is wrong to drive the Native from pillar to post once he has arrived at this end. The correct remedy lies in proper measures of control and the provision of adequate housing.” NTS 4504; 581/313, Speech delivered to the Conference, April 27, 1943, p.3.

77 Slarke Report, p.13. As he unequivocally stated: “the Native has come to stay. In these circumstances an attitude of laissez faire towards questions of Native administration and control cannot fail to react to the detriment of the community as a whole.” [The underlined portion of the quote appears in the original text.]
Coloured homeowners and their associations to the siting of housing schemes for Africans in their midst. In late 1942, the CE had also proposed establishing a housing scheme for Coloured and African workers in the Sea Point area to house all the Africans working in the affluent residential areas of Sea Point, Green Point, Camps Bay, Clifton, and Bakoven. Most of the Africans in these areas worked as private domestic workers or hotel employees. This proposal met with a vociferous and well-coordinated response on the part of the Green and Sea Point Ratepayers’ Association, which thoroughly condemned the proposal. To begin with, the association argued that responsibility lay with the individual homeowners and hotels that employed Africans to provide accommodation on their premises. As its honorary secretary explained, although the association had “a great deal of sympathy for the non-Europeans and natives in our midst . . . it [the proposed housing scheme] would spoil the whole neighbourhood within a mile of the accommodation, because there would be night noises, beer drinks, and faction fights.”

Echoing these sentiments, the Camps Bay and District Civic Association suggested that the solution was to be found in the construction of large African townships on the

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78 H 15/175, December 22, 1942, “Accommodation for Natives and Non-Europeans at Sea Point and Camps Bay,” from Frank Gale, the Acting CCC TC. The initial move in this direction came in July, 1942 from the Plans Committee which directed the CE to report on what accommodation should be provided the African and Coloured employees of the Sea Point and Camps Bay areas. H 15/175, December 7, 1942, Extract from Minutes of the Meeting of the Public Health Committee, p.1.

79 H 15/175, March 3, 1943, “Suggested Housing for non-Europeans and Natives, Sea Point Area,” from G.M.M. Clune, Secretary and Treasurer, Green and Sea Point Ratepayers’ Association to the CCC TC. H 15/175, April 5, 1943, Letter, “Housing in Camps Bay for Natives and Non-Europeans,” from M.W. Domal, Honorary Secretary of the Camps Bay and District Civic Association to the CCC TC.

80 H 15/175, March 3, 1943, “Suggested Housing for non-Europeans and Natives, Sea Point Area,” from G.M.M. Clune, Secretary and Treasurer, Green and Sea Point Ratepayers’ Association to the TC, p.1.
outskirts of the city, and not by dotting the suburban landscape with such housing schemes. In a letter addressed to the TC, it alluded to the additional specters of increased criminal activity, as well as the inconvenience of overcrowded buses should the city proceed with its plans.  

Toward the goal of asserting greater control, Slarke argued that Divco should be empowered to properly supervise and house Africans in its jurisdiction. According to Slarke, “it seems wrong in principle to expect a rural authority to undertake the administration of Natives who serve mainly urban and industrial interests.” He maintained that prosecuting landlords according the provisions of Section 5(4) of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, for allowing squatters to occupy their land would be effective in preventing the spread of “black spots.” Even so, as Slarke noted, the implementation of strict rules in one region invariably resulted in the shift of squatter settlements to other areas where regulations were less stringently enforced. Rogers, the MNA, made the same point, suggesting that Slarke’s recommendation might result in having these Africans evicted in favor of those Africans who were exempt from such restrictions. This development would not only lead to the evicted persons seeking shelter elsewhere, but

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81 A2142; 2/1/3 #20, February 20, 1943, “Accommodation for Natives and Non-Europeans in Camps Bay & District,” from M.W. Domal, Honorary Secretary of the Camps Bay and District Civic Association to the TC, pp.1-3.


83 Slarke Report, pp.1,12. Legal mechanisms to prosecute landlords and tenants was contained in Section One of the Natives Land Act of 1913, the Cape Private Locations Act of 1909, and Sections Four bis or Six of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, 1923. As Rogers, the MNA, observes, this most recent arrivals to Cape Town and the unemployed might be driven by this tighter control to outlying areas in Divco and the Municipalities of Goodwood, Parow, and Bellville.
might result in many registering as voters to gain exempted status. As well, landlords would pass on the fee for the license (required to accommodate exempted Africans) onto the African tenant who was already suffering economic hardship.

As an additional lever to tighten control, Slarke reiterated Cauldwell’s recommendation that Cape Peninsula authorities should establish a central reception depot. The CE and the NAD believed that the Hardekraaltje Forest Reserve in Bellville (a residential area in the Northern Suburbs) was the best available potential site for the proposed location. From the perspective of geographic location and access to transportation, the 210 morgen parcel of land at the Hardekraaltje Forest Reserve would have been ideally suited for both the location and a proposed reception depot. The depot was to accommodate approximately 2,000 Africans and facilitate the screening of Africans entering Cape Town, and possibly also serve as a labor bureau, through which city employers could meet their labor needs with the assistance of the NAD offices located there. However, vehement and well-organized opposition to this proposed location mounted by ratepayer associations in Bellville forced councillors to withdraw their support from the proposed site. Slarke also suggested that four magisterial districts be

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84 As of May 8, 1939.
85 Rogers, May 12, 1943, Slarke Report, p.2.
88 The four magisterial districts were Cape Town, Wynberg, Simonstown, and Bellville. NTS 4504; 581/313 Pt.II, July 28, 1943, Memorandum from Native Commissioner to D.L. Smit, pp.2-3.
established in the Cape Peninsula and be proclaimed under Section 12 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act. This move would render each magisterial district responsible for administering a system of registration of service contracts for African workers in Cape Town, and thus tighten control of Africans in the city. Their efforts of containing and utilizing the African work force to the maximum degree would be coordinated through the proposed central reception depot at Bellville.89

Slarke’s emphasis on control of Africans as opposed to ushering in ameliorative measures for the housing backlog drew the ire of many critics across the political spectrum. The Johannesburg Committee of the Friends of Africa pointed to the bias for greater state control of Africans in his recommendations. It insisted that the government treat “the whole problem as one of creating satisfactory and stable living conditions for permanent urban workers and not as a temporary incident in the influx and efflux of migrant workers. . . . [T]he answer . . . does not lie in multiplying the already onerous restrictions on African workers but in a constructive policy to improve the lot of an urban population.” Among its alternate recommendations, it suggested launching a comprehensive housing program for African workers, removing restrictions on their movements, and legislating increased wage rates across the country to bring other regions in line with Cape Town.90 Even Rogers, the MNA, was critical of the inherently repressive nature of Slarke’s recommendations. As he offered: “[s]uccess will not be achieved solely


by the negative policy of demolishing unauthorized structures. That policy needs to be supplemented by the provision of housing accommodation, which is a matter of the utmost urgency." In fact, according to Rogers, "the major problems of Native Administration encountered at present in this area would be solved by the provision of permanent and adequate housing accommodation and the urgency of this cannot be too strongly emphasized." 

_African Housing and the Politics of Inaction_

As was the case with the publication of Cauldwell's report, the release of Slarke's report occasioned a large scale conference attended by the local authorities of the Cape Peninsula, with the issues of African influx and housing again the central focus. The NAD was the moving force behind the conference, this time in the person of Major Piet van der Byl, the new NAD Minister. The latter made a personal effort to acquaint himself first-hand with conditions in Cape Town's informal settlements. Van der Byl had spent his Saturdays leading up to the conference visiting the slums of District Six in the city, and the squatter camps of Windermere and Blaauwveli.

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91 S.A. Rogers, Slarke Report, p.3.

92 Rogers, Slarke Report, p.5.

93 The conference was held on April 28, 1943.

94 Cape Times, April 29, 1943, "Indescribable Squalor of Peninsula Slums." Cape Argus, April 28, 1943, "Acute Native Housing Problem." Van der Byl had spent his Saturdays leading up to the conference visiting the slums of District Six in the city, and the squatter camps of Windermere and Blaauwveli.
The conference witnessed considerable hand-wringing among the participants. As Smit, the NAD Secretary, pointed out, since the last conference in 1941, there had been a huge increase in the number of Africans living in Cape Town. But as was true of the first conference, very little in the way of substantive results followed from the event. The same reluctance evinced by municipal authorities and the government to accept responsibility, which had blocked ameliorative measures from materializing in 1941, conspired against any lasting and meaningful initiatives evolving out the 1943 conference. As Donald Molteno, Member of Parliament and Cape Western Representative for Africans, complained, "[t]he attitude of the Peninsula local authorities appears to be that they desire the presence of cheap African labour but without their being involved in responsibility for the provision of ordinary civic amenities for the workers concerned."95 The government for its part, insisted that the challenge posed by African urbanization was a local matter that required action on the part of municipal authorities, with the government assuming a less participatory role.

The real issue that the conferences of 1941 and 1943 were convened to address was who would assume responsibility for the "African problem." Smit, as the representative of the NAD and the central government, set the tenor of the 1943 conference when he intoned: "So that while we are prepared to assist you as much as we can, we cannot accept the responsibility, and we look to you to keep your own house in

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order. Predictably, his position was vociferously challenged by several local councillors present at the conference.

Although virtually every white councillor abhorred the massive influx of Africans into Cape Town and the establishment of unsightly shack settlements, it had become increasingly obvious that African labor was indispensable in the Cape Peninsula’s labor market. What had inhibited steps to control African urbanization from the beginning was neither the will nor the legal authority to remove squatters and demolish the “festering sores” they inhabited. The crux of the problem was finding alternative accommodation for them, and that involved considerable public expense since African workers were unable and unwilling to pay normal or even sub-economic rents.

Although councillors from both the CCC and Divco were hesitant to commit themselves to costly housing schemes for Africans, the CCC had undertaken the establishment of Langa location and its subsequent extensions. The resultant costs were higher than anticipated and the CCC had been unable to make African residents pay their own way. One major impediment to the undertaking of housing schemes involved the exorbitantly high cost for building materials during the war. In fact supplies were difficult to obtain at all since they were commandeered for the war effort. Even for some time

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96 From the minutes of the conference, a clear sense arises that difference of opinion on the issue of responsibility was simmering just below the surface and threatened at any time to erupt into a heated exchange of recriminations and fault finding. NTS 4504; 581/313, vol.III, Draft speech by D.L. Smit to the conference of local authorities at Cape Town, April 28, 1943, p.8.

97 H 15/233 Extract from Minutes of the Housing and Slum Clearance Committee Meeting held on April 29, 1940.

after the war’s end, certain materials were difficult to procure and the shortage of skilled building artisans relative to the huge housing backlog combined to drive up the costs of construction.\(^99\)

Some councillors harbored philosophical reservations about the nature of assuming the financial burden of housing the African population. For instance, the Member of Provincial Council, H.S. Walker, was opposed to the city’s African policy since it thrust responsibility for Africans upon the city and allowed employers to exploit workers at the public expense. Walker’s assessment was essentially correct: “the location system is tantamount to subsidising--at the expense of the citizens--cheap labour for the benefit of manufacturers, builders, shopkeepers, hotel-keepers and others and suppressing the wages of our own poor citizens.”\(^100\)

Elsewhere in the Union, most notably in Durban, the establishment of location beerhalls had succeeded in generating sufficient profit to offset the operational costs of maintenance and administration of locations.\(^101\) Attempts on the part of the CCC to institute a beerhall system met with abject failure and violence. As a necessary prelude to running a successful beerhall, the location authorities needed to prohibit or severely curtail the right of residents to brew their own sorghum beer (“mqombothi”). Given that the

\(^{99}\) 3/CT: 1/4/10/1/1/12 CCC NAC Minutes, February 6, 1947, Report from Direct of Housing, J.C. Collins, “Temporary Housing for Natives, Notes for Discussion with Local Authorities.” Apparently, cement and steel were the most unobtainable building materials, even as late as 1947.

\(^{100}\) NTS 4504; 581/313, 1943, From a booklet prepared by Walker entitled “Some Homes in the Cape Peninsula”, p.6.

brewing and partaking of *mqombothi* was an integral component to the celebration of many important social and religious functions (i.e., ancestor worship, marriage, or birth of a child), such a restriction was bound to elicit powerful opposition. Additionally, many women earned income from brewing beer and were reluctant to allow the state to undermine the opportunity this enterprise offered for earning a livelihood unchallenged. The fact that beer halls would also admit women was contested as inimical to traditional Xhosa values, as it threatened patriarchal power relations. Many religious, community, and political leaders denounced the attempt to set up a municipal beer hall and eliminate home brewing.\(^{102}\)

Both the CCC and Divco could justifiably argue that the huge influx of Africans had come about as a result of government actions, or more properly speaking, government inaction. The government and its defense works contractors had played a pivotal role in drawing African workers to Cape Town, and yet were among the most remiss in fulfilling their responsibilities to provide accommodation for their employees. Furthermore, the government did not respond to Divco’s pleas to enforce the provision of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act and remove the African squatter camps that arose within the five mile limit of the Cape Town boundary. Nor did the government heed appeals made to it by local councillors to establish a uniform wage rate nation-wide in order to minimize the attraction of Cape Town’s higher wages.

The Cape Flats Report

The third report to appear was commissioned by the Department of Social Welfare and was entitled the Report of a Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into Conditions Existing on the Cape Flats and Similarly Affected Areas in the Cape Division, 1942—or as it was more commonly known, the Cape Flats Report. Among its main terms of reference, was the mandate to report on “the general social welfare and health conditions in the area, with particular reference to housing.” Whether consciously or not, the Cape Flats Commission framed its analysis of the causation of the large-scale phenomenon of squatting in quasi-Marxist terms as a “process of movement and re-settlement brought about through the rising pressure of population within a metropolitan core squeezing out to the metropolitan periphery and beyond those persons who cannot face the exaction of tribute which residence within an area of rising value demands.” In other words, in large part, poverty accounted for the drift of African urban dwellers to the fringes of Cape Town.

Unlike the two NAD reports, no conferences or committees were formed subsequent to its release. However, the Cape Flats Report generated a good deal of

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103 It was also referred to as the Britten Report, after Mr. H. Britten, the chairman of the Committee of Inquiry. It was a comprehensive and well-researched report, totaling 66 pages in length and was published on January 26, 1943. The recorded minutes of the commission amounted to 972 pages of evidence. H 15/234, The Committee of Inquiry into Condition [sic Conditions] Existing on the Cape Flats and Similarly Affected Areas in the Cape Province.

104 All told, the five-member Committee of Inquiry heard evidence from more than 50 persons and organizations over a five-month period, beginning in March 1942. Cape Flats Commission Report, p.1.

attention in the city’s two daily newspapers with regard to the issues it highlighted. But in the end, it failed to stimulate tangible measures aimed at redressing the wretched living conditions it described.

**Miscegenation and Paternalism**

Officials often cloaked their reservations regarding African urbanization in the garb of a putative concern for the well-being of the Western Cape’s Coloured population. In justifying efforts to exclude Africans from Coloured residential enclaves, local officials observed that “Natives come into these areas and hire rooms and friction arises between them and the Coloured people with the result that they push the Coloured people out.” Officials from the Housing and Native Affairs Departments argued that landlords would hike up the rents of African tenants to the detriment of Coloureds seeking accommodation in the area. In fact, there was some validity to this claim since landlords could squeeze higher rents from African tenants whose options for housing were closely circumscribed. The latter were less likely to object to the overcrowded conditions of tenements and shacks than their Coloured counterparts, who could afford to be more discriminating in their choice of accommodation.

The underlying fear of white officials was that living in close quarters, Coloured and African people would transgress the color boundaries that divided them under the

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106 The *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus* were Cape Town’s daily newspapers in this period.

107 NTS 4504; 581/313, Pt II, May 9, 1939, p.3.

108 NTS 4504; 581/313, Pt II, May 9, 1939, p.3.
system of segregation. In fact, a large component of the paranoia that accompanied Africans taking up residence free of government control centered on the imagined dangers of miscegenation with Coloured neighbors. The incidence of households accommodating Africans and Coloureds, however, was relatively low. A comprehensive housing survey conducted in the late 1930s by Edward Batson of the University of Cape Town revealed that of the estimated 25,000 Coloured households in Cape Town, only 1,400 (or 5 percent) of these shared with African, Asian, or white tenants.\(^9\)

But officials deemed the urban environment’s many temptations potentially dangerous to the moral well-being of the “raw,” recently “de-tribalized” African. The propensity of Africans to fraternize with impoverished Coloureds in city slums and squatter camps was believed to represent an especial menace to Africans. Officials invariably warned against the dangers of shebeening and prostitution when Africans consorted with the “worst sort” of Coloured.\(^10\) A significant portion of the interaction between African and Coloured people did in fact revolve around alcohol. Africans were prohibited by law from purchasing and possessing “European” liquor (i.e., distilled spirits like rum, gin, vodka, etc.). Coloureds, on the other hand, could purchase such liquor and enterprising individuals frequently served as liquor runners for the African proprietors of shebeens.

\(^9\) Cape Times, October 20, 1943, “Evil of Housing Deficit.” Most of these mixed households would have comprised Coloured and African tenants. Professor Batson’s study, entitled the Social Survey of Cape Town, was primarily focused on the Coloured community, and only addressed the social conditions of Africans in a tangential manner.

\(^10\) Shebeens were informal drinking establishments, usually located in the homes of squatters and township dwellers.
Officials persistently displayed an obsessive paranoia about the dangers of miscegenation, as if the political and social order of the Western Cape was hanging in the balance pending the successful elimination of this purported menace. Since it crystallizes so well the prevailing racist paradigm of the time, it is worthwhile to quote the assessment of Mr. W.G.A. Mears, Chairman of the Langa Native Advisory Board at some length:

One serious aspect of this uncontrolled Native influx is the degree of miscegenation which inevitably follow in its train. Owing to shortage of accommodation, the Native has found ready harbourage with an undesirable and degenerate class of Coloured resident whose main concern is the exploitation of his sub-tenant. The overcrowded housing conditions have led to a flourishing trade in illicit liquor and dagga [marijuana] and the number of shebeens is continually increasing. . . . The advantages of a liaison with a woman of a more privileged class are readily appreciated by the Native who, however, seldom legitimises the resultant offspring by a legal marriage. . . . [W]e now have rapidly emerging in many of our Western Province districts a hybrid who soon will considerably swell the non-European population and who will take little cognizance of carefully built-up racial barriers. Already the first generation of this new class is approaching school-going age and creating educational anomalies. With its growth will come also political and administrative issues of some magnitude. I emphasize these aspects in view of their embarrassing potentialities for the Government in its administration of electoral, liquor, land, tax and other legislation affecting Natives.  

Rather than representing an aberrant viewpoint, Mears's observations accurately reflected the same type of stereotypes abound in the memoranda produced by officials in the Departments of Native Affairs, South African Police, and Health.  

111 NTS 4523; 602/313, “Control of Influx of Natives to Cape Western Areas” from W.J.G. Mears to Minister of NAD, September 1943, p.2  

Expressing an ethic of white paternalism, officials who sought to exercise control over the lives of Africans frequently claimed to be actuated by the need to protect them from exploitation. Implicit in this justification, was the assumption that Africans were in need of European benefactors to avoid the perils of exploitation. Supposedly, this exploitation took several forms. Profiteering landlords were frequently targeted for their unscrupulous manipulation of the supposed naiveté and vulnerability of African tenants. Although the Rent Board investigated cases where African tenants paid extortionate rates for deplorable accommodation, its efforts were to a certain extent frustrated when landlords ignored determinations handed down by the Board or intimidated tenants. Even so, the Rent Board apparently succeeded in assisting numerous African shack dwellers who were the victims of unscrupulous landlords of all races, including African landlords.

As Smit declared, it was “necessary to prevent the growing tendency to lease ground to Natives upon which they are allowed to erect hovels of the worst type. Here the landlord exploits the Native and exercises no supervision of his mode of living. There is no provision for water or sanitation, and there is an ever present danger of undetected contagious and infectious disease.”

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Taking officials at their word, apparently it was with reluctance that they assumed the weighty burden of safeguarding the interests of Africans. As Smit expressed it: “We all hate the idea of placing restrictions on the movements of people, but it is in the interests of the Natives themselves that they should not settle in such degrading surroundings as we find all round the Cape Peninsula today, nor is it in the interests of the European community that such a state of affairs should be permitted within the confines of the areas under their control.”\(^{116}\) Invariably, the calculation of white interests entered into the assessment of what was best for Africans, and nowhere was this more true than with respect to the “sanitation syndrome.”

The Sanitation Syndrome Revisited

Although the “sanitation syndrome” paradigm had arisen under a different set of circumstances decades earlier as discussed in the previous chapter, it still had profound resonance for Capetonians of the 1940s and 1950s. In a fashion similar to what Swanson describes with respect to the bubonic plague in the first decade of this century, officials seized the “opportunity” of an epidemiological threat to isolate and “quarantine” Cape Town’s African population.\(^{117}\) On the eve of the World War II, Cape Town had not been subjected to a virulent outbreak of disease in over two decades. Yet beginning at this time, the discourse which cast the city’s African population as an imminent menace to the health

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\(^{117}\) “Opportunity” and “quarantine” are terms Swanson uses in describing how Africans were segregated in the urban environment.
of whites and Coloureds re-emerged with renewed vigor in the popular press and in memoranda circulating among local officials. Effectively, the potential threat of an epidemic spreading from the city’s African community was utilized by officials as a lever of control. Officials anxious to justify the imposition of spatial segregation upon the city’s African population seized on the notion that squatters represented a health threat to the white and Coloured citizenry of Cape Town. As the CE, S.S. Morris, expressed it: “if an epidemic broke out . . . it would be uncontrolled. . . . This health danger is not only facing the non-European but the European, for disease knows no colour.”

Mixing metaphors, the Cape Flats Commission commented on how the region had undergone metamorphic growth and yet has never at any time made a serious effort to cleanse its fringes once and for all of the fungus of haphazard planning, insanitary housing, disease and crime.” Due to its unique role as a port city, Cape Town was especially vulnerable to the introduction of virulent diseases. The role that Africans played as potential purveyors of externally-introduced pathogens in their capacity as stevedores, carried with it a potential danger. As a NAD Inspector observed: “The conditions in the overcrowded and vermin-infested hovels in which Natives find shelter in increasing numbers are ideal for the spread of contagion. In the Cape Peninsula shelters are springing

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118 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/6 CCC NAC Minutes, 9/50-8/51, p.347, August 18, 1950, the CE, S.S. Morris. “Memorandum of Discussion between Members of the Cape Town Housing Commission and the National Housing Commission.”

up literally overnight in places so remote as to make early detection of disease almost a physical impossibility. "120

Efforts to regulate and control the African population were often undertaken by the Cape Town’s MOH. Significantly, ultimate responsibility for determining the soundness of housing structures within Cape Town rested not with the Housing Committee, the CE, nor the Department of City Planning. It was the MOH who condemned homes and authorized their demolition. The MOH routinely designated structures as unfit and they were duly destroyed if the owner failed to respond to the summons issued by the CE’s office to remove the offending dwelling himself. The net effect of slum clearance measures was to push African settlement to peri-urban areas, most typically in the form of irregular squatter camps. But these measures served both to distance and intensify the problem.

In his annual reports, the MOH decried the abysmal housing and sanitary conditions of Africans and explicitly underlined the direct connection between high rates of preventable diseases and extreme poverty. The findings of the National Health Services Commission of 1942-1944 also drew attention to the intimate correlation between disease and the poor environmental and dietary conditions of Africans. The Commission advocated “drastic reforms in the sphere of nutrition, housing, health education and recreation” for the African population. "121 Even the former (and future) Prime Minister,

120 Starke Report, p.12.

General J.C. Smuts, commented that “Medical officers from one end of the country to the other are warning us that the health conditions prevailing in most of our locations are very serious indeed. You can imagine what the state of affairs must be when you have this huge flood of Natives just emerging from barbarism, flooding into our towns.”¹²²

But from the early 1940s through to the mid-1950s, the central government and the local Cape authorities were engaged in an often acrimonious battle over which authority would assume fiscal responsibility for providing subsidized housing and the necessary social services to improve health conditions. Despite the call for adequate housing accommodation for Africans by the MOH, the CE, the MNA, the central Health Department, and other officials, the matter went largely unaddressed.¹²³

**Disease and the Facilitation of Social Engineering**

The white minority government of South Africa engaged in social engineering on a grand scale with its African population. To buttress white supremacy, “non-white” groups were spatially segregated from white residential communities. This had been norm since Europeans had first settled South Africa, but with the passage of time, the force of social custom had ossified along increasingly rigid race lines. Even so, certain neighborhoods in Cape Town, especially those of a working class nature, were characterized by varying degrees of racial intermixing. Within South Africa, residents of Cape Town prided


themselves on their more progressive and "liberal" attitudes regarding racial relations. In fact, regulations circumscribing the movements of activities of Africans in other regions of South Africa, especially in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, were more strictly enforced by contrast to Cape Town.

Theoretically, several options for dealing with a potential health threat existed. The underlying cause of the poor health of African urban dwellers could be traced to the squalid living conditions they inhabited, without adequate shelter, running water, waste removal, access to health care, and overcrowding. Municipal services ensuring water standpipes, sewage and garbage removal, and enforcement of zoning laws to prevent the erection of improper housing would have been the most obvious means of improving conditions. Even more fundamentally, higher wages for unskilled African workers would have also gone a long way to ameliorating conditions.

Time and again, ratepayer associations and officials of the departments of Health, Native Affairs, and Police, couched their discussions of Africans in Cape Town in the discursive paradigm of disease prevention. Rarely did they express concern for African migrants whose health was most directly jeopardized by being forced to inhabit miserable living and working circumstances, and by lack of proper nutrition. More typically, officials and white private citizens expressed alarm at the potential or imminent health risk Africans posed. For example, when the NAD Minister visited Windermere, the largest and most visible of Cape Town's squatter camps, in early 1943, he was quoted in the Cape Argus: "we have to realise that however well we may live in the city, if we have this festering sore outside of our boundaries, sooner or later there will be an epidemic, and we shall pay
heavily for tolerating such conditions.”

Echoing these same fears, the Cape Times editorialized that “[e]lementary humanity demands early and decisive action and if this is not a sufficiently powerful reason, elementary self-preservation will provide one; the native slums are a festering sore which can infect and undermine the health of the whole community.”

In the estimation of one Capetonian, the “residential cesspool” of Windermere posed “a more immediate and perhaps more deadly threat than the atomic bomb.”

It is unclear to what degree officials genuinely believed in the putative menace that Africans posed, or whether they cynically exploited this perceived threat to provide an ideological smokescreen for their repressive measures. It is reasonable to ask whether from an epidemiological standpoint, if there were valid grounds for fears of infection. Given that Cape Town is a port city, uniquely positioned at the crossroads of continents, and that its African population living as squatters subsisted in conditions of extreme squalor without benefit of adequate water, sanitation, drainage, and medical care, it is conceivable that such concerns were not entirely unfounded. The threat was there, but whether the perception that Africans were more apt a segment of the population to contract and disseminate epidemic disease was actuated by overt racism, or solely by a sincere concern for the health of the city’s white and Coloured inhabitants remains subject

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124 Major Piet van der Byl quoted in Cape Argus, April 28, 1943, “Acute Native Housing Problem.”

125 Cape Times, April 29, 1943, “Peninsula Natives.”

to conjecture. Incidents of tuberculosis, venereal disease, and infectious diseases were remarkably high in Cape Town and periodic outbreaks of infectious diseases kept health authorities anxious. As will be seen in Chapter Six, the health conditions of squatter camps were highly conducive for the incubation and spread of disease.

Stemming the Tide: African Urban Policy, 1945-1948

Policy toward African urbanization pursued an ambivalent, confused course during the war and the immediate postwar years. Despite the relaxation of influx controls during the war, the general ease with which Africans migrated to cities during the war, and their swelling numbers in South Africa's cities, government policy toward urbanization remained founded on the Urban Areas Act of 1923. Although periodically updated and given new powers, as recently as 1945 with the passage of the Native Urban Areas Consolidation Act, it was outdated and ill-equipped to respond to the changing realities of urban life. Significantly, the NAD Secretary excluded Cape Town from the countrywide directive to relax police enforcement of pass laws owing to the acute shortage of housing for Africans in the Cape Peninsula.

Discordant voices in the United Party (UP)-led government alternatively advocated a relaxation of restrictions on the entry and residential rights of Africans, and at the same time, a tightening of coercive control. Although a coherent consensus approach

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to the issue of African urbanization failed to emerge among party ideologues, factors beyond its control pushed the UP toward a more repressive stance. Greater militancy among the African urban proletariat proved embarrassing to the government and caused considerable alarm among the white electorate. The bolder, more assertive protest of Africans was manifested in the resurgent African National Congress, for the first time making significant gestures to widen its base of support to the urban masses. It was also reflected in the widespread labor unrest during the mid-1940s, and culminated in the massive black mine workers’ strike of August 1946. Organized by the African Mine Workers Union, it involved as many as 70,000 men, lasted nearly a week, resulted in considerable bloodshed and loss of life, and dramatically highlighted this new-found assertiveness among Africans.129

The NP, under the leading of Francis Malan, capitalized on the vacillation of the UP government toward African urbanization, and successfully parlayed the apprehension whites felt in the face of a seemingly uncontrollable tide of African migration surging toward the cities. Warning of the “swart gevaar” (black danger) and proclaiming itself uniquely able to pursue resolute measures to stem this tide, the NP scored a remarkable electoral victory. Even before this upset, the UP had been forced to bow to the pressure that the rising popularity of the NP had placed upon it to adopt a harsher position of the question of African urban policy.

In Cape Town, a series of initiatives were introduced to impose greater control over the city’s African inhabitants. Cape Town officials and some councillors had many times proposed regulating the flow of Africans into the city by cutting off the in-migration at its source and asking the South African Railways and Harbours Commission to only provide tickets for the Cape Town-bound Mbombela train to those Africans who produced a certificate authorized by the local Native Commissioner, after satisfying him they had firm offers of employment awaiting them in Cape Town. The railways had for years balked at this measure, concerned ultimately with the smooth and profitable operation of its passenger services more than the vagaries of Native policy. Finally, with the government’s intercession, from June 1946 forward railway tickets were withheld from Africans in the Eastern Cape traveling to the Western Cape, unless they could satisfy the ticket official that they had an offer of employment awaiting them.\(^\text{130}\)

In the attempt to stabilize the rapid spread of shacks mushrooming over the Cape Town area landscape, “pegging” was proposed as a partial solution. This involved having municipal authorities number and duly record existing shacks, while concomitantly destroying any shacks that sprang up after the pegging had taken place.\(^\text{131}\) In July 1947, an added measure of control was introduced in the Northern Suburbs of Parow, Bellville, Goodwood, Durbanville, and Kuils River. In these areas, a curfew was imposed on non-exempt Africans, prohibiting them from being in public between 11:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m.,

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\(^{130}\) Highlighting the effective of this measure, a shortage of unskilled labor arose. *Cape Times*, May 17, 1947, “Native Labour Scarcity: Rail Restriction ‘Too Effective.’”

\(^{131}\) NTS 6443; 77/313R, Part I, p.105, September 8, 1949, “Control of Influx of Natives into the Cape Peninsula Proclaimed Area.”
unless in possession of a permit from their employer explaining the exceptional circumstances accounting for their violation of the curfew.132

City officials were also keen to resolve the issue of housing for Africans so that the squatter problem could be tackled more effectively. To this end, the CCC pushed for the establishment of a major housing scheme for Africans in the Retreat area. Council had approved the site as a location as early as August 1943, and the NAD Minister formally proclaimed the site in December 1946.133 Even in advance of its formal proclamation, Retreat’s population grew as Council officials instructed Africans to proceed there in anticipation of securing housing accommodation.134 But the perennial issue of what authority would accept the main weight of the financial burden that would follow in the train of a large-scale housing project stalemated the realization of the location.

The relative holding pattern that characterized the government’s ad hoc African policy in the years following the war years contributed to its political demise. In place of the UP’s prevarication and lack of direction, the NP posed a clearly articulated program of determined action that would introduce greater separation among the various peoples of South Africa and drastically curtail the rights of Africans. Although, the change did not transpire overnight, the change in governments represented a genuine watershed in regard to urban Africans, perhaps more so in the Western Cape than elsewhere in South Africa.

132 Cape Times, August 13, 1947, “Native Curfew Ineffective.”

133 NTS 5961; 77/313 N(2), Pt II Government Gazette, December 13, 1946. 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/17, CCC NAC Minutes, undated, p.447.

134 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/18, CCC NAC Minutes, June 11, 1952, p.2.
The consequences of this transfer in power were to have dire consequences for African squatters in Cape Town.
Although the political developments discussed in the previous chapter concerning the state’s abortive attempts to rein in Cape Town’s African population had profound implications for squatters, usually their attention focused on more immediate, if mundane matters. They struggled to acquire inexpensive access to land; to forage for materials useful in the construction of shacks; to counter the machinations of predatory landlords; to reunite their families under one roof; to secure transport to and from their places of employment; and to earn sufficient income either in the formal or informal sectors of the economy to support themselves and their dependents.

Despite minor variations, conditions in Cape Town’s informal settlements were uniformly abysmal. The shacks that squatters inhabited were irregularly constructed and offered inadequate protection against the natural elements of the Cape Peninsula—which by South African standards, could be harsh. Augmenting the generalized misery, a large portion of the barren tracts of land on which squatters settled lacked even the most basic of services (including water and refuse collection), rendering squatters uniquely vulnerable to myriads of pathogens, which bred in the deplorable sanitary circumstances prevailing. Compounding the physical challenges, by occupying land in defiance of municipal housing
and land use laws, squatters faced extreme insecurity of tenure as the threat of eviction constantly hung over their head.

Unfortunately, squatters did not enjoy an extensive array of choices as to where they might take up residence. Insofar as options existed at all, they were severely limited. But for all the squalor, unsanitariness, and rank ugliness of informal settlements, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Africans continued to migrate to Cape Town and remain for prolonged periods of time in its squatter camps. Furthermore, squatters expressed emphatic reluctance to depart to what they considered less desirable alternatives, such as official locations, townships, and the rural reserves from which they came. While it might not be immediately apparent why African residents of Cape Town would prefer to establish domiciles in the horrid environment of shack settlements, the rationale that informed such decisions was simple and compelling. Camps afforded a much greater measure of freedom from state scrutiny and police harassment than was true of other residential areas of the city. As well, a network of relationships bound Africans to their brethren in squatter camps. These networks were pivotal in facilitating their transition to the city. Perhaps most importantly, for tens of thousands of African women and men, squatter camps offered them their only opportunity to live with their spouses and children as intact family units.

The Contours of Cape Town

Topographically, the Cape Flats proved a major handicap and challenged the resourcefulness and patience of the squatters located there. The flat, low-lying region
known as the Cape Flats, situated on the periphery of Cape Town, stretches from the False Bay coast of the Indian Ocean to Table Bay, which is an arm of the Atlantic Ocean (see Figure 3). With some fairness, one critic of the conditions to which the Coloured and African populations were exposed in the Cape Flats region, referred to it as "a belt of misery."\(^1\) The physical conditions of the region, which were slow to be developed by estate and city planners (precisely because of its marginal and undesirable nature), exercised a profound and deleterious impact on the lives of squatters.

First and foremost, the Cape Flats are composed of poor, sandy soil. The area is largely bare of vegetation, except for shrubbery, some fields under agricultural cultivation, and the ubiquitous Port Jackson tree.\(^2\) Owing to the flat expanse of the Cape Flats, virtually denuded of vegetation, the "Southeaster" (as the prevailing southeasterly wind effect that routinely visits Cape Town is known) rips through this bleak and barren landscape. In the winter season (May to September), Cape Town experiences cool and rainy weather. During these months, inhabitants of the Cape Flats are especially vulnerable to the southeasterly winds blowing in from the False Bay coast. For squatters in imperfectly constructed homes punctured by an abundance of cracks and holes, drafts

\(^1\) Oscar D. Wollheim, Warden of the Cape Flats Distress Association, *Cape Times*, October 26, 1950, "CAFDA Appeal for Tolerance: False Bay to Table Bay ‘A Belt of Misery’.”

\(^2\) The Port Jackson wattle tree (*Acacia saligna*) was imported from Australia in the 1880s and has been instrumental on the Cape Flats in stabilizing sand dunes, arresting soil erosion, and facilitating the growth of indigenous bushes, grasses, and reeds. The tree looks like a bush and typically stands no more than 3-4 feet in height. It can prosper in the sandy environment of the Cape Flats where other forms of vegetation experience difficulty in laying roots. 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/22, Cape Town City Council (CCC) Native Affairs Committee (NAC) Minutes, p.833, June 5, 1957, “Nyanga West Native Township: Second Report. Development of First Section as an Emergency Camp and Subsequent Conversion to a Permanent Housing Scheme,” by the City Engineer (CE) S.S. Morris. U.G. 18 - 1943, The Report of a Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into Conditions Existing on the Cape Flats and Similarly Affected Areas in the Cape Division, 1942 (Britten Report), p.3 (paragraph 21).
were a frequent feature of life on this windswept plain. Winds would assail inhabitants from all sides, penetrating through joints, rivets, screw holes, and eaves.³

The Spatial Dynamics of Squatting

For the many Capetonians who took pride in Cape Town's beauty and well-maintained appearance, the presence of "black spots" posed a unfortunate reproach to the city's otherwise seductive appeal and its pristine image of a well-ordered, civically-minded city. In letters to the editor and in the memoranda exchanged between city officials, citizens and officials lament the presence of Africans, expressing the notion that squatter communities marred the luster of Cape Town's image and created an unfavorable impression on visitors.

The solution adopted by City Councillors to this "problem" was to extrude squatter camps to the furthest perimeter of the city's boundaries, and as far away as practical from major transportation arteries, in order to render them as invisible as possible. The desire to segregate squatters spatially applied to all Africans in the greater Cape Town area. Highlighting the perceived need of imposing a cordon sanitaire around African settlements, the NAD (Native Affairs Department) required all plans for the establishment or extension of existing locations and townships to be bounded by a "buffer strip" of 300 yards of green space. This requirement constituted an improvident waste of valuable land and was deeply resented by city planners. In practical terms, it introduced

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³ *New Age*, March 26, 1959, "From Windermere to Nyanga: Africans Moved from One Slum to Another."
enormous complications in attempting to find sites for African locations, since it vastly increased the dimensions of parcels of land required to house Africans. Specifically, plans to enlarge Langa in the early 1950s were frustrated by the imposition of this regulation and the dogged refusal of the NAD Minister to relax the regulations. Implicit in this requirement was the assumption that concentrations of Africans presented a risk to surrounding communities with respect to crime, personal security, and health. The 300-yard green belt symbolized the putative moral and criminal contamination that officials believed African inhabitants posed to other Capetonians.

Another strategy employed by city planners involved siting African locations in undesirable environments in which other population groups would be reluctant to settle. Areas bordering sewerage facilities and swampy, waterlogged terrain were considered ideal for African settlement, since such spots would otherwise remain uninhabited. In Strand, a community skirting the False Bay coast on the outskirts of Cape Town, the barracks that the municipality authorities built for local African workers were situated behind barbed wire right next to the municipal sewerage grounds, where stercus (or “night soil”) buckets were washed."

4 He was under pressure from residents of the Pinelands “garden city” suburb abutting Langa to expand Langa further. Kevin Greenback, “‘Into the Wild Bushes of Nyanga’: The Growth, Control and Relocation of Cape Town’s Squatters, 1939-1955.” B.A. Honours Thesis, Department of History, University of Cape Town, 1993, p.34.

5 Guardian, May 12, 1949, “‘Your Families Can Sleep in the Bush.’” “Night buckets” was the euphemistic term used in reference to stercus pails or the receptacles in which human waste was collected in areas where waterborne sewage was unavailable. Today, large concentrations of squatter settlements are sited in the area surrounding the large Cape Town Sewage Treatment Works, adjacent to False Bay. Locations and townships were sited next to sewerage facilities in many cities, such as Western Native Township and Sophiatown near Johannesburg, or Marabastad outside of Pretoria. André Proctor, “Class Struggle, Segregation and the City: A History of Sophiatown 1905-40 in Belinda Bozzioli, ed., Labour, Townships and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, 1979), pp.52-
City officials were reluctant to allow Africans to settle close to white communities or to take up residence in areas traditionally inhabited by Coloured Capetonians. Officials could draw on a well established discourse about the putative dangers of miscegenation and how supposedly drunk besotted Coloureds would corrupt “raw,” wide-eyed African migrants fresh from the countryside. An ongoing debate during the 1940s and 1950s about where to site locations for African workers gave expression to the struggle for urban space, and took place against the backdrop of white supremacy and the requirements of residential segregation particular to South Africa, and specifically to Cape Town. At various times, when the NAD or a local authority issued a public announcement of the intent to establish a location in a given area, invariably the response was of a predictable and uniform nature. Local ratepayer associations and “concerned” private citizens would send off anxious letters to the applicable ministers, their Members of Parliament, the Town Clerk, or to one of the two daily newspapers that served Cape Town. The pressure they brought to bear effectively scuttled the proposed projects. In this manner, paralysis characterized the several attempts during the 1940s and 1950s to develop or extend African locations on such sites as Hardekraaltje Forest Reserve and Lot QQ (in Bellville), Retreat, Welcome Estate, and downtown Cape Town. In addition to the ratepayer associations, which arose in virtually every residential area, there were umbrella ratepayer

53,57. Ezekiel Mphahlele, Down Second Avenue (Garden City, NY, 1971), p.75. It was a common practice throughout South Africa to site African locations next to sewage facilities.
associations, such as the Joint Council of Cape Town, which represented 12 affiliated ratepayer associations.⁶

In spite of the city’s repeated attempts to expel squatters from the supposedly immaculate environs of Cape Town, in an important sense, squatters were integral, not marginal to the city. Their labor power was essential to the city’s economy. Their spatial isolation was unquestionably significant as it reflected their marginalized status in economic, social, and legal terms and the unequal power relationship in which squatters found themselves. In a society stratified first by race, and secondly by class, impoverished African squatters occupied the lowest rung of the ladder. Situated in low-lying, flood-prone areas often surrounded by sand dunes and bush, and lacking basic services, informal settlements were extremely undesirable locales.

The often tight and crowded conditions of squatter settlements produced a powerful imprint on the way many squatters imagined space. Unlike the city center and suburbs of Cape Town, which were lined with broad paved roads, serviced by many well-tended parks and playing fields, fountains, and city squares, squatter settlements rarely were blessed with any of these niceties. What roads existed were narrow, irregular, and unpaved. Few sporting fields were available for rugby, soccer, cricket, netball, and related sports, and those that existed, were not properly drained, leveled, or maintained—in fact, they were merely vacant fields on which squatters trespassed. Instead of splendid fountains

⁶ Department of Native Affairs (NTS) 4504; 581/313, Vol. III, January 23, 1945, Letter from Honorary Secretary of the Council of Cape Town Ratepayers’ Associations to Major Piet van der Byl, Minister, NAD,“Re Influx of Natives.”
and inspiring statuary, open lots in squatter camps were generally graced with accumulations of refuse and human waste.

It was hardly surprising that squatters configured space differently. The expense and general unavailability of proper construction materials condemned structures to a single level in height. Squatter camps sprawled over comparatively large expanses, in part because their haphazard arrangement failed to maximize utilization of existing space, but also because the lack of multilevel housing significantly reduced the potential of the land to support a dense population mass. In the opinion of a visiting American journalist, “[t]he difference between Windermere [Cape Town’s largest squatter camp] and the slums of America is one of direction. Cape Town’s slums are horizontal—a lake of rubbish and tin. America’s slums are vertical—multi-storied tenement houses, without windows, without water, without sanitary facilities.”

A Rose By Any Other Name

Within different squatter settlements, certain sections were assigned special names by their inhabitants, suggesting that a sense of community and specificity took root among inhabitants. In the greater Retreat area there were several separate—albeit not distinctly delineated—areas; among them, Blaauwvlei, Forest (a sub-section of Blaauwvlei), Illfracombe Estate, and Hardevlei. Adding to the specificity, within such enclaves certain

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7 David Hacker, Cape Argus, October 23, 1958, “Windermere Slum Among the World’s Worst, Says Visitor.”

8 Jim, 14; Mr. N, 4.
sub-sections were known by place names. In Windermere, the “stockade” enjoyed a certain notoriety. It was a large tumble-down wooden building that was divided by materials like tin, cardboard, and sacking into approximately 60 rooms. Altogether, somewhere between 300 and 500 persons inhabited this overcrowded structure.9

The naming of squatter camps or of locations was sometimes quite revealing. The names with which squatters christened their neighborhoods alternatively demonstrated nostalgia (naming them after home districts or towns), resistance (using the names of past and present symbols of African nationalism), or sarcastic humor.10 In the instance of Forest, the latter trait was very much in evidence. Forest’s sandy terrain was devoid of trees and contained little vegetation.11 One of the earliest developments in the Nyanga township was known to Africans as Mau Mau, presumably after the popular Kenyan rebellion against British colonial oppression and settler land alienation, although there was some discrepancy among informants concerning the interpretation given to the name.12 What was to become Nyanga township, was until the mid-1940s known as Smith’s (and sometimes Smit’s or Schmidt’s) Quarry. To avoid the confusion surrounding the three different names, authorities renamed the township Nyanga, which means “moon” in

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9 Cape Argus, March 10, 1945, “M.P.s See Windermere Hovels” and Cape Argus, February 13, 1945, “Dirt and Squalor at Windermere.”


11 Kamana.

12 Mrs. C, 12.
The only official African location in existence at the time of Nyanga’s creation was Langa (which means “sun”). Officials intended Nyanga/Moon as an appropriate complement to Cape Town’s other existing township.\textsuperscript{13} However, for the vast majority of African residents of Cape Town, the origin of Langa’s name was more readily associated with the Hlubi king, Langalibalele, who was imprisoned on Robben Island, and later died in the vicinity of Uitvlugt.\textsuperscript{14}

Places were also named in a practical vein, after the legal owner on whose land squatters were resided, or in reference to a physical characteristic of the camp’s landscape. In the Hout Bay area, the Strand shack settlements derived its name from its proximity to the beach, since “strand” is Afrikaans for beach.\textsuperscript{15} Cook’s Bush, which was one of the largest and most infamous of Cape Town’s informal settlements, took its name from the farmer on whose property the camp was located.\textsuperscript{16} In Blaauwveli, Jack Solomon owned much of the land, so not unnaturally, the area was often referred to as kwaSolomon by Xhosa-speakers.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} 4/CT; ½/1/1/63, Divco Minutes, p.185, April 17, 1945, “Smith’s Quarry Housing Scheme: Naming Of.”


\textsuperscript{15} Mzwakali, 9.

\textsuperscript{16} Siyo II, 6.

\textsuperscript{17} Mrs. C, 5,8. Solomon was a Coloured person, although one otherwise well-informed interviewee remembered him as a German. Mr. N, 6; Ntloko I. 3/CT: 4/2/1/3/1173; B1468 Part II, September 24, 1943.
In some cases, non-squatters may have conferred monikers on camps, as was probably the case with respect to “Sakkiesdorp,” a so-called “black spot” near the Philippi Cement factory (close to the area that was later developed as Nyanga township) owing to the preponderance of sacking used in the construction of shacks. Presumably, a white South African bestowed the name of da Gama on the Hout Bay squatter camp, after Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer credited with “discovering” the Cape Peninsula. Similarly, it seems reasonable to assume that the name of Windermere, given to the neighborhood of Kensington Estate, was dubbed by an expatriate Briton.

There was extreme irony inherent in referring to the Kensington Estate area as Windermere, bearing in mind that the Windermere region of England’s Lake District is renown for its natural beauty, in particular, with respect to its unspoiled lakes and forests. By contrast, as one American observer remarked: “[t]he first thing a visitor to Windermere wants to do is get out. Windermere is a filthy, stinking swamp of rubbish, flies, foul water, scraps of metal, shreds of paper and scavenging animals. It is also the home--somehow--of human beings.” Another American visitor, an African-American journalist, also expressed horror at conditions in Windermere and commented that it was the worst slum

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18 Cape Times, July 1, 1944, “Eight Division Housing Schemes: Plans to Do Away with Sakkiesdorp.”

19 Mzwakali, 9.

20 Cape Argus, April 22, 1945, “Windermere—City’s Most Urgent Problem: Why Government Has Intervened”. Presumably, the much touted transformation that Windermere was presumably to undergo in the aftermath of its transfer to the jurisdiction of the CCC (in May 1943) was the source of the allusion to (in a tongue-in-cheek) manner as the “Cinderella suburb”.

21 Cape Argus, October 23, 1959, “Windermere Slum Among the World’s Worst, Says Visitor.”
he had encountered in Africa. Quite possibly, Windermere’s name derived from the fact that the area was frequently mired in extremely wet conditions, with tiny lakes or vleis dotting the area (especially in the winter months when precipitation levels were high) and could be mistaken (by one possessed of an active imagination, or a sardonic sense of humor) for a Lake District of sorts. The Reverend Robert Barr, who was one of the leading advocates for poor relief in the area and founder of the Friends of Windermere Association, penned a poem that sought to capture the squalor of Windermere, while at the same time, pointing to the cruel irony implicit in its name.

“Windermere”

Someone whispered in my ear,
Have you heard of Windermere?
Might as well ask if I knew
Cape Town’s skies were sometimes blue!
Treasured hours with Lake poets spent,
Made the name a sacrament.

From the windows of his home,
Wordsworth’s quiet eye could roam
Far along the Cumbrian hills,
See her forests, dales and rills,
Watch her lakes until he found
Rydal Mount was holy ground.
In that place to poets dear,
Lay the wood-fringed Windermere.

What a travesty to take
Such a name from such a lake
And give it to this tragic mess
Of human shame and bitterness.
I wonder what my poet could find
In this grim hell to feed his mind?
Pondokkies just as clean and big

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22 Paraphrasing William Gordon as quoted in Cape Argus, January 21, 1959, “Windermere is the worst slum, says Negro.”
As Cumbrian folk would give a pig,
Bodies syphilitic-ridden--
Curs'd disease that can't be hidden,
Marking for a living tomb
Children still within the womb,
Children born to burdened lives
Of mothers who were never wives,
Drink, the Deil's [sic, Devil's] Gestapo chief,
Breeding crimes beyond belief:
Gambling, brothel dens and drugs,
Fleas, mosquitoes, flies and bugs,
Human filth in stagnant pools
Where abominable ghouls
Wait to launch a massed attack
On coloured, white as well as black,--
This, my master sonneteer,
This is Cape Town's Windermere.

Meanwhile city fathers dream
Some great civic centre scheme,
While this dark circumference cries
For immediate enterprise.
Surely luxury plans can wait
Some far-off, uncertain date.
Put them in a pigeon-hole,
Dump them in a fumarole,--
But for open human sores
Here at Cape Town's lovely doors,
Christian conscience can't allow
Any other time but NOW. 23

The Construction of Shacks: An African School of Architecture?

Employing almost equally vivid and descriptive terms, the Cape Flats Committee members depicted the kind of structures that they viewed first-hand in the course of their investigations:

The pondokkie of the Cape Flats, in its design, owes naught to any school of architecture, European or Asiatic, ancient or modern. Its conception is determined

23 Quoted in the Cape Times, September 1, 1943.
entirely by the scraps of material which go into its structure, pieces of corrugated iron, old tins and drums, rough boughs, sacking, anything which can possibly offer protection against the weather. Piece by piece, scrap material is bought, begged or filched and added to make room for a growing family. There are no windows, ceilings, and very often no door. Sanitation is non-existent. Many of these hovels would do a disservice to animals. The pondokkie is the lowest standard of human habitation. . . .

The conglomeration of shacks that sprang up in haphazard fashion on the Cape Flats did not differ vastly from those in existence today in terms of their construction. Despite their limited resources, squatters frequently demonstrated considerable ingenuity in building their shacks. For the vast majority of shacks, sheets of corrugated iron served both as walls and ceiling, usually reinforced by wooden planks. Additionally, flattened petrol and kerosene tins, off-shots (of timber), split-poles, branches, willow reeds, and sacking served as the fundamental building materials (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). These materials would be held together with wire and fastened to poles serving as the shack’s superstructure. Other itinerant items might further embellish these essential articles. Many of the materials that went into the construction of a shack could be foraged or obtained from local scrap yards and dump sites. To this end, squatters would scour local factories for remnants that might be useful in the making of a shack. They lacked the financial means required to purchase proper construction products, and given their high degree of mobility and the

25 Lucwaba, 4.
26 Mehlwena, 6.
27 Mrs. F, 4.
Figure 5 A shack constructed of oil drums and sacking. At the time the photograph was taken, it was occupied by a single man who was attempting to save money in order to marry. He had dragged the drums nearly a mile over sand dunes. NTS 4503; 581/313, 1940/1941, H.S. Walker, “Some Homes in the Cape Peninsula,” p.12. (Courtesy of the Central State Archives, Pretoria)
Figure 6 A shack constructed of corrugated iron mounted on split poles. The fence of branches and wire was erected to keep a dog within the yard. In describing the squalid conditions of this shack that housed its aged inhabitants, the photographer commented: "One wonders if human misery can know greater debt—it probably can, but not much." NTS 4502; 581/313, 1940/1941, H.S. Walker, "Some Homes of the Cape Peninsula," pp.12-13. (Courtesy of the Central State Archives, Pretoria)
precarious nature of their tenure, such an expenditure made little sense. According to a selective census of Africans in various Cape Town squatter camps, only approximately 40 percent of the families had been resident in the same area for ten years or more.\(^8\)

Moreover, many basic building supplies were unavailable, especially during the war years. Even into the late 1940s, such materials as cement, steel, sheets of corrugated iron, and imported timber were in short supply.\(^9\)

Not all squatters built their own shacks. Many land owners rented not only land but also pre-constructed shacks. Even in cases where only the land was being let, there were men who earned an income by constructing shacks for other squatters.\(^30\) If a squatter erected his or her own shack, assistance from family members, friends, or neighbors was usually forthcoming.\(^31\) Some squatters displayed particular innovation in their use of unconventional materials for building shacks. Elmina Gontsana’s husband built their two-room shack with asbestos which he obtained from the lumber and building supplies store in Elsies River where he worked. But apparently nobody else copied their lead of a shack constructed of hardened asbestos exterior and asbestos panels inside. The asbestos offered greater warmth for the winter months, and during the rest of the year the interior of the

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\(^30\) Mrs. F, 4.

\(^31\) Koto, 2; Moses, 2.
shack was not appreciably warmer than most owing to the fact that the Gontsanas were fortunate to benefit from the canopy of an overhanging tree. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the City Engineer (CE), Walter Lunn, considered recommending that the Cape Town City Council (CCC) order inexpensive mass-produced asbestos huts, but experiments with these huts furnished mixed results and the project was jettisoned. Lunn even lived in such a hut for a time to experience first-hand the conditions it offered. In the attempt to utilize skills he had acquired in the construction of Xhosa homes in the Eastern Cape, Mrs. E’s husband built a shack in Retreat with mud bricks, and smoothed cow dung over the sandy floor.

Clay brick or concrete flooring surfaces were inappropriate since they were extremely cold in winter and a great deal of condensation would collect on them. Accordingly, most shacks used wooden flooring boards, given that more sophisticated options, such as masonite, sawdust-cement, and vermiculite floorings were beyond the limited financial means of squatters. Itinerant wooden planks and pieces of wood from packing cases formed the standard flooring materials. But often, floors would consist of

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32 Gontsana, 2-3.

33 It is fortunate that the scheme was abandoned in light of subsequent revelations concerning the cancer-causing properties of asbestos.

34 Mrs. E, 2.


little more than flattened cardboard boxes spread out over the bare, sandy ground. In cases where the floor was nothing more than loosely packed earth, possibly with a thin covering of cardboard, footprints would distort the floor’s contours and furniture would sink into the soft surface. Unlike in other regions of the country, floors could not be hardened earth owing to the Cape Flats’ high volume of precipitation and flooding, its sandy surface, and cold night-time temperatures. Other variations were utilized. Frequently, squatters added a product known as “dampcose,” which was a tar-based sheeting that was water resistant and offered a cushion upon which to walk. Others plastered floors with cement or laid a flooring of sack. Sacking had many purposes. As one informant offered: “If you’re clever enough, you would use sacks. You know if you buy beans or samp [maize], it’s in a bag. You open it and sew them together. Oh!, that’s a nice ceiling.” More typically, squatters made ceilings with wooden planks. In either event, the roof would be of corrugated iron (or zinc). Many squatters threw sheets of dampcose over their corrugated iron roofs to prevent the rain from penetrating. Owing

37 Mzwakali, 2; Vena, 2.

38 New Age, March 26, 1959, “From Windermere to Nyanga: Africans Moved from One Slum to Another.”


40 Ntloko l.

41 Mrs. F, 4; Rondo, 3.

42 Mrs. F, 4.

43 Lucwaba, 4.

44 Mrs. F, 5.
to the flimsy materials that were thrown together to build a shack, the entry of rain and moisture was a problem for many squatters, especially during the winter months.  

Adding to the travail of summertime conditions, the sun beats down on the area unremittingly. As noted earlier, the predicament of squatters was appreciably aggravated by the lack of trees which otherwise might have provided a canopy of shade for the conglomeration of shacks exposed to the elements. Further exacerbating the situation, the corrugated iron roofs invariably employed in the construction of pondokkies served as an especially effective conduit for heat in the summer and cold in the winter.

Cardboard and newspaper were the standard method of patching over the planks that would usually constitute the wall of a shack. They were placed on the walls primarily to serve as insulation from the cold. Over the newspapers, some residents pasted a collage of product labels, carton foil wrappings, or other varieties of wrapping paper to produce a more pleasant ambiance. Squatters preferred large sheets of printed labels, of jam tins for example, since they were inexpensive, often aesthetically pleasing and glazed, rendering them relatively resistant to grime and especially moisture, the latter which plagued shacks as a result of the Cape’s damp climate and the less-than-waterproof nature of shacks. As well, product labels were frequently already gummed, thus easily applied

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45 To keep the rain out, Francis Mabija and her husband would have to patch holes in the roof or their shack with glue. Mabija, 3.

46 Ntloko. Cape Argus, March 6, 1959, “Hardships in Move to Nyanga West, Say Priests.”

47 Mnyatheli II, 2; Ntloko I; Ntsababa, 3.
without need for glue.\(^{48}\) Otherwise, the newspaper or wrapping paper would be dipped in an \textit{ad hoc} adhesive paste fashioned of flour and starch, and dough and pressed to the surface of the shack’s walls.\(^{49}\) Unfortunately, the starch concoction appealed to the tastes of the legions of mice which flourished in locales amid bushes and sandy surfaces. The incessant noise of mice gnawing away at the starch and flour mixture could prove very irritating.\(^{50}\) Some residents also painted the walls to render them more pleasing to the eye.\(^{51}\) Despite their dilapidated and impoverished exterior, many observers commented on the surprisingly tidy interiors.\(^{52}\)

Lacking the financial wherewithal to purchase commercially produced furniture, squatters used their carpentry skills to construct rudimentary furniture from planks and scrap materials. Mr. N made his own tables, chairs, and beds for his three-room shack.\(^{53}\) The only furniture one family could lay claim to were tables and beds that they had


\(^{49}\) Mrs. F, 4.

\(^{50}\) Magona, \textit{To My Children’s Children}, p.21.

\(^{51}\) Gontsana, 3; Ntsababa, 3.

\(^{52}\) David Hacker, \textit{Cape Argus}, October 23, 1958, “Windermere Slum Among the World’s Worst, Says Visitor.” Hacker observed that “Windermere is a paradox. One can step from ankle-deep trash into a scrap metal shack to find a tidiness that would equal that in any Cape Town home. Floors are clean, teacups are neatly washed and put away, beds—with sheets—are carefully made up, clothes are hanging neatly on the walls.” See also \textit{Cape Argus}, May 17, 1941, “Pondokkie Dwellers on the Flats: ‘Appalling’ Living Conditions Investigated: Nursemaid’s Contacts with Disease,” and \textit{Cape Argus}, March 10, 1953, “Natives Supply the Answer: House-Proud Families Build Homes.”

\(^{53}\) Mr. N, 4.
fashioned out of wooden planks. This was also the experience of Michael Mehlwena, who did not own chairs as such. He and his family would sit on wooden planks. For most squatters, except for their bed and mattress, most furniture would be home-made.

Squatters and Land Ownership

Land ownership among Africans was rare but not unheard of. No law prohibited one African transferring ownership of land to another, although this infrequently occurred. After 1937 however, Africans were no longer able to purchase or rent land in certain areas of Cape Town without the consent of the Governor General. Throughout the city, however, Africans owned plots of land that they had acquired prior to the imposition of more restrictive laws initiated at the central government level. In Windermere, at least 17 plots on which stood structures of various descriptions, were owned by Africans. Among informants, Francis Mabija had, with her husband, purchased

54 Mr. M, 2.
55 Mehlwena, 6.
59 GES 621; 113/13B, November 9, 1945, Memorandum from TC, M.B. Williams, to the Secretary for Public Health, “In re Slums Clearance. Windermere,” and January 30, 1946, Memorandum from Acting TC, Frank Gale, to the Secretary for Public Health, “In re Slums Clearance. Windermere.” Minutes of Housing Committee also discuss Mr. George Veveza, an African who purchased land in Windermere in 1922, and by 1946, had 28 residents inhabiting dilapidated unspecified structures. 3/CT:
land from a white man and erected a shack on it.\textsuperscript{60} As well, Nozipho Yoyo and her husband owned two plots of land in Parow (a suburb in the Northern Suburbs).\textsuperscript{61} According to Yoyo, there were a number of other Africans who owned property in Parow.\textsuperscript{62} During the mid 1940s, the CCC’s Native Affairs Committee (NAC) gave serious consideration to alienating sufficient land among white, Coloured, and Indian landowners to create a neighborhood in Cape Town so that Africans could participate in a homeownership scheme.\textsuperscript{63} Ultimately, the plan failed to materialize, but even where Africans were successful in purchasing land, certain obvious social and legal liabilities were placed in their way of fully benefiting from the rights and services normally enjoyed by land owners. Because the Yoyos were African, municipal authorities refused to lay on water or electrify their “home.”\textsuperscript{64} In fact, they were not even allowed to erect a house as such on their land. Undeterred, they built a large shack with two bedrooms, a lounge, and kitchen, and took in tenants. But in this, as in other ways, the Yoyos were the exception, not the rule.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{60} Mabija, 4.

\textsuperscript{61} Yoyo, 1,3. The land had been purchased by Mr. Yoyo’s mother.


\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Cape Argus}, April 16, 1946, “Land for Natives to Own Homes: Council Approval of Principle Sought.”

\textsuperscript{64} Yoyo, 1,9.

\textsuperscript{65} Yoyo, 1-3. Although the Yoyo inhabited a shack, as did other Africans in the area, Parow was also home to proper, well constructed homes of white and Coloured people. It appears that their home was
The private land which squatters inhabited was usually owned by Coloured and Indian landlords who rented subplots to Africans. A number of white farmers and large land-holding corporations also leased their land to African squatters. For instance, the 238.4 hectares that constituted Retreat were owned by approximately 10 large landowners. The largest of these, the Cape and Transvaal Land and Finance Company and the African Residential Sites (Pty.) Ltd., held title to 82 percent of Retreat’s land.

Many landlords rented the land to Africans under the hire-purchase system, a system which was especially well-suited for the maximum degree of tenant exploitation. Tenant-owners would make a deposit and work toward paying off the balance of the amount. However, if payments went into arrears, owing to unemployment or a crisis of some sort, the landlord had the option of seizing the land, the original deposit, and the payments that had been made toward paying off the balance. The widespread abuse engendered by this system prompted the Cape Flats Commission to establish an investigation into this practice as one of its principal terms of enquiry.

situ[...](p.2. Mrs. C, 5; Mrs. E, 3; Mehlwena, 5; Mnyatheli II, 2; Ngquitse, 3.

E [Rondo, 5.


But more typically, squatters on private land paid simple monthly rent, collected by estate agents appointed by the land owners. In fact, few squatters knew the name of the owner of the land upon which they squatted.\textsuperscript{70} Although owners might live nearby to squatters, they invariably inhabited homes constructed of brick and commercially produced construction materials.\textsuperscript{71} Renting to African squatters could be an extremely lucrative venture since it involved no capital outlay and might yield a considerable sum when a land owner succeeded in having squatters erect or rent 40 or 50 shacks on a parcel of land. At an average monthly rental rate of £1 per plot, this practice produced a significant and steady income. Many critics of the deplorable living conditions found in squatter camps decried the exploitative practices of these landowners, who practiced a kind of “farming” of African and Coloured tenants.\textsuperscript{72} According to a Cape Flats Distress Association (Cafda) social worker,

[\textit{Landlords generally are reaping a rich harvest from the unfortunate people who have no other alternative but to pay and are forced into Shebeen running and other illicit [sic illicit] means of making money. I contend that stricter supervision should be kept by the Municipal Inspector and the Rent Board, on these parasites

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{70} Miriam Foloti, who with her husband, rented land in Blaauwvlei, remembered Solomon. They paid rent not to Solomon, however, but an agent of his named Metinise. Foloti, 8-9.  \\
\textsuperscript{71} In the Retreat area for instance, the Coloured and Indian landlords usually lived in houses near to the Retreat train station, in a separate area known as Vitable. Mrs. C, 5.  \\
\end{flushleft}
who are driving the people into crime by their outrages [sic outrageous] charges for Pondokkies which they, the Landlord have not even built. 73

The social worker particularly objected to the high rents that landlords charged for hovels which lacked running water and lavatories, into which squatters were “herded like sheep.” 74 Some enterprising Africans also benefited from the shortage of accommodation available to other Africans. Subletting was a common method among squatters of padding household income or defraying rental costs. In certain instances, it could even provide an independent income on which to live. 75 Although erecting additions to an existing shack for the purpose of creating rooms for rental purposes was a sound strategy, it was in violation of municipal bylaws. In the event that a municipal inspector detected the addition, he was authorized to demolish it. 76

Squatting and the Challenges of Family Life

Most of the African women and men who migrated to Cape Town after the mid-1930s either settled permanently or spent a sizeable portion of their economically

73 Molteno Papers, BC579; E2.35, March/April 1945, Report of Lieutenant L. van Kiely to the Chairman, Friends of Windermere, “Pondokkies on Private Property,” p.3. A petition from a number of ministers in the Kensington/Windermere area was equally scathing in its criticism of “indiscriminate and unscrupulous landlords.” NTS 4504; 581/313, Vol. III, May 2, 1944, Petition addressed to the Minister, NAD.


75 Two Africans rented a large shack for £2 and sub-divided it into ten rooms. After taking two rooms for themselves, they let the remaining eight and realized a profit of £5. Cape Times, September 6, 1949, “City's Homeless Natives: III: Fewer Pondoks Are Being Built.”

76 Lipschitz and Greshoff, “Living Conditions in a Squatters’ Camp,” p.11.
productive years there. Naturally enough, they sought the benefits of family life, whether
this involved arranging for their spouses from home districts to join them in Cape Town,
or entering into less formal romantic liaisons with other urban inhabitants and labor
sojourners. However, the only viable alternative available to most Africans wishing to live
together as husband and wife and to maintain the integrity of their families involved taking
up residence in one of the city’s many squatter camps. Prior to the establishment of
Nyanga, Langa stood alone as the only official location offering accommodation for
married couples. But availability of married quarters was strictly limited and totally
inadequate in meeting the needs of the burgeoning African population—a fact amply
illustrated by the perennially full waiting list. Typically, it took several years before a
couple would be provided with married quarters after submitting an application to the
Manager of Native Administration.

For these reasons, families, as opposed to single men, inhabited a
disproportionately high percentage of squatter shacks. If desired, usually men were able to
locate accommodation close to the workplace, often in overcrowded tenements, for which
rack-renting landlords collected exorbitant rents. Additionally, men could lodge in the
bachelor barracks in Langa, or occupy beds in one of Cape Town’s three officially-
sanctioned hostels. For men and women engaged in certain classes of employment, such as
domestic work in private homes or in hotels, there was also the option of living in quarters
provided on the premises. Some of the city’s larger industrial employers—most notably
those in the construction, quarry, and brickyard industries—also offered on-site
accommodation. As well, men engaged at the docks as stevedores or on the railways,
could live in barracks located in special South African Railway and Harbour Authority compounds. Counterbalancing the convenience and reduced costs associated with compound or hostel life was the concomitant loss of freedom and unencumbered movement. Moreover, conditions in these barracks were austere. At the docks, in the city’s largest compound, approximately 800 African men resided in barracks which offered beds that were little more than planks. Dr. J.M. Bosman, the Port Health Officer, justified the crowded conditions, explaining that “Natives have always been used to sleeping crowded together. They like it that way.”

Owing to the shortage of available married accommodation, the vast majority of Africans could only participate in family life by seeking recourse to squatting in one of the many “black spots” of the greater Cape Town area. At various times during the 1950s, officials conjectured that there were approximately 35 to 50 “black spots” in the Cape Town region. Estimates as to the scale of squatting in the Cape Town area diverged widely, but even employing the most conservative of these accounts, it would be safe to conclude that the phenomenon was extensive in nature. The perception “that pondokkies were springing up like mushrooms” was heightened by the rapid rate at which illegal

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77 Adding to the spartan environment, the dining hall was situated outside in the cement-paved courtyard. Cape Times, July 22, 1947, “Grim Compound In Docks: Old Prison to be Modernised.”

78 These areas were also sometimes referred to as “plague spots.” Cape Argus, June 2, 1954, “It Is a Family Affair.”

79 B.S. van As, a scholar who wrote an extensive 1954 M.A. thesis for the University of Stellenbosch on Africans in the Western Cape (“Stedelike Naturellebehuising in WesKaapland: Die Aldelingsraad van die Kaap”), estimated in 1954 that there were 45 “black spots” in Divco territory and five more in CCC areas. Cape Times, July 13, 1954, “There Are Some 85 ‘Windermeres’ in Western Cape.”
squatting settlements proliferated in a brief span of time.\textsuperscript{80} In the late 1930s, most observers estimated that the city's squatter population stood at somewhere between 5,000 and 20,000. By the early 1950s, approximately 13,000 African families resided in the Cape Peninsula, of whom nearly 10,000 were squatters. The authors of the study upon which the latter figures were drawn estimated that 70 percent of Africans were living as squatters, and that 74 percent of families had recourse to this mode of existence.\textsuperscript{81} Whatever the exact figures, the fact that a large proportion of Cape Town's African population lived as squatters, usually in family units, signaled a general shift of the residency pattern among Africans. By accommodating wives and children, squatter camps facilitated the transition to a more permanent, settled existence in towns. The cycle of migrancy was undermined once a man was joined by his wife in Cape Town, since he had less reason to return periodically to the countryside.\textsuperscript{82}

The men and women who lived in squatter camps endured considerable hardships and deprivations to maintain their families. The long hours African workers spent both at the workplace and in transit to and from it, meant that many had minimal time to spend at home with their spouses and children. Often African women and men spent most of their

\textsuperscript{80} Remark made by Mr. W.J. Houghton, Assistant City Engineer, Cape Town. Cape Argus, May 7, 1955, "Pondokkies Going Up 'Like Mushrooms': Chaotic Overcrowding on Cape Flats."

\textsuperscript{81} With average family sizes of five members, the total squatter population would have totaled approximately 50,000 persons employing the study's figures. Lipschitz and Greshoff, "Living Conditions in a Squatters' Camp," p.1.

\textsuperscript{82} Bonner notes a similar process taking place on the Witwatersrand during the mid- to late 1940s. Bonner attributes broken marriages as an impetus for women to migrate to towns on the Witwatersrand, where they might settled more permanently owing to their failed marriage in the countryside. Phillip Bonner, "African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930s and 1960s: Its Social Character and Political Consequences," Journal of Southern African Studies, 21 (1995): 120,122.
days either at work or traveling between home and their workplace. As well, life in these locales was squalid, unhealthy, and often demoralizing. But rather than opting for the more orderly existence of Langa township, which offered mainly bachelor accommodation, the majority of men chose the more precarious existence unique to the city’s sprawling squatter camps, since it offered greater personal freedom and most importantly, the opportunity to pursue a semblance of normal family life. As one reporter aptly observed: “inhabitants of Windermere . . . would rather live among the slime and the rubbish heaps than face the break-up of their families.”

Homeboy Networks: Bridging the Rural and Urban Divide

Adjusting to a large city could sometimes prove difficult for people habituated to a more rustic existence in the Eastern Cape. This process was not made easier by the harsh levers of control exercised upon Africans in Cape Town, primarily with respect with police harassment, influx control, enforced segregation, and a pervasive anti-African racism among whites. From the first, the urban experience could be a dehumanizing and alienating one. During the 1940s, on their arrival in Cape Town the welcome awaiting Africans consisted of being “dipped” or de-verminized in a section of the reception depot in Langa known as the “deep,” in the same way that cattle would be immersed in a

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83 Cape Times, April 25, 1958, Windermere Is Africans’ ‘Last Hope’: Slums Preferred to Family Break-up.”
chemical solution to guard against ticks, causing East Coast Fever.\textsuperscript{\textdegree} The blankets and
clothes of newcomers from the Transkei and Ciskei would also be fumigated.\textsuperscript{\textdegree}

In the case of the African men coming to work in Cape Town, many of them had backgrounds of working for whites. In addition to previous stints as agricultural laborers on white farms, experience of industrial and commercial employment in centers like Port Elizabeth and East London, a number of them had worked on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand.\textsuperscript{\textdegree} For these men, the passage from the countryside to the city was less jarring than for the majority of first-time migrants.

What facilitated the often stressful transition from the rural to the urban environment was an informal network of friends and relatives who were already established in Cape Town. These contacts were instrumental in acquainting new arrivals with the vagaries of urban existence in countless ways. Most importantly, they assisted newcomers in locating accommodation and employment. By providing shelter, if only on a temporary basis, they afforded migrants the opportunity to establish a foothold in Cape Town before seeking out homes of their own. A Cape Times editor attributed the willingness of relatives and friends to maintain new arrivals to their “fine sense of family

\textsuperscript{\textdegree} Gladys Vuyiswa Mcwabeni, interviewed by Thembelini Mjane\textsuperscript{\textdegree}ka in August 1996 (provided by courtesy of Gary Minkley). Nondzaba, I, 1; Nondzaba, II, 2; Makele, 1. Also refer to Colin Bundy, “‘We Don’t Want Your Rain, We Won’t Dip’” Popular Opposition, Collaboration and Social Control in the Anti-Dipping Movement, 1908-16” in William Beinart and Colin Bundy, Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930 (Berkeley, 1987), p.194.

\textsuperscript{\textdegree} Cape Argus, May 7, 1955, “Pondokkies Going Up Like Mushrooms: Chaotic Overcrowding on Cape Flats.”

\textsuperscript{\textdegree} According to van der Horst, approximately half of the African men who came to Cape Town had worked on the mines of the Rand. Sheila van der Horst, African Workers in Town: A Study of Labour in Cape Town (Cape Town, 1964), pp.39,68.
and tribal responsibility." However clumsily expressed, the observation captured some sense of the kinds of social obligations upon which migrants could draw. When wives, relatives, or friends from the countryside visited relatives in Cape Town, often they were unable to stay with the people whom they came to see. In the case of men inhabiting single-sex barracks in the Langa location, female visitors were prohibited from spending the night. In such instances, visitors would stay with family or friends living in squatter camps. For all their squalor, informal settlements served as havens to families, and Africans with no other place to seek refuge.

Many informants related how they were offered a place to stay when they came to Cape Town for the first time. When Nelson Rondo arrived from Tsomo (in the Transkei), his aunt from his home village allowed him to reside with her at her shack in Simonstown. Similarly, Harriet Makele lodged with her uncle and aunt in the Parkwood squatter camp; Grace Siyo lived with her relatives in Cook's Bush; Susan Tshapile moved into the Windermere area with relatives from her hometown of Engcobo, while Mrs. F stayed with her sister nearby. However, people from the same villages usually did not congregate in specific squatter camps. For the most part, they did not even reside in specific quarters of these camps. Instead, once in Cape Town, new arrivals would

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87 Cape Times, June 3, 1944, “Natives Seeking Jobs.”

88 Mrs. C, 2,5.

89 Rondo, 1.

90 Mrs. F, 1; Makele, 1; Siyo I, 3; Tshapile, 2,11.

91 Citing one or two oral histories, Sayers suggests that people from the same rural village did locate in specific areas of Cape Town together. While this seems a plausible supposition, as a general
maintain village ties through choirs, savings clubs, burial societies, sporting clubs, and related associations.\footnote{Mrs. F, 5; Koto, 7; Mabija, 12.}

The assistance that friends and family extended in finding jobs also proved to be of great benefit. Wilson Kolo’s father helped him secure employment at the city’s harbor where he also worked. Together they shared a two-roomed shack in Kensington along with their girlfriends.\footnote{Kolo, 1-2.} When Mr. N came to Cape Town in the early 1930s, his friends who were working as stable hands in Milnerton were able to arrange employment for him at the stable too.\footnote{Mr. N, 1.} Grace Nondzaba’s brother-in-law attempted to arrange a position for her at Groote Schuur, the city’s main hospital. The attempt ultimately came to naught when the interpreter who was to negotiate the service contract demanded a bribe which Nondzaba was unable to pay.\footnote{Africans in formal wage employment required service contracts which were administered through the municipal Native Administration Department, headquartered in Langa. The system of service contracts was a method by which the government could monitor the number of African workers required in a given urban area. A tax was levied on each service contract at point of issue at regular intervals when they were renewed.} Even though she did not get the job, Nondzaba’s brother-in-law still proved helpful since he let her share his shack in Simonstown.\footnote{Nondzaba, II, 2.} Employing homeboy or home connections might also take on a less organized form. When Michael Mehlwena first arrived in Cape Town, he bumped into another Transkeian man whom he
knew at the Bellville train station. The acquaintance successfully assisted Mehlwena in obtaining a job at the Philippi cement factory.97

Persons from a given district would often gravitate to a certain industry or to a specific firm.98 This occurred as a result of homeboy networks operating as informal labor bureaux. Instead of arriving with uncertain prospects of obtaining employment, migrants most typically made the trek to Cape Town confident that the expense of the train ticket would not be expended in vain. Through the assistance of his homeboys, a labor migrant would be relieved of the unpleasant necessity of seeking a position, which might mean asking for work door-to-door, from one commercial establishment or factory to another. For their part, employers welcomed potential workers recommended by their fellow villagers. This practice spared employers the need to otherwise recruit labor or contact the city’s Native Labor Bureau. The latter course of action entailed the payment of fees for service contract registration and an employer’s service levy. When employees were hired informally, employers could bypass the formal labor recruitment machinery and realize significant savings for themselves, or for their employees onto whom the fees were usually passed.

97 Mehlwena, 2-3.

Economic Inequities: Formal Employment

A large part of why Africans lived in shacks on the Cape Flats related directly to their dire poverty. Their degraded economic status was intricately tied in with the structure of racism, segregation, and--after 1948--apartheid. Irrespective of the limited degree of differentiation between one African and another, Africans living and working in Cape Town were uniformly poor when compared to virtually all whites and Indians. The nature of work performed by Africans varied a great deal, but regardless of its nature, it was classified as unskilled and was accordingly poorly remunerated. Despite the low wages that Africans earned, on average, their wages were the highest among Africans anywhere in South Africa. The relatively high cost of living in Cape Town and the traditionally superior pay commanded by unskilled Coloured employees translated into elevated salaries.\(^\text{99}\) Owing to the so-called “civilized labor policy,” Africans were legally prevented from occupying skilled or semi-skilled positions, which relegated them to the lowest rung of the pay scale. Furthermore, the provisions of the Conciliation Act prohibited Africans from belonging to trade unions. As a result, Africans were largely rightless as workers and easily exploitable. However, despite the wide differential between wages for skilled and unskilled labor, the gap was less pronounced in Cape Town than in other industrial and commercial centers of the country.\(^\text{100}\)

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\(^{100}\) Van der Horst, African Workers in Town, pp.64-65. Since proportionately, there was a larger than average pool of semi-skilled workers in Cape Town (primarily owing to the large Coloured labor force), this translated into greater competition and lower wages for semi-skilled work.
Exacerbating these structural inequities, Africans competed as unskilled workers in the labor market of the Western Cape with Coloured men and women. Some potential employers regarded Africans as interlopers in the Western Cape and were predisposed to offering available positions to Coloured instead of African workers. Over the course of the 1950s, the apartheid government was a vocal advocate for extending employment to Coloured workers as opposed to their African counterparts. An informal policy whereby Coloured men and women were offered work instead of African work seekers had operated for decades. By 1955, it became law by way of the Coloured Labor Preference Policy, which was initiated through the efforts of W.W.M. Eiselen, the NAD Secretary.\textsuperscript{101}

Yet despite government intervention in the labor market on behalf of Coloured workers and the natural sympathies many white employers may have felt toward Coloured workers over and against Africans, the majority of employers of unskilled labor preferred to utilize African manpower. To begin with, African workers would work for lower wages. Africans also enjoyed a reputation for being more physically robust and less inclined to shy away from grueling manual labor. There was also a popular conception of Coloured workers as overly fond of alcohol, with all its attendant evils, including tardiness and absenteeism. Lastly, since they were generally without labor rights, Africans were regarded as more tractable than Coloured workers. In fact, employers frequently observed that the work that some Africans did, especially that which involved long hours—as was true of work in dairies and hotels—was spurned by Coloureds. Briefly, following the

political disturbances that erupted among Africans in Cape Town during 1960—which included a city-wide general strike among African workers—many firms consciously moved to replace Africans with Coloured laborers. However, owing to the difficulty of attracting suitable Coloured workers to assume the physically demanding work normally performed by Africans, the long-term effect of this initiative came to naught.\textsuperscript{102}

The poor pay and often arduous conditions of work in which Africans labored often resulted in an exceptionally high rate of turnover. A study among African workers in Cape Town by the economist Sheila van der Horst, revealed that on average, men had previously been engaged by seven other employers previous to their then-current employer and the annual turnover rate of many firms exceeded 100 percent.\textsuperscript{103} Additionally, in 73 percent of the cases, the previous jobs held by workers in her test group, had lasted less than 15 months, and only 8 percent of their jobs had lasted in excess of three years. The dominant reason for the high rate of labor turnover could be attributed to the low wages Africans earned. Of 631 workers polled, only 23 percent (representing 144 workers) declared themselves satisfied with their wages.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102} Van der Horst, \textit{African Workers in Town}, p.78.


\textsuperscript{104} Van der Horst, \textit{African Workers in Town}, pp.68-70, 120. The fact that only 0.5 percent of previous jobs had lasted for 10 continuous years had profound implications for Africans resident in Cape Town. According to the terms of the Natives Urban Areas Act of 1945, Africans only had the right to reside in Cape Town if they: (a) had been engaged with the same employer for a period of ten years; or (b) had legally resided in Cape Town continuously for 15 years; or (c) were a dependent of a person falling under the provisions of (a) or (b).
Although men's work was better paid and much more variegated than that of women, long hours and demanding physical labor were the rule. According to testimony provided by interviewees, they or their spouses (in the case of women informants) held the following occupations: "garden boy," bricklayer, stable hand, cleaner, building supplies employee, South African Railways employee, refuse collector, messenger, cleaner, garage employee, salesman, driver, textile worker, packer, dishwasher, cook, quarry worker, butcher's assistant, steel worker, stevedore, slaughterhouse employee, motor mechanic, and foreman.\(^{105}\)

As dismal as remuneration and work conditions were for African men, formal employment opportunities for women were vastly more circumscribed in nature, particularly in the Western Cape. In 1956-1957, there were only 16,093 reported cases of African women engaged in positions by the manufacturing sector in the entire country. A mere 32 of these women were located in the Cape Peninsula. The tight restrictions on the entry of African women into the region and the presence of a large female Coloured labor force resulted in few openings.\(^{106}\) For the small percentage of African women who possessed the necessary educational requirements and training, a limited number of positions in the formal sector existed as teachers, nurses, and midwives. Grace Nondzabo initially worked at a hotel in the sea resort of Muizenberg, before taking up employment in

\(^{105}\) Mrs. F, 1,3; Gontsana, 1.9; Jim, 2; Kolo, 1; Koto, 1; Mr. M, 1; Mabija, 2; Makele, 1; Mr. N, 1.3; Ngquitse, 1; Nondzaba, II, 3-4; Richards, 1; Rondo, 2; Yoyo, 7.

a Green Point nursing home.\textsuperscript{107} Nozipho Yoyo trained as a nurse but experienced difficulty in obtaining employment owing to the restrictions of apartheid. She worked briefly at a sanatorium in Cape Town but was otherwise unable to find work as a nurse or midwife since only white or Coloured nurses were normally employed for these positions. At best, an African midwife would be hired merely as an assistant to a midwife, and would be expected to care only for other Africans. As a result, many African midwives ended up working as domestics.\textsuperscript{108}

Any formal job, however, as well as positions as domestic workers, posed special difficulties for women with children. Married women were severely disadvantaged by their responsibilities as wives, mothers, and as squatters. For women subsisting as squatters, simple household tasks were vastly more arduous and time-consuming than for their white counterparts owing to the former’s poverty and lack of electricity, running water, time-saving devices, and access to transportation. For many squatter women with children, domestic work was not a worthwhile economic endeavor. In a 1952 survey conducted among women living in the Eureka squatter camp (in Elsies River), most women argued that the potential earnings of performing domestic service in the nearby Northern Suburbs were largely offset by the financial liabilities incurred. Researchers discovered that the typical monthly remuneration for domestic work in the area ranged from £2 - £3. Given that it would cost mothers between £1 and £2 to arrange care for their children, and that transportation costs further eroded a large portion of the remaining differential, it is not

\textsuperscript{107} Nondzaba II, 3-4.

\textsuperscript{108} Yoyo, 1,13.
surprising that only one woman of the thirteen interviewed was engaged in domestic service. The more lucrative of the domestic worker positions, which paid up to £5, were in areas remote from Eureka Estate, and were an option open only to women who did not have children, or whose children were tended by a family member.¹⁰⁹

Despite these drawbacks, most women who worked outside of squatter camps took up positions in white households or city hotels as domestic workers. This involved long hours, poor pay, and physically demanding labor. The majority of women informants had been employed as domestic workers in Cape Town’s various white neighborhoods, such as of Sea Point, Camps Bay, Rondebosch, Pinelands, Milnerton, Heathfield, and Goodwood.¹¹⁰ Their job descriptions varied somewhat, with some also assuming part-time duties as nannies for their employers’ children.¹¹¹ Another difference in their terms of employment related to their status as “live-ins” or as commuters. The latter would return to their hovels on the city’s periphery in the evenings, while life was very different for “live-ins.”

Being retained as “live-in” or “sleep-in” employees on site involved a great sacrifice. Sleep-in domestic workers were isolated from their husbands, children, family members, and neighbors, and often were able to see them only on Thursdays (the normal off-day given to domestic workers)--or depending on the terms of employment, on the


¹¹⁰ Mrs. E, 1; Jim, 2; Kamana; Koto, 1; Mabija, 2; Makele, 1; Moses, 1; Ngquitse, 1; Oniwe, 3; Mrs. S, 2; Siyo 1, 5; Tshapile, 2.

¹¹¹ Mrs. E, for instance, had this dual responsibility. Mrs. E, 1.
weekends. The great distance between suburbs like those in Sea Point or Camps Bay and the areas where most Africans resided on the Cape Flats, made commute times physically fatiguing and expensive when factoring in the additional costs of transport.

Economic Enterprise: The Informal Economy

In light of the limited scope for employment outside of squatter camps, the opportunity of participating in the informal economy was one that many women squatters seized upon, whether as their principal or supplemental source of income. The informal economy that thrived in squatter camps afforded women an opportunity to generate an income while staying near to home. This offered the advantages of time and expense saved on transportation, and permitted women to keep their children close to them, obviating the need for baby-sitters. For most women in squatter camps, participation in the informal economy was an effective means to add to the income of their husbands while meeting the demands made upon them as wives and as nurturers of children. Women’s primary source of income within squatter camps was as traders. They sold various foodstuffs and a range of miscellaneous items from their shacks. Sheep heads, the legs of sheep and cows, fruits and vegetables, fish, offal, soup from offal, vetkoeks (fried cakes), pampoen koekies

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112 Grace Siyo was a live-in domestic worker in Sea Point, residing in a room in the backyard of her employer, a living arrangement which was common throughout South Africa. On her days off, she would stay with family and friends in the squatter camps of the Cape Flats. Siyo 1, 5.

113 Francis Mabija, who was a domestic worker in Camps Bay, would have found the daily trek from her home in Windermere prohibitive had she not been a live-in. Mabija, 2.
(cookies), and *suikerbier* (sugar beer) were the typical kinds of fare offered for sale.\footnote{A. Sayers, "Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Retreat," p.19. Foloti, 3; Fukusana, 5; Jim, 8; Lucwaba, 7; Mabija, 7; Nondzaba, II, 7; Siyo I, 15; Yoyo, 8.}

Women also sold firewood, coal, and items which they had knitted or embroidered. For instance, Elmina Gontsana was self-employed as both a shopkeeper and a dressmaker. Customers learned of her dressmaking services through word-of-mouth and brought their clothes to her shack, where she worked.\footnote{Gontsana, 7-8.}

For Gontsana, participation in the informal economy constituted her livelihood. She and her husband ran a shop located in a multi-racial quarter of Elsies River, selling cold drinks, cigarettes both in packs and in single quantities, cakes, and candy to Africans, Coloureds, and whites. Gontsana would purchase cakes from a nearby bakery at a deep discount once they went unsold and resell them to her customers.\footnote{Gontsana, 8.} Unfortunately, the Gontsanas were keenly resented by white shop owners with whom they competed. Since they were selling drinks cheaper than their white counterparts, the latter insisted that they restrict their business solely to African customers. Fearing that these white competitors would report them to the police, the Gontsanas relocated to the Nyanga location since black businesses were not legally entitled to operate in the Elsies River area.\footnote{Gontsana, 1-2,7.}

Hawking, for most women, served only to supplement their incomes. In the case of Elsies Jim, although she already registered a full day's work as a domestic servant, she...
would raise extra cash by selling meat.\textsuperscript{118} In addition to women selling out of their shacks, itinerant hawkers offered squatters even greater convenience by selling merchandise door-to-door. Miriam Foloti sold vetkoeks and fruit both at her home and at a local school.\textsuperscript{119} Hawkers would also sell fish, clothes, and vegetables from baskets balanced on their heads.\textsuperscript{120} Even a local chemist employed a hawker to sell patent medicines in squatter camps.\textsuperscript{121} Although most of the hawkers were Coloured people, some whites and Africans also took up this trade.\textsuperscript{122}

Formal shops, usually situated on main roads near to informal settlements, would sell the kind of supplies that squatters needed most commonly, like matches, sugar, tea, bread, mealie meal, and other foodstuffs.\textsuperscript{123} Rarely did Africans own these shops. The CCC routinely denied Africans licenses to build and run shops on land outside the Langa or Nyanga locations. What trading occurred among Africans in squatter camps was transacted out of people's shacks. Even these informal traders, usually women, were subject to police harassment. Police, however, experienced difficulty in making arrests against traders for this violation, since in the closed environment of squatter camps, only African police spies could position themselves to witness illegal trading. Merchants

\textsuperscript{118} Jim, 3.

\textsuperscript{119} Foloti, 7.

\textsuperscript{120} Gontsana, 6.

\textsuperscript{121} Lipschitz and Greshoff, "Living Conditions in a Squatters' Camp," p.29.

\textsuperscript{122} Mrs. C, 7; Ngquitse, 5.

\textsuperscript{123} Mrs. C, 12; Jim, 8; Kolo, 6; Mr. N, 8; Rondo, 9.
operating out of their shacks took care not to exchange money in the presence of municipal officials.\textsuperscript{124} Indian, Coloured, Cape Malay, white (especially Jewish), and Chinese merchants would normally own the shops servicing African customers.\textsuperscript{125} In some instances, even local farmers would operate modest shops.\textsuperscript{126}

Given the poverty of squatters and their tendency to live from one paycheck to another, shop owners were forced to extend credit (on the "book system") to at least certain African customers, especially those who were well-known to merchants.\textsuperscript{127} Usually accounts would have to be settled every month, fortnightly, or on the weekend.\textsuperscript{128} One squatter, who enjoyed a higher and more regular income than most of his contemporaries, explained that the shop owner allowed him and his wife to pay according to the book system, which involved settling their tab once a month.\textsuperscript{129} Squatters who did not have enough money to purchase certain goods outright, would purchase items on a lay-by basis. This required them to pay for the item within a specified period of time (for instance, two months) or lose the money that had been put toward the item’s purchase by

\textsuperscript{124} AWC 55; 3/17, February 7, 1959, Memorandum from Acting TC, Jan Luyt, to the District Commandant, South African Police, “Illegal trading from Slum Huts, Windermere.”

\textsuperscript{125} Foloti, 8; Gontsana, 7; Jim, 8; Kolo, 6; Tshapile, 8, Mabija, 7; Moses, 5; Mzwakali, 5; Mr. N, 8; Ngquitse, 5; Nisababa, 4; Richards, 2; Rondo, 9; Siyo I, 12.

\textsuperscript{126} Mzwakali, 3.

\textsuperscript{127} Foloti, 10; Jim, 8; Makele, 4-5; Mzwakali, 5; Siyo I, 12.

\textsuperscript{128} Foloti, 10; Gontsana, 6; Mabija, 8; Siyo I, 12.

\textsuperscript{129} In this instance, the informant identified the shopkeeper as a Jew, but gave Eve Smit (typically Afrikaner) as his name. Mr. N, 9.
way of installments. Invariably without money, many African squatters were forced to purchase goods in small or single quantities. This meant that they paid unduly exorbitant rates for goods which would have been more economically purchased in greater bulk.

Since few squatters owned vehicles of any description, and in any event, often did not live in locales accessible by motorized vehicle, no opportunity for buying in bulk in order to take advantage of increased savings existed.

The Difficulties of Getting from A to B: Transportation Networks

Some squatters were fortunate enough to live in sufficiently close proximity to their workplace that they could walk. A few even had their own means of transportation. It was not unusual for African men to travel to work on their bicycles, with bicycles normally costing between £3 and £7. But it was the rare squatter who owned a car, and where such cases obtained, usually the owner worked in an automotive garage.

The bus and train service that served squatters was of a poor quality. Since camps were situated in remote areas, transportation nodes tended to be far away. Moreover, the costs of transport were prohibitive for squatters in relation to their meager salaries. Often a commute to work represented not only a sizeable investment of income, but also of time and energy. Having walked through sand, mud, or unpaved roads to a bus terminus or

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131 Jim, 8.


train station, sometimes miles away from their shack, a squatter might have to change trains or buses once or twice before arriving at their workplace. For many laborers who started work at 7:00 a.m., this meant they would have to leave home as early as 4:30 a.m., well before dawn, just to arrive at work on time. They might only return home around 7:00 p.m. or later. Adding to this depressing state of affairs, in the winter months they would have to travel to work and return home in darkness. The average time most Africans expended in traveling to their workplace, one-way, was approximately 40-60 minutes, although the journey could take as long as one hour and forty minutes.\textsuperscript{134}

Transportation woes were especially acute among the people who had been forcibly removed to Nyanga’s emergency squatter camps beginning in the mid-1950s. Owing to its more remote nature, transportation costs were much greater from Nyanga to the workplace. Whereas a weekly third-class rail ticket from Langa to Cape Town cost 4s. 9d., bus fare from Nyanga to Cape Town amounted to 10s. 10d. for the week.\textsuperscript{135} For some residents of Nyanga, bus and train travel to work consumed up to 40 percent of their meager income and could in some instances translate to a loss of up to six hours in travel time.\textsuperscript{136} Furthermore, for the people from the Northern Suburbs who were initially forcibly removed to Nyanga, bus service to Bellville, where many still worked, was extremely unsatisfactory. Buses stopped two miles short of Bellville, forcing workers to walk the

\textsuperscript{134} Van der Horst, \textit{African Workers in Town}, p.51.

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Advance}, June 24, 1954, “Langa Menaced by Dr. Verwoerd.”

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Cape Times}, November 9, 1955, “Natives at Nyanga Spend 40 p.c. of Wages on Fares.”
remaining distance. A rail line was installed by 1959, but it took an additional year before service became available. Even then, the Nyanga train station was placed approximately two miles from where most residents in the township were actually living. Because Nyanga claimed only three primary schools, older children in higher standards were forced to take buses to schools in Langa or Athlone. This meant children would leave home at 7:00 a.m. and only return home around 12 hours later. Not surprisingly, when they learned of their impending removal to Nyanga, residents of the Northern Suburbs of Goodwood, Parow, and Bellville, would “vanish” and reappear in shanties amid the thick bush along rail lines east and north of Bellville.

Not only did the inadequate transportation network serving squatters demoralize and impoverish them, it limited their ability to earn a living, and exposed them to considerable annoyance. Women living in squatter camps were less inclined to launder clothes for white patrons living in distant suburbs since the expense and time invested in

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137 Cape Times, November 6, 1954, “Location Next to Nyanga Urged: Committee Against Site at Eerste River.”

138 New Age, March 26, 1959, “From Windermere to Nyanga: Africans Moved From One Slum to Another.”

139 Cape Argus, March 11, 1954, “Transport at Nyanga.” Cape Argus, February 25, 1956, “Nyanga: Rent, Bus and Train Fares Swallow Their Earnings.” Educational facilities available to African squatters were woefully inadequate, with schools relatively few and far between, and instruction in Xhosa rare. Schools in Athlone, Windermere, Retreat, and Langa offered instruction in Xhosa, and some parents chose to absorb the extra expenses incurred in sending their children by public transportation to these schools. In areas like Cook’s Bush, where there were no schools at all, parents had no choice but resort to this remedy. Additionally, parents were faced with expenses for school uniforms, books, slates, pencils, and erasers. Some families were unable to send their children to school since they simply could not afford the attendant costs. Ntsababa, 5-6; Mnyatheli II, 4; Ntloko I. Cape Argus, March 11, 1954, “Transport at Nyanga.” Oscar D. Wollheim, Cape Argus, November 18, 1952, “40,000 Forgotten Men of the Cape Live in Misery.”

lugging laundry back and forth to their shacks made it an unattractive and only marginally profitable method of earning income. Workers commuting to work had to compete for seats with children going to different parts of town for schooling, and with the legions of liquor runners who often intimidated other passengers.¹⁴¹

**Conclusion**

In very obvious ways, squatter camps were not ideal environments in which to live. But through their industry and determination, squatters made them habitable. In these vile and unhygienic surroundings families endured, even if a high price was paid in terms of health (i.e., high infant mortality rates). In carving out a niche for themselves in the sometimes inhospitable, always undesirable landscape of the Cape Flats, squatters built up a series of vital communities. They invested their time and energy in constructing their shacks, and setting up households in an alien, often unfriendly setting and were unwilling to allow themselves to be dislodged from what had, in a very meaningful sense, become their home.

¹⁴¹ *Cape Argus*, February 13, 1945, “Dirt and Squalor at Windermere.”
5 CULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN CAPE TOWN'S SQUATTER CAMPS

In transplanting to Cape Town and making it "home," rural African migrants engaged in an ongoing process of cultural contestation, whereby they created a hybrid squatter culture. Squatter camps served as sites for the coming together of many peoples of different regions, language and ethnic groups, and varied social practices. Although the majority of African squatters originated from the Eastern Cape and spoke Xhosa as their mother tongue, Africans from other areas within South Africa and neighboring countries also gravitated to Cape Town in search of the city's economic opportunities and comparatively high wages. Despite the relative homogeneity of Cape Town's predominately Xhosa-speaking African population, significant cleavages emerged among migrants. These divisions centered around such factors as ethnicity, sub-ethnicity, language, gender, extent of urbanization, degree of assimilation to Western customs and religion, and class stratification.

Squatter camps were more than just irregular clusters of shacks in which poor people sought shelter. Out of the numerous haphazard concentrations of shanties that

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1 The Cape Province (particularly the Western Cape) was relatively homogenous with respect to its African population, especially when compared to the Witwatersrand. Xhosa-speakers made up a disproportionate portion of the population of the Cape Province. Union Statistics for Fifty Years: Jubilee Issue 1910-1960 (Pretoria, 1960), A–19. Monica Wilson and Archie Mafeje, Langa: A Study of Social Groups in an African Township. (Cape Town, 1963), p.54.
dotted the landscape of Cape Town arose communities of great cultural vitality, each with distinct features. Reflecting the unsettled lives of many of these men and women, recourse to liquor, cannabis, and prostitution was common. Other squatters sought recreational outlet in more sober pursuits such as sport, music, dance, and associational ties. The organizations that women formed for fellowship, mutual support, and capital accumulation were among the most notable ways in which squatters engaged in strategies of self-help to alleviate the constraints that they suffered as the poor.

Transference of Traditional Practices

As a people in flux, Africans moving from the countryside to the urban setting were forced to demonstrate considerable skill in adaptation. Although it would be simplistic and misleading to present African migrants from rural areas in the Eastern Cape and beyond its boundaries as tradition-bound and ill prepared for the challenges of life in “European” cities, it is salutary to note that the transition did involve major challenges in acculturation for peoples largely unused to a large urban conurbation and a full-blown cash economy. One of the most fascinating facets of the process of urbanization in Cape Town relates to the ways in which Africans grafted rurally-based patterns of social organization, religious worship, notions of gender, health care, recreation, inter-racial and intra-ethnic relations, and notions of community onto their cultural practices in the urban environment. In this manner, they sought to lessen the alienation they might have otherwise experienced. By offering familiar cultural institutions and practices, squatters
camps served as "islands of security" in which Africans could take refuge from the strange and hostile environment of Cape Town.²

Rarely did rural migrants merely relocate to the city and summarily sever ties with their families, friends, and home district. More typically, migrants to Cape Town were caught up in a pattern of oscillating labor migration, whereby they straddled the rural and urban realms, returning periodically to their villages and magisterial districts to marry, harvest crops, retire, and tend to personal crises. Mayer refers to this process as "double-rootedness," highlighting how many African migrants inhabited both the urban and rural environments, which they usually conceptualized as distinct worlds.³

In fact, squatter camps functioned as hybridized locales in which the city and the village converged. In the words of one squatter, "it was just like in the country-side because what we used to do on Sundays was to visit friends and enjoy ourselves by drinking Xhosa beer. We would visit each other just like in the country-side."⁴ Settlements were on the periphery of the city and in most instances, a short walk from the bustle and the squalor of the shanty town would reveal empty, desolate tracts of sandy terrain and open sky. Further underscoring the semi-rural nature of the camps, many squatters kept farm animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, horses, pigs, and fowl. Until the late 1930s, the


Cape Flats was primarily a rural area, where farms, stables, quarries, and smallholdings prevailed, interspersed with only the occasional squatter settlement. Some of the larger land owners devoted portions of their property to the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, and flowers, either for their own consumption, or more typically for market. Even as late as 1948, the Department of Native Affairs (NAD) Secretary expressed misgivings about expropriating land cultivated by farmers in the Retreat area to establish an African township. An organization of farmers of German descent who had cultivated the surrounding land for generations and provided Cape Town with the bulk of its vegetable supply, protested the proposed expropriation, meeting with relevant public officials and issued a strongly-worded protest.

Despite their links to the countryside, Cape Town’s squatter camps offered uniquely urban challenges. In response to these challenges, African squatters were forced to alter their customs to render them meaningful for peri-urban life. This involved a


7 3/CT: 1/4/10/1/14 Cape Town City Council (CCC) Native Affairs Committee (NAC) Minutes, p.16-18, September 17, 1948, “Retreat Native Housing.”

8 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/19 CCC NAC Minutes, pp.343-346, December 2, 1953, four-page report from S.S. Morris to the NAC, “Re: Proposed acquisition and development of land south of the Nyanga Native Township for the provision of a site-and-service scheme and housing of Natives.” German immigrants, who were welcomed by the government, settled the Cape Flats in 1877 and given 100 acre allotments of land. U.G. 18 - 1943, Report of a Committee of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into Conditions Existing on the Cape Flats and Similarly-Affected Areas in the Cape Division, 1942 (Britten Report), p.3 (paragraphs 29-31).
process of cultural contestation and innovation through which squatters constantly redefined themselves as labor sojourners, migrants, and permanent city dwellers. However, for all the changes, often the continuities of everyday patterns of life were the more notable. A number of cultural practices pivotal to the amaXhosa’s identification as a people retained their resonance for those who uprooted to Cape Town. Practices related to important life transitions, such as birth, initiation, birthdays, marriage, death, honoring ancestors, and ethnic celebrations continued to be recognized and celebrated in the urban environment, although usually in modified forms to conform to restrictions and opportunities in the city. As Sean Field notes in the case of Windermere: for African migrants it “seemed to constitute a historical half-way station between their past rural lives and their present urban lives. In these situations, African customs and sense of belonging appeared to be more firmly internalised.”

While many migrants clung to their customs as a means of maintaining their identities in an alien setting, others consciously maintained a studied distance from their “tribal” traditions, purposely keeping them separate from the urban realm. Some resolved the apparent tension between the claims of traditional African practices and those of Western culture by setting them apart spatially. Emphasizing this dichotomization of cultural spheres, one former squatter explained: “I was doing my traditional beliefs in

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9 Foloti, 7; Gontsana, 11; Koto, 6; Mabija, 10; Makele, 5; Mnyatheli I, 5; Mnyatheli II, 4; Mzwakali, 7; Ngquitse, 6; Nondzaba, II, 6; Nitloko I; Rondo, 11; Tshapile, 7. Footnotes with surnames and page numbers refer to oral histories collected by the author and his assistants, and are available on file at the Archive and Manuscripts Library of the Harry Oppenheimer African Studies Center at the University of Cape Town.

Transkei not in Cape Town." In a similar manner, another squatter alluded to this tendency of imagining polarized and distinct cultural universes. When asked if she practiced many of her people's customs once she moved to Cape Town, she promptly replied "Oh no! That we did in our homes back in the homelands."

This conflict between cultural spheres often played out ideologically, particularly with respect to religion when Christians were called upon to take part in indigenous African religious practices. A squatter who belonged to the Pentecostal church related the dilemma she faced when her youngest son expressed a desire to undergo a circumcision ritual in the Xhosa tradition. Believing that her Christian beliefs precluded her active participation in the planning and performance of the circumcision ritual, she asked her in-laws to make the necessary preparations, including the brewing of sorghum beer (variously known as *mqombothi* or *utshwala*). Curiously, this same informant was able to reconcile her Christian principles with consulting a *sangoma* (traditional African healer) when she fell ill.

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11 Mehlwena, 9.

12 Georgina Daki Oniwe, 6.


14 Jim, 10-12. Similarly, Gertrude Fukusana related how her mother consulted *sangomas*, but would not sell beer since "she was a church woman." Fukusana, 5.
By all accounts, *sangomas* pld their trade very profitably in squatter settlements, even though most African city dwellers progressively abandoned African healing practices as they became increasingly drawn into urban and Western modes of cultural and economic life.\(^5\) Still, many squatters retained their faith in the effectiveness of *sangomas*, herbalists, and diviners. But *sangomas* faced stiff competition. Within the African community, the Zionist and Apostolic churches offered healing and purification rituals, and generally vied for much of the business that might otherwise have accrued to *sangomas*.\(^6\)

*Sangomas* also competed with conventional Western medicine. Most squatters who straddled the Xhosa and Western worlds adopted a pragmatic approach to meeting their health care needs, operating on a kind of continuum of options, rather than making choices that represented radically different world views.\(^7\) As their circumstances and

\(15\) Moses, 5; Nondzaba, 11, 5; Jim 6-7; Koto, 4; Ngquitse, 4; Mrs. S, 4. *Sangomas* treated patients suffering from a wide variety of ailments, both physical and spiritual, with an assortment of herbs and "Xhosa medicine" (or *umuthi*). Some *sangomas* also prognosticated future events and were consulted to release afflicted persons from curses and ill-fortune caused by the spirits of the dead who had been wronged or unduly neglected. Kolo, 5; Mabija, 6; Makele, 4; Mr. N, 7; Ntloko 1.

\(16\) *Sangomas* and faith healing in separatist churches employ different methods. Typically, the latter rely on prayer, blessed water, and the laying on of hands to heal, whereas *sangomas* focus more on restoring an imbalance in nature brought about by failure to placate the shades (deceased ancestors) or the malevolent curses of a mortal enemy. Brian du Toit, "Religion, Ritual, and Healing Among Urban Black South Africans," *Urban Anthropology* 9 (1980): 22-23, 42. An informant noted that there were few *sangomas* in the Cook's Bush settlement since most of the camp's inhabitants were Zionists who sought cures for their medical ills through the minister's faith healing practices with water. Sylo II, 7. Kwandiwe Merriman Kondlo, "Aspects of Culture among the Squatters in Cape Town, 1945-1960," paper presented at the Cape Town History Project Workshop, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, November 11-12, 1991, p.159. However, seeking the assistance of a *sangoma* for certain matters was not regarded as entirely inconsistent with allegiance to the Zionist or Apostolic churches. When someone became ill, the afflicted person might still request a *sangoma* to slaughter a goat to effect a recovery. In this event, the *sangoma* would perform a ceremony, which would include offering meat and *mqombothi* for the neighbors who graced the gathering with their attendance. Sylo 1, 13.

budgets allowed, they availed themselves of the treatments of both *sangomas* and Western bio-medicine.\(^\text{18}\) As an informant explained: “I for one used to go to them [*sangomas*] only when I’ve got an illness that I know and ask for medication. In most cases I was going to the clinic or hospital.”\(^\text{19}\) Apparently, a *sangoma’s* services did not come cheap.\(^\text{20}\) Even so, the fees commanded by *sangomas* were less exorbitant than those charged by Western medical doctors. Owing to the extreme poverty of squatters, the greater costs attending care by a medical doctor and his or her prescribed regimen of pharmaceuticals, rest, and hospitalization contained considerable explanatory value in accounting for the appeal of *sangomas*. More fundamentally, in addition to basic monetary considerations, the care of *sangomas* met cultural and spiritual expectations never addressed by doctors trained in the Western mode of medical treatment, that focused on the physical, rather than the spiritual causes of ailments.

Many Christian informants exhibited ambiguous feelings toward *sangomas*. As one woman observed: “I don’t know [if there were many *sangomas* in Cape Town’s squatter camps] as I was a Christian. We didn’t go to *sangomas* when we were sick.”\(^\text{21}\) Similarly, another informant’s appraisal of the efficacy of *sangomas* appeared to be colored by her passionate adherence to Christianity. When asked what kind of methods *sangomas* used to


\(^\text{19}\) Mehlwena, 7.

\(^\text{20}\) Koto, 4.

\(^\text{21}\) Foloti, 6. Even in insisting that she could not (or more properly speaking, would not) comment on *sangomas* in the Retreat squatter community in which she had lived, Miriam Foloti revealed the inherent tension between Christian beliefs and “traditional” Xhosa religious practices.
heal people, she replied: “I really can’t tell you. What I know is that they were good liars.” Other former squatters expressed equally hostile attitudes. One was dismissive of his contemporaries who patronized sangomas, indicating that although “some” Africans consulted sangomas, those who did were “uncultured.”

Squatter Culture.

The cultural institutions devised by squatters demonstrated considerable hybridity, as apparent in the realms of music and entertainment, sport, and the consumption of alcohol and recreational drugs. To varying degrees, all these forms of culture offered squatters some sense of grounding and reinforced their many identities. For a people in transition, buffeted by poverty and racial oppression, familiar cultural institutions provided an important feeling of belonging and community. This was especially true of religion. Many different churches operated in or near to squatter camps. Among them, the separatist or “Ethiopian” churches that bore a strong African imprint (i.e. the Zionist church, the Apostolic church, the Ethiopian church, the Assemblies of God, the Order of Ethiopia, and the Holy Church of Christ) thrived. As David Chichester observes, “under conditions of endemic poverty, particularly among the black, urban working class,

22 Moses, 5. Agrinet Mnyatheli also observed that “they were telling lies.” Mnyatheli I, 5.

23 Ntloko I. Mrs. C also adopted a hostile attitude toward sangomas. She had already eschewed recourse to sangomas and traditional Xhosa practices while she still living in the Transkei as a girl, and had no use whatsoever for them when she moved to Cape Town later in life. She could not articulate what she found objectionable about sangomas other than to state: “I don’t like them and I never liked them.” Mrs. C, 13-14.

24 Oniwe, 6; Foloti, 7.
'Zionist' and 'Apostolic' churches flourished by concentrating on spiritual healing to recover a human identity in the midst of dehumanizing economic, social, and political environments.\textsuperscript{25}

Mission churches such as the Anglican, Dutch Reformed, Methodist, Moravian, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, and Wesleyan, however, also succeeded in retaining many African adherents who had been raised in these denominations in the eastern Cape Province.\textsuperscript{26} In general, the independent churches lacked the resources that their more established mission counterparts could claim and were forced to improvise. For instance, Zionist services were often held in private homes since congregations were too poor to fund proper church structures.\textsuperscript{27} Despite such obstacles, separatist churches claimed widespread allegiance. Unfortunately, some squatters were too poor to participate as active church members. Lacking money for Sunday clothing, church dues, and collection money, some squatters chose to absent themselves and their families altogether from church services.\textsuperscript{28} Although the majority of congregants of separatist churches were impoverished, these churches were more accessible to squatters


\textsuperscript{26} Jim, 10; Koto, 6; Mabija, 10; Makele, 5; Moses, 7; Mzwakali, 7; Nondzaba, II, 6; Rondo, 11; Yoyo, 11.

\textsuperscript{27} Gontsana, 11. Zionists were drawn from the very poorest elements of the black working class, and were often disdained by African members of the mission and "Ethiopian" churches for their extreme poverty and lowly social status. Chidester, \textit{Religions of South Africa}, p.138.

\textsuperscript{28} Oscar D. Wollheim, \textit{Cape Argus}, November 18, 1952, "40,000 Forgotten Men of the Cape Live in Misery."
than their mainstream alternatives, and offered them one of the few opportunities they had for meeting in a public forum.

Recreation and Entertainment

Not surprisingly in light of the unskilled, monotonous, and often degrading work they performed, Africans attached great value to expressing and defining themselves through their recreational activities. The latter also served as a means of diversion from the stark reality of their everyday mundane lives in an alien setting in which they occupied the lowest rung of the social, occupational, political, and legal ladders. Throughout the greater Cape Town area, halls hosting concerts and dances catered to African patrons. For the most part, dances were for the young, with both Xhosa and Coloured pleasure-seekers in attendance on these occasions. Jazz groups like the Merry Makers and the Merry Macs attracted loyal local followings. Singing clubs were also popular, especially when they involved competitions with other schools, or choirs whose members hailed from specific villages in the Eastern Cape. Choirs sometimes also arose to represent a

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29 Dance halls were found in Sea Point, Mowbray, Langa, Retreat, Kensington, and Athlone. Kolo, 8; Mabija, 10; Mnyatheli I, 6; Ntloko I; Yoyo, 14.

30 Makele, 6; Mr. N, 12.

31 Ntloko I. Wilson and Mafeje, Langa, pp.126-127. Nozipho Yoyo’s husband was a member of the Merry Macs, which achieved renown in the Cape Peninsula. He and the band would play in the Apostolic church to which they belonged, as well as in other local venues, and at birthdays parties. Shortly after settling down with his wife, Yoyo quit the Merry Macs, in part because of the frenetic lifestyle of jazz musicians, which was not consistent with a stable marriage. Yoyo, 11. Mr. Yoyo was apparently also an accomplished tennis player. He offered clinics through the University of Cape Town.

32 Ntsababa, 6.
particular section of a squatter camp or location in Cape Town. Whether singing traditional songs on informal occasions, or competing in singing contests, song constituted a common pastime for many inhabitants of squatter communities.

Other recreational activities were of a varied nature. The Windermere squatter settlement offered horse racing on the weekend, and gambling in different forms invariably took place. Several bioscopes (or movie theaters) operated in the Cape Town area, with most films offered in English, although some were also presented in Afrikaans. Among sporting activities, soccer, rugby, cricket, and netball were the most popular with squatters. Of them, soccer was the most widely played among boys and men, while netball was the most common choice with girls. Soccer possessed the virtue of requiring virtually nothing more than a ball and an open field, an important consideration bearing in mind the poverty of squatters, and their lack of access to recreational facilities and equipment. Membership on teams was predicated both on talent and on factors relating to

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33 Yoyo, 4.

34 Siyo 1, 14.


36 Gontsana, 11.

37 Kolo, 9; Koto, 7; Mabija, 11; Mehlwena, 9; Rondo, 12.

38 Mr. N, 13; Rondo, 11.
home origins, ethnicity, and degree of assimilation to the city. Normally, a player would attach him- or herself to a team with players originating from the same home district.\(^{39}\)

**The Culture of Beer**

For all the attraction that religious worship, music, dance, singing, and sports held for squatters, perhaps no pastime was more meaningful to squatters, nor more closely associated with squatting than the enjoyment of beer, liquor, and--to a lesser extent--cannabis (or *dagga*, as it is referred to in South Africa). Brewing beer (*mqombothi*) was primarily performed by women, and the implications of this fact were far-ranging. As brewers and *shebeen* queens, women gained financial independence, both from their spouses, and in an indirect way, from the necessity to surrender their labor for sale.\(^{40}\) This economic outlet afforded African women the space to establish a foothold in the city and for the successful *shebeen* queen, a good income. It was not coincidental that the state’s coercive apparatus was deployed to limit the scale of beer brewing. In so doing, it was striking at the basis of women’s ability to support themselves economically.


\(^{40}\) *Shebeens* were illegal drinking establishments which operated out of the homes of township and squatter dwellers. Most proprietors of these informal taverns were women, who were known as *shebeen* queens.
The brewing of *mqombothi*, however, was a physically arduous enterprise. Each time *mqombothi* was made, the tin vat in which it fermented had to be buried underground, dug up, cleaned, and then replaced in the ground and covered up anew. All the while, women had to keep alert to avoid being surprised by a police raid. Neighbors would warn one another of the approach of a police raid or a plain-clothes African detective. Additionally, the hauling of water, necessary for the production of *mqombothi*, involved a significant investment of labor power since water taps were typically not readily available, and might require walking several hundred yards to the nearest one. But a Xhosa woman who refused to brew *mqombothi* was often deemed a "bad wife."41

Squatter women brewed and sold *mqombothi* primarily to supplement meager family incomes.42 Brewing beer was a lucrative livelihood that also offered women the advantage of staying close to home, and in cases where it applied, minding children. Instead of working as a domestic in a white suburb, often located on the other side of town, a woman could save herself the time and expense of traveling on public transportation by selling beer. It drew on skills that most women were taught as part of their upbringing in the countryside since wives were expected to brew beer for their husbands, their husbands’ friends and family members.43

41 Hellmann, Rooivard, pp.40,46.

42 Nondzaba, I, 2.

In addition to *mqombothi*, *shebeen* queens produced a number of other concoctions, all containing a higher volume of alcohol: *skokiaan*, *isikilimiqiki* (or “kill-me-quick”), *isishimiyana*, and *babaton*.\(^4^4\) These concoctions provided more “kick,” particularly for patrons accustomed to the low alcohol content (of approximately 2 percent) of *mqombothi*.\(^4^5\) Sometimes, the kick these concoctions provided could lead to blindness or prove lethal, since their ingredients were often toxic and replete with impurities.\(^4^6\) The manufacture of concoctions was less easily detected by police conducting raids since they could be manufactured in a much shorter period of time and did not require open air exposure. While *mqombothi* took approximately 24 hours to produce, improvised concoctions could be made in a fraction of the time since they did not require brewing.\(^4^7\) In light of the danger that police raids posed to beer brewers, significantly reducing the production time offered a distinct advantage.

The volume of *mqombothi* produced by squatters was extremely high. A large-scale raid on Windermere in December 1953 by 800 police officers resulted in the discovery of more than 4,000 liters of *mqombothi*. Police speculated that hundreds of gallons were destroyed (i.e., poured away) by Africans anxious to avoid being charged for

\(^4^4\) La Hausse, p.47. Hellmann, *Rooivard*, p.48. Ezekiel Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue*, (Garden City, NY, 1971), p.14. *Skokiaan* was made from yeast and warm water; *isikilimiqiki* or “kill-me-quick” (porridge, bread, sugar, and syrup); *isishimiyana* (yeast, sugar, syrup, and potatoes); and *babaton* (malt, yeast, stale bread, and sugar). Owing to the enormous popularity of *skokiaan*, *shebeen* queens were also commonly known as *skokiaan* queens.


\(^4^7\) Hellmann, *Rooivard*, p.47.
its possession. Another raid later in the month on Christmas Eve, conducted on Windermere and the nearby informal settlement of Jakkalsvlei, netted more than 15,000 gallons of mqombothi and liquor, found in 2,000 tins, drums, barrels, and other varieties of containers. To evade detection, shebeen queens would adopt extreme measures, including bringing liquor into camps in perambulators, in bundles of laundry, and even pouring it into the tubes of bicycle tires. To further frustrate police efforts, squatters secreted mqombothi in many ingenious places in and around their shacks, even hiding it in the ceiling, but more commonly in a concealed hole in the ground. Beer brewers would bury tin vats in large cylindrical holes in the ground and cover them up to prevent their discovery. In searching for liquor, police would poke the earth with long, sharp iron crowbars to uncover clandestine cavities. If police discovered a submerged vat on a vacant plot or in a yard shared by several shack dwellers, the beer brewer would escape prosecution, unless they were caught in the act of brewing.

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48 Cape Argus, December 1, 1953, “800 Police Swoop on Windermere.”

49 Cape Argus, December 24, 1953, “Police in New Raid on Windermere, Destroy Liquor.”


51 Moses, 7; Mabija, 9.

52 Empty drums from containers of oil, paraffin, soap, and grease were used to store liquor. The drums or vats usually were buried close to shacks and sometimes these presented a danger to livestock which would wander in the area. The oxen that would draw the carts used for collecting stercus buckets sometimes would fall into these holes and break their legs. Longmore, The Dispossessed, pp.208-210, 218. Hellmann, Rooivard, p.40. Abrahams, Mine Boy, pp.162,164-165. Ezekiel Mphahlele, Down Second Avenue, pp.31-32.

If while conducting such raids, police found a vat of *mqombothi* near someone’s shack, they would remove it and pour out its contents. The police were more likely to take enforcement action against those dealing in liquor as opposed to just *mqombothi*. To guard against these raids, informal early warning systems arose to warn of the approach of police, which often gave residents time to either hide or dump their *mqombothi*. Makeshift sentinels would shout out, Kubo–ooo-oo-oo0000–mvu! Kubooo–oo–oo–omvu! (It is red! It is red!). And while one shack was raided for liquor, the occasion would afford other squatters extra time to hide their own liquor or *mqombothi*. To distract the attention of raiding policemen from the liquor secreted in their home, various strategies were employed. For example, Sindiwe Magona’s mother quickly set down her bathing tub, filled it, disrobed, and jumped in just in time to create the appearance of bathing. The policemen who broke in were sufficiently shocked that they passed the shack by without searching it.

For many single men who did not have wives or girlfriends to make traditional *mqombothi* for them, or whose spouses were opposed to brewing *mqombothi*, *shebeens* were the natural alternative. *Shebeens* were a very common feature of life in squatter

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54 Jim, 10.

55 Ntloko 1.

56 Moses, 7; Mrs. S, 4.


58 Koto, 6.

59 Magona, *To My Children’s Children*, p.29.
camps and were more than merely drinking establishments.\textsuperscript{60} They served as centers for socializing, where squatters could share stories and experiences, commiserate with one another, and build on the social networks they utilized to obtain employment, housing, consumer goods, sex, food, and all that they required for their survival and recreation.\textsuperscript{61} Windermere alone probably boasted as many as 700 or 800 of these drinking establishments.\textsuperscript{62} Africans were forbidden by law to purchase or possess liquor other than \textit{mqombothi}, and that too was subject to strict restrictions. Persons found by the police with liquor, or \textit{mqombothi} beyond their exempted amount, faced the prospect of arrest and having their alcohol destroyed.\textsuperscript{63}

In Cape Town, although \textit{shebeens} were common in squatter camps and townships, unlike their counterparts on the Witwatersrand, \textit{shebeen} queens did not enjoy the same degree of prestige, nor were they readily associated with any one ethnic group. Instead, in Cape Town the term \textit{itopikazi elifani} [a funny or peculiar old woman] was employed in reference to the \textit{shebeen} queen.\textsuperscript{64} One informant, spoke of the \textit{shebeen} he operated in Forest (a sub-section of the Retreat squatter camp). Both he and his wife were arrested for

\textsuperscript{60} Pauw, \textit{The Second Generation}, p.22. Jim, 10; Mzwakali, 7; Vena, 6.


\textsuperscript{63} Mzwakali, 6-7; Richards, 3; Vena, 6.

\textsuperscript{64} On the Witwatersrand, Basuto women were closely associated with the occupation of shebeen queen. Bonner, “‘Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women?’,” pp.221-250. Wilson and Mafeje, \textit{Langa}, p.25.
this illegal activity, yet neither was ever jailed. Apparently, having a sufficient sum of ready cash with which to bribe the raiding inspector made the difference between being arrested and left unmolested, with only a lighter wallet.\textsuperscript{65} In addition to being a *shebeener*, this informant was also a minister in the Eastern Cape, for a branch of the Anglican church. When asked to reconcile the apparent tension between these two livelihoods, he explained: “Jesus didn’t say anything about liquor. He said you must pray first before you do something wrong. So I prayed.”\textsuperscript{66}

Africans were forbidden by law from purchasing “European liquor” (i.e., brandy, gin, or wine) according to the Liquor Act of 1928.\textsuperscript{67} To circumvent the law, *shebeen* operators (i.e., *shebeeners*) would either try to pass as Coloureds to purchase liquor, or

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\textsuperscript{65} Mr. M, 2; Mr. N, 11. As J.R. Rathebe, Secretary of Sophiatown’s Bantu Men’s Social Centre explained: “in the district in which I live is a man who has a small distillery and the police actually come there every Saturday night, have a dance and of course consume as much liquor as they wish. The morale of the police is very low indeed and they accept bribes from sellers for immunity from arrest, raids, etc.” Quoted in André Proctor, “Class Struggle, Segregation and the City: A History of Sophiatown 1905-40,” in Belinda Bozzoli, ed., *Labour, Townships and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand* (Johannesburg, 1979), p.82. In his fictional novel of life during the 1940s in Malay Camp (a squatter camp outside Johannesburg), Peter Abrahams describes how one of his characters, Leah, a *shebeen* queen, routinely pays an African policeman to warn her in advance of liquor raids. *Mine Boy*, pp.21-22,162. According to another informant: “[p]eople weren’t allowed to be in possession of liquor. In such cases, the police were tipped by someone else. But that person would bribe them with a bottle of brandy. In most cases these were black and sometimes white policemen. Otherwise people’s brandy bottles were broken. So, those selling beer used to hide their stuff in the nearby bush. Then that’d be how they survived.” Siyo I, 12.

\textsuperscript{66} Mr. N, 12. Mr. N proved a fascinating and well-informed informant, but at times, he had to be treated as “a hostile witness” to the past. He refused to speak to the author (because he is white) and insisted that Weziwe Ncane, the interview assistant, was a police spy. Even after presenting identification proving her student status with the University of the Western Cape, Mr. N expressed skepticism about Ms Ncane’s true motives.

\textsuperscript{67} This restriction was not repealed until 1961 by Act No. 72. Du Toit, “Ethnicity and Patterning in South African Drug Use,” pp.81,90,95. In addition to the legal prohibitions forbidding possession and consumption of “European liquors,” as du Toit argues, Africans were compelled by their lowly socio-economic status to opt for less expensive forms of recreational, mind-altering substances such as *mqombothi* and *dagga*.
more typically, rely on Coloureds (normally referred to as “runners” or “mailers” when employed by shebeeners) to buy liquor on their behalf. In Windermere alone, some 2,000 men, representing one-fifth of the area’s Coloured population, were so engaged. Runners were unusually adept at cheating their African customers. Some fabricated stories about suffering police arrest and having had their cache of liquor confiscated, when they had merely pocketed the money given them or helped themselves to the liquor. Others poured out a portion of the liquor and replaced it with water and various fortifying agents. Apparently, this deception was facilitated by the fact that Africans generally lacked access to unadulterated distilled liquor and therefore found it difficult to distinguish “real” and doctored liquor. Another ruse reported by an informant involved him approaching a Coloured patron outside a liquor shop to enlist his assistance in purchasing liquor. The Coloured gentleman agreed to make the purchase and disappeared into the

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70 Magona, To My Children’s Children, p.20. According to Magona, the danger always existed that runners “simply came back reeking, having found it more expedient to carry the goods inside their ribs.”

71 According to a former Coloured “mailer,” diluting spirits like brandy could be accomplished successfully by pouring out a quarter of the bottle, filling the remainder with water, and lighting a few sticks of nitrogen inside the bottle to re-charge it. For safe measure, mailers would keep an undoctored bottle aside, and light it to prove its pure alcoholic properties when called upon to do so. Field, “The Power of Exclusion,” p.162.

72 Longmore, The Dispossessed, pp.220,222.
shop. But the African never saw his makeshift partner emerge since the man had disguised himself by reversing his jacket inside out and turning round the cap on his head.73

Like mqombothi and other homemade concoctions, dagga was used by many to make the conditions of squatter camps more tolerable.74 Dagga was available in shebeens or could be acquired through contacts with the young men who sold it, who were typically those associated with the tsotsis (gangs).75 In addition to its recreational properties, dagga was also utilized for its purported medicinal properties.76 Many Africans who regarded the use of dagga as a normal part of life were surprised to learn that it was illegal.77

Numerous outsiders commenting on conditions in squatter camps decried the abuse of alcohol and dagga. In certain instances, squatters were also critical of their prevalence. Several observed that the high rate of inebriation in squatter settlements was among their most unpleasant features, and that fights would frequently erupt at shebeens.78 As well, prostitution flourished in the lax environment of shebeens, with both

73 Ntloko I.

74 Jim, 11-12; Mzwakali, 8.

75 Siyo I, 15; Siyo II, 8-9; Mabija, 11; Makele, 6; Richards, 4. Maria Lucwaba was once approached by a man who asked her to store some bags of dagga on the understanding that he would share part of the proceeds from its sale. When her husband learned of this transaction, he grew angry and turned the bags over to the police. The unidentified man never returned for his dagga. Lucwaba, 7.

76 As Mr. N offered: “Even myself, I used to buy it and smoke it, even today. It is good for healing; you just smoke it through a pipe and not a paper.” Mr. N, 13.

77 Michael Mehlwena was in the habit of smoking it until he learned that Africans who smoked dagga were liable to arrest. Mehlwena, 10. Dagga is either smoked in a rolled cigarette or in a sort of a hubble-bubble pipe, and has been a recreational narcotic for centuries among Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa. Du Toit, “Ethnicity and Patterning in South African Drug Use,” pp.76,83-84.

78 Ngquitse, 5; Richards, 3.
African and Coloured women working as prostitutes, usually resorting to the surrounding bush in which to transact their business. The ubiquity of shebeens was frequently commented upon by contemporaries and cited as a pretext for demolishing squatter camps. Only one squatter could positively declare that shebeens were absent from his or her settlement.

Squatting and the Ethos of Neighborliness

To soften the blow of poverty and ease the hardships emanating from racial discrimination, an informal network of mutual aid was present in most squatter communities. It normally operated on a casual basis and was predicated on the commonly shared condition among squatters as migrants alienated from their kin-based support systems, and vulnerable to the exigencies of life in an often unfriendly urban setting. If illness, pregnancy, or some other crisis incapacitated a woman without a husband, her

79 Swart, “Windermere: From Peri-Urban Area to Suburb (1920’s to 1950’s),” p.49. Mnyatheli II, S. Abrahams, Mine Boy, pp.27-28. Bonner, P.L. “Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women?,” pp.231-232. Relatively little information was offered by informants concerning the prevalence of prostitution in squatter settlements. One person related how it existed in Sea Point, an affluent suburb of Cape Town, where in certain instances, African domestic workers might supplement their incomes by trading sexual favors for cash. These women would accompany single white men to their homes, or in cases where the men were married, drive off to a secluded spot on Table Mountain. Siyo II, 8-9.

80 In this instance, no shebeens existed in Nozitho Yoyo’s immediate vicinity because “mostly we were church people and ministers.” The section of Parow in which she resided was superior in many ways to most squatter settlements in the Cape Peninsula, and was not a squatter camp strictly speaking. Shacks were interspersed with proper homes, and well serviced with respect to access to shops and public transportation. Yoyo, 10. Curiously, shebeens were a kind of variant of the tea-meetings in which “respectable” Christians regularly participated. In fact, shebeens had originally been known as itimiti, in reference to the way that patrons imitated their better educated, more refined social superiors. On Thursdays, religious women would gather in manyano societies, for prayer and dance. La Hausse, Brewers, Beerhalls, and Boycotts, p.41. Du Toit, “Religion, Ritual, and Healing,” pp. 26,45.
neighbors would provide assistance in the absence of extended family members. This might include cooking for the woman and her children, doing her laundry, arranging for medical care, collecting mail. Assistance would also sometimes be forthcoming in instances where a neighbor was experiencing hard times and had no resources on which to fall back. When people lost their possessions as a result of fire, neighbors might supply them with clothes. Where squatters from the same village or region lived together, this network of mutual assistance tended to be especially strong. If a squatter was incarcerated for a pass offence, neighbors might collect bail money. Neighbors also took upon themselves the duty of supervising and reprimanding other neighbors' children. When the misdeed warranted it, neighbors even disciplined malefactors with corporal punishment.

Replacing home ties to a certain extent, women belonged to stokvel associations or saving societies. A stokvel was a club or association which organized regular parties at the home of club members. Responsibility for holding stokvel parties (or as they were known

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81 Jim, 6; Mzwakali, 4.


83 Mrs. E, 2; Vena, 5.

84 Tshapile, 6.


86 Magona, To My Children’s Children, pp.24,45.
among the amaXhosa, amabhokhwe) rotated from one member to the next. Hosting a stokvel was a welcome event since the host was entitled to the entrance fees collected from attending members and guests. This could amount to a considerable lump sum, an accomplishment that was otherwise difficult to achieve among a class of people where the ability to save any money whatsoever was the exception to the rule. Stokvels proved a crucial means for stockpiling cash toward the purchase of special, expensive, and otherwise unobtainable items. Given laws restricting the rights of Africans to open bank accounts, this economic function of stokvels was the distinctive feature for some members.

Stokvels also offered members a sense of community and although many squatters joined stokvels for economic reasons, the social aspect seems to have been more important for most. Since stokvels were predominately comprised of women, it gave women

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87 Alternatively, the host might receive the weekly subscriptions paid by members and use the pooled money to provide food and beverages for the party. In this scenario, members attended free and only guests paid an entrance fee. Eddie Koch, “Without Visible Means of Subsistence. Slumyard Culture in Johannesburg,” in Belinda Bozzoli, ed. Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Resistance (Johannesburg, 1983), p.163. Mzwakali, 7; Ngquitse, 7; Oniwe, 6.

88 Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng, p.141. Koto, 6. Lucwaba, 6; Mnyatheli I, 6. Owing to its economic advantages, the stokvel has been referred to as a mutual benefit society. Hellmann, Rootyward, p.43.

89 Susan Tshapile saw them in this light, since she chose to describe the association with which she was involved as a “savings club.” Tshapile, 9. However, there were other avenues for saving money. An African could maintain a savings account with the post office, or alternatively, risk secreting cash on the premises of her shack. A more common method for setting aside savings was to purchase land, cattle, and farming implements and arrange for relatives in home districts to safeguard them. As well, in remitting a portion of their wages to family members in the countryside, workers in town were investing in social obligations upon which they could call when they retired to the villages that they continued to regard as their real home. It was a widespread practice to send money to one’s wife, parents, or siblings in the countryside. In fact, many young men and women came to Cape Town with the express objective of accumulating capital for themselves and their families, and then returning to their home villages. M. Lipschitz and N.M. Greshoff, “Living Conditions in a Squatters’ Camp,” Race Relations Journal, 21 (1954): 10,32.
members a communal forum in which they could provide support to one another. As women and as Africans, they were intimately familiar with oppression and hardship. Since their men were frequently absent—working in distant locales or residing on the premises of their employers in the city during the work week—and their families and childhood friends hundreds of miles away, most squatter women experienced acute loneliness. They benefited from the contacts they established with other women living in equally trying conditions.  

Men would usually attend parties held on weekends, while weekday stokvels were typically women-only affairs. In an effort to attract customers, weekend stokvel parties often involved plenty of music, and for the young, dancing. These parties would last throughout the night as partygoers danced to music provided by pianos, accordions, guitars, violins, harmoniums, and where these instruments were unavailable, pebble-filled bottles and milk-tin rattles. Along with various delicacies, mgombothi was served, however, its consumption introduced other consequences. One man’s memories of stokvels were tainted by recollections of fights which sometimes erupted at these parties. On one occasion, he was accosted by a policeman with whose girlfriend he had flirted.

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93 Rondo, 12.
Others viewed brewing and serving *mqombothi* at odds with adherence to Christianity.\(^{94}\) Furthermore, for some Africans, the brewing of beer, especially for commercial sale, was regarded as inconsistent with respectability.\(^ {95}\) For “respectable” and particularly religious members, lemonade, other cool drinks, and cake might be substituted for *mqombothi*, but such events were much less common.\(^ {96}\)

The same principle of collectively pooling resources that underlay *stokvels* was present in the arrangements surrounding burial. Among the amaXhosa, great importance is attached to the disposal of the dead. But Xhosa migrants living in Cape Town were forced by circumstances to modify traditional burial practices. However preferable it would have been to bury their dead in the lands of their ancestors, few Africans could afford the prohibitively high costs involved in arranging transportation for a corpse and casket to the Transkei or Ciskei. As a result, graveyards for Africans sprang up in many neighborhoods of Cape Town.\(^ {97}\) Burial would generally follow within a day or two of death since the services of a mortuary were beyond the means of most Africans.\(^ {98}\)

Since most African households were already impoverished and liable to being crippled financially by the expenses involved in a burial service, burial societies were

\(^{94}\) Foloti, 6; Fukusana, 5; Jim, 11.


\(^{97}\) In Retreat, Muizenberg, Langa, Simonstown, Kensington, Ottery, Bellville, and Woltemade. Jim, 7; Moses, 5; Mr. N, 7; Rondo, 8; Siyo II, 11; Yoyo, 12.

\(^{98}\) Whether this was so owing to racist customs or the general poverty of Africans unable to afford the added expense attending funeral costs is unclear. Rondo, 8.
common among squatters. Their purpose was to collect sufficient funds to bury members or their spouses and dependents. A few such societies were even formed to pay and make the necessary provisions for burial in the Transkei or Ciskei. Moreover, burial societies would arrange for removal of the deceased’s body, and in some instances, the tending of graves. Even in the absence of structured burial societies, a less formal network operated. Squatters would summon street meetings to collect money for a neighbor who had lost a family member. To supplement the benefits extended by burial societies, some squatters invested in burial insurance. However, the insurance agents who offered burial insurance were not always entirely reputable. The money paid into such funds on occasion would go astray.

According to one informant, what was truly distinctive about the African settlements that sprung up on the Cape Flats was the way in which this “nation” looked after each other. The spirit of reciprocity and neighborliness that prevailed was a testament to the cooperation and goodwill of squatters. In her autobiography, Phyllis Ntantala observes of Cape Town’s informal camps that “[T]hese settlements were not just haphazard, they were properly run, with communities that saw to the welfare of the

99 Makosa, 15; Mr. N, 7,14. Hellmann, Rooivard, p.96.

100 Ntloko I.

101 Lucwaba, 8. Makele, 6. Celiwe Makosa explained that relatives too would provide the money necessary to bury a family member. Makosa, 15.


103 Rondo, 13; Makosa, 14-15.

104 Ntloko I.
people, and that were responsible to the people who elected them. This perspective suggests a greater degree of organization than was revealed through the testimony of informants or in the archival record. Even so, when disputes arose, informal networks of conflict resolution were invoked to restore harmony. Elders normally served as arbiters listening to litigants' testimony and pronouncing punishment, which usually involved compelling the malefactor to prepare *mgombothi* for the aggrieved parties and the community at large. As one squatter explained: “if someone has deviated from the norms of the camp, the committee comprising elders would summon that individual to a meeting and call him to order.” A couple of informants spoke of a body called a *solomzi* which arbitrated disputes that arose among squatters.

Echoing Ntantala, several writers have commented on the organized structures among squatters in place on the Witwatersrand. In particular, the organized invasions of vacant land led by charismatic leaders like James Mpanza, have been described at length in the work of Bonner, Stadler, and Hirson. But these organized squatter movements did

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106 Kondlo, “Miserable Hovels and Shanties,” p.156.

107 Koto, 8.

108 Foloti, 5; Mabija, 12. Agrinet Mnyatheli also describes a similar type of body of advisors that would intervene in instances like excessive noise from parties or criminal activity. Harriet Makele had experience of a related type of committee, which was headed by elders in the area. Mnyatheli II, 6; Makele, 7.

not materialize on the Cape Flats in the same way. Informal settlements in Cape Town were haphazard in the sense that they were not planned as *en masse* land invasions. Squatting was predominately a survival strategy for a class of urban inhabitants who otherwise possessed neither the legal right nor the financial means to rent or purchase housing in the built environment. In Cape Town, squatting did not take on the features of a coherent protest movement. Although the presence of large numbers of squatters represented an implicit reproach to the hegemony of the apartheid state within the context of Cape Town, any challenge that squatters’ putatively illegal presence on municipal and private land implied was unintended and coincidental.

**Relations Among African and Coloured Squatters**

Squatting had been long practiced by Coloureds, and even to the present day, many elderly white Capetonians more readily associate the phenomenon with the Coloured community than they do with Africans. African and Coloured squatters lived alongside one

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111 In her study of Brakpan, Hilary Sapire also found that squatting there “remained an essentially spontaneous, individualistic response to the housing shortage in the location, to the tight controls on influx into the area and to the absence of employment openings in the town. Unlike the situation in Benoni or Johannesburg, no single concentration of squatters emerged and no obvious squatter leaders made an appearance in the mid to late 1940s.” Hilary Joan Sapire, “African Urbanisation and Struggles Against Municipal Control in Brakpan, 1920-1958,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Witwatersrand, 1988, p.217.
another, and their interaction, although often friendly, was rarely a straightforward and unproblematic affair. (See Figure 7)

Most African informants insisted that relations with Coloured people were harmonious. In fact, often they were at pains to present an idealized and nostalgic picture of the past, portraying the 1940s and 1950s as a time when goods were more affordable, and when life was safer, slower-paced, and both inter-racial and intra-racial relations harmonious. Despite the proclivity of informants to offer salutary observations on how African and Coloured squatters enjoyed congenial relations, interwoven into these protestations, certain ambiguous sentiments and perceptions filtered in. In a few instances, some former squatter expressed unequivocal rancor and lingering bitterness toward Coloured squatters.

Important divisions threatened to fragment solidarity among squatters. Frequently Coloured residents inhabited distinct pockets or quarters within squatter camps, spatially removed from their African neighbors. Reflecting their superior economic status owing to greater opportunities for employment and the right to organize in labor unions, Coloureds might own houses in areas which were characterized by a mixing of shacks and more permanent homes constructed of building materials like brick and store-bought lumber. As well, Coloureds enjoyed the legal right to purchase or rent land, which was denied to Africans, except with respect to renting within official townships. Squatter landlords were frequently Coloured or Indian and the same pattern prevailed with respect to local shop

\[112\] Foloti, 4; Jim, 13; Mabija, 12; Mehlwena, 11; Mnyatheli II, 6; Mzwakali, 8; Mr. N, 14; Ngquitse, 7; Oniwe, 8; Richards, 4; Rondo, 14; Mrs. S, 6; Tshapile, 9.
Figure 7 Coloured squatters, such as this woman and her children, lived side-by-side with African squatters in the Parkwood Estate camp. From Phyllys Rabkin, “A Socio-Economic Study of Parkwood Estate, Cape Flats,” M.A. Thesis, Department of Social Sciences, University of Cape Town, 1941. (Courtesy of African Studies Library, the University of Cape Town)
owners servicing squatters. Africans were legally prohibited from operating shops outside of African townships, and within townships, required a licence. This situation contributed to some measure of animosity among Africans directed at Coloureds, since local merchants charged exorbitant prices for their goods given their relatively captive market. Further exacerbating relations, merchants extended credit only to those customers who they believed were good credit risks. Effectively, Coloureds filled the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie which was economically exploiting African squatters.

Language could also pose a barrier to interactions among Africans and Coloureds since the latter more typically employed Afrikaans than English as their home language, and most Africans from the Eastern Cape were not conversant in Afrikaans. Many of the Africans who inhabited squatter camps were caught up in patterns of oscillating migration and not permanent city dwellers. Frequently, they resisted integration into Cape Town culture, which among things meant that their command of English remained rudimentary. And since very few Coloured people could converse in Xhosa or the other African languages spoken in Cape Town’s squatter camps, free communication was inhibited.

Perhaps the most common arena of interaction was through alcohol, either in shebeens or at special festivals, to which Africans invited friends and neighbors. For such occasions, Coloured people even had a saying in Afrikaans which translates into

113 Lucwaba, 8.

114 Moses, 4. Abrahams, Mine Boy, pp.27-28. Although no entrance fee was collected at such parties, it was generally expected that guests would make a small monetary donation. Hellmann, Rooivard, p.46.
English as “we get free meat and beer.” The enjoyment of food and mqombothi served as a way of bridging ethnic barriers and establishing common ground among neighbors from different regions who spoke various languages. 

Mqombothi was an integral part of socializing and was served at both festive and solemn occasions. On such occasions, Coloureds, Zulus, Sothos, and other Africans would join Xhosa amabhokhwe parties.

Even though Coloureds mixed peaceably with the amaXhosa and other Africans at shebeens and amabhokhwe, there were individuals in both communities who were less amicably predisposed to one another. Normally such people merely avoided situations in which they would come into contact with one another. As one African informant explained concerning Coloureds, usually: “They just came for visits and we were good friends.” Despite the tensions inherent in relationships between African and Coloured squatters, friendships between the two occurred freely among children. As Elsie Jim observed: “It was nice, we were playing with Coloured children.” In fact, a few informants shared the same recollection with visible fondness. But although Jim went on to relate how African and Coloured children would dance and sing together in the Retreat squatter camp, her story revealed something in the telling which she had not appreciated as a child.

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115 Gontsana, 11.
116 Vena, 6; Richards, 3.
117 Ngquitse, 6-7; Lucwaba, 7; Oniwe, 7.
118 Yoyo, 6-7.
119 Mr. N, 14.
120 Jim, 8; Makosa, 6; Gontsana, 7.
The songs that she and Coloured children sang together were not entirely lacking in significance. Only later in life did she come to realize that the lyrics "besop vir die Kaffir" meant "beware of the kaffir" in Afrikaans.\textsuperscript{121}

For their part, Africans sometimes resorted to an arsenal of derogatory terms for Coloureds, including \textit{ilawu} (a rogue without customs and traditions) and \textit{iqeya} (someone who drinks to excess).\textsuperscript{122} As well, divisions existed in the way that Africans and Coloureds interacted. Coloureds had their own churches and tended to live in separate communities.\textsuperscript{123} In Retreat, Coloureds were free to attend the African school although none did. However, some African school children did go to the Coloured school.\textsuperscript{124} Further underlining the tensions inherent in their relations, Coloured homeowners in areas bordering largely African squatter camps were active in opposing the existence of such settlements and the proposed establishment of African locations. For instance, in 1944, when the Bellville South suburb of Cape Town was under consideration as a site for an African township and reception depôt, 108 local Coloured residents, all members of the Bellville South Civic Association, signed a petition protesting the proposed township.\textsuperscript{125} City Councillors were sympathetic to the concerns of the Coloured petitioners.

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{121} Jim, 13. The term "kaffir" is an extremely derogatory term used in reference to Africans.
\textsuperscript{122} Wilson and Mafeje, \textit{Langa}, p.13.
\textsuperscript{123} Makele, 6.
\textsuperscript{124} Ntloko, II.
\textsuperscript{125} 4/CT; 1/2/1/1/61, Divisional Council of the Cape (Divco) Minutes, February 22, 1944, p.85. Ordinary Monthly Meeting: "Control of Natives."
\end{footnotes}
were likewise opposed. The latter organization also circulated a petition in which members condemned inter-racial intermarriage and the threat that Africans ostensibly posed to their moral and educational standards.126

The wage differential separating Africans and Coloureds further served as a source of friction, since Coloured workers invariably earned better salaries that Africans.127 One African squatter found working with Coloured people in hotels a positive experience, however, she recognized that her Coloured co-workers made higher wages simply on the basis of race.128 Reflecting her profound religious beliefs, she explained that “Coloured people are coming from us. They’re also human beings. You cut here [showing the palm of her hand], there’s red blood in us all. So I can’t say I hate them. Instead, I love them deep in my heart.”129 Less conciliatory, more unambiguous sentiments were expressed in an interview with another informant:

Andile Ncula (AN): How did African and Coloured people get along?
William Koto (WK): It was difficult. They always clashed, to an extent that the police had to intervene.
AN: Did African and Coloured children play together?
WK: Oh no! Because of those feuds they were barred from playing with our children.
AN: Was it unusual for a Coloured person to be a lodger in a pondokkie with African people? If yes, why?
WK: Yes, because of the rivalry amongst them.

126 4/CT; 1/2/1/68, Divco Minutes, September 30, 1947, p.214, “Control and Accommodation of Natives at Bellville.” Department of Health (GES) 2975; PS3, Memorandum “Re: Control and Accommodation of Natives at Bellville from A.P. Tueurnich, TC and Treasurer, to the Secretary, NAD, pp.2-3.

127 Mehlwena, 12.

128 Vena, 4.

129 Vena, 7.
Further reflecting the ambivalent ways in which some African squatters saw Coloured people, on one occasion, a woman stated that relations were harmonious with Coloureds, but another time expressed a more problematic viewpoint: “Life was smooth for them. They never experienced the hardship we experienced. They were like in heaven. If a Coloured person sees a black domestic worker in a white man’s house she would inform the police and the next thing the police would come and require that person’s pass.”

According to information gathered by the Commission on Separate Representation of Voters, some 50 Union Africans (legal residents of South Africa), 150 foreign Africans, and 75 Basutos (from modern-day Lesotho) were cohabiting with Coloured women in the Cape Peninsula. No cases whatsoever of Union African men living with Coloured spouses were uncovered in Windermere, which with an estimated population of 25,000, was Cape Town’s largest informal settlement. Informants corroborated anecdotally the tendency among Africans from beyond South Africa’s borders to form liaisons with Coloured women. Non-Union Africans enjoyed a reputation for being good and generous providers, whereas African men from within South Africa were characterized as stingy. Male migrant workers from countries neighboring South Africa were bound by less tangible ties

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130 Mnyatheli II, 6; Mnyatheli I, 8.


132 Some elderly informants referred to non-Union Africans as “Swahilis” irrespective of their language speaking abilities. Africans from modern-day Zimbabwe, Mozambique, or Malawi were indiscriminately designated as Swahilis. Others lumped Africans from north of the Limpopo River together under the term of “Nyasa.” Siyo II, 1,2. The Limpopo River separates South Africa from countries to the north, Nyasaland, modern-day Malawi, supplied a large portion of South Africa’s mine workers. Wilson and Mafeje, Langa, 34. Another informant correctly identified “Swahilis” as Kenyan nationals, although it is unlikely that they were in fact from Kenya. Mr. N, 13.
with their distant home communities. Expectations of providing remittances would have been less exacting, and the possibility of being joined by existing wives extremely remote. It was hardly surprising that they sought female companionship among local women, and entered into relationships with Coloured women, who conferred advantages in accommodation and status that African women could not offer.

But the official numbers above at best imperfectly polled squatter camps, and that is where large-scale intermixing took place between Africans and Coloureds. A number of opportunities existed for the coming together of African and Coloured squatters. Given the limited space separating one shack from another in crowded squatter camps it was virtually impossible for neighbors not to come into contact on a regular basis. Bearing in mind that shacks were typically one or two-room structures, without benefit of windows or ventilation, it is not hard to understand why squatters spent a large percentage of their waking leisure time out of doors, often in company of one another. The common tribulations suffered by squatters contributed to a prevailing sense of community across ethnic and language barriers. Since women were often forced to stay home during the day to care for children, they formed especially close ties, as interaction was commonplace during the course of their day, when doing laundry by streams, cooking outside their shacks over open fires, or queuing for water at taps.

Intra-African Relations

The majority of squatters were Xhosa speakers, and this relative dominance of a single language group among Africans contrasted sharply with the more diverse, polyglot
communities in other urban centers in South Africa. Even so, many different ethnic groups were present in the squatter camps of Cape Town. The Retreat squatter community encompassed a wide mix of different groupings, such as amaXhosa, Sothos, Zulus, and Coloureds. In fact, the ethnic heterogeneity of the area was a leading reason officials were so insistent that it be brought under control and re-zoned for the exclusive use of Coloured homeowners. As was true of Sophiatown outside Johannesburg, the state perceived the existence of a racially mixed and culturally vibrant community as a potential threat. The NAD attempted to segregate Africans of different linguistic groups to forestall solidarity across ethnic and linguistic groups. W.W.M. Eiselen justified the segmentation of the African population to promote education, tribal discipline, "Bantu authority," and municipal control.

By most accounts, relations between Xhosa-speakers and other Africans were good, with friendships forming across ethnic lines. But violence arising from tensions

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133 Most common among non-Xhosa peoples were Zulus, Sothos, Shangaans, Bhacas, and Fingoes. Jim, 12; Koto, 7; Ngquinte, 7; Siyo II, 1.


136 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/20, CCC NAC Minutes, August 8, 1954, five-page memorandum from Eisele n to all local authorities, “Planning of Residential Areas for Bantu in Urban Areas: Ethnic Grouping.” Accordingly, when laying out Nyanga West in the 1950s as a flagship township for all Africans living outside of Langa under the CCC’s jurisdiction, the City Engineer relegated Africans to certain sections of the township according to ethnicity. In this instance, the City Engineer (CE) allocated Nguni Africans 1,463, while Sothos received 147, and other groups 16. 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/22, CCC NAC Minutes, p.847, June 5, 1957, “Nyanga West Native Township: Second Report. Development of First Section as an Emergency Camp and Subsequent Conversion to a Permanent Housing Scheme,” by the CE, S.S. Morris.

137 Jim, 12; Mehlwena, 10; Mr. N, 14; Mrs. S, 5; Tshapile, 9.
between different ethnic groups was not unknown. Fights broke out when elders were not called in to arbitrate and smooth over conflicts that arose among younger men. While many informants were reluctant to discuss such conflict, clearly the cleavages that existed in the Eastern Cape were to a certain extent replicated in the Cape Town setting. Rivalry among squatters from different villages sometimes erupted in "tribal fighting." Faction fights might take place among Africans of different language groups, but more typically they pitted men of one village against another. In April 1945, a faction fight in the Blaauwvlei section of Retreat left several Africans seriously injured, in a number of cases requiring hospitalization. Police arrested 70 participants, 54 of whom were subsequently found guilty and sentenced. A faction fight in Retreat the previous year had already resulted in two deaths. But for the intervention of the Retreat Vigilance Association, armed with a white flag, greater loss of life might have occurred. Ignorant of the complicated rivals and tensions at play, one police officer opined that beer was the cause of violence among Africans: "These people are not content with merely celebrating or having a good time. When this stuff they make [mqombothi] goes to their heads out come

138 Ntloko I.

139 Grace Nonzabo related how she found the "tribal fighting" between people from the two Transkeian villages of Engcobo and Mgubuli to be among the more unpleasant aspects of life in the squatter camp. Nondzaba, II, 4. Miriam Foloti also reported that the amaPondo and amaXhosa would sometimes clash. Foloti, 4.

140 South African Police (SAP) 451; 1/141/49. Instances of "tribal" conflict took place in Windermere in December 1949 and January 1953. In the former case, it was a conflict among Xhosa-speaking peoples.


142 Advance, April 8, 1954, "Retreat Fight."
the sticks and knives. When they get to the fighting stage one thing leads to another and then we have a murder or two on our hands and a few dozen assault cases—and so it goes on.”

Gender Relations and Family Life

According to census figures, the influx rate of African women coming to Cape Town outstripped that of men (see Figure 7). Southern African societies tend to be patriarchal in nature and the division of labor was highly gendered. Not surprisingly, women were invariably responsible for performing menial domestic chores like acquiring and preparing food, washing clothes, gathering water and fuel, and nurturing children. Often men were freed from household responsibilities due to simple fatigue. The strain of a full day of physical labor in a heavy manual job was augmented by a long commute by bus, train, or foot. When a working man returned home tired, normally he was exempt from preparing food or other household tasks.

Women spent a disproportionate amount of time preparing and acquiring food. There were different reasons for this, but the lack of electrified refrigeration made shopping for groceries, if not a daily, then a regular activity. Most foods could only be kept two days before spoilage began. However, a luxury like a refrigerator was entirely beyond the means of virtually all squatters. Even though they did not enjoy access to electricity and refrigeration, squatters devised ingenious methods for storing perishable

143 Cape Argus, December 24, 1953, “Police in New Raid on Windermere, Destroy Liquor.”

144 Gontsana, 10; Mzwakali, 6.
Figure 8 Differential influx of African men and women into Greater Cape Town.

foods. Drawing on informal networks of neighborliness, squatters would sometimes “club together” to purchase meat from a butcher. To realize greater savings, they would collect it shortly before the butcher closed shop for the day and buy the left-over scraps (*stukkies*) at a deep discount.\(^{145}\) Most typically, they placed meat and butter in large bowls, pots, or basins of cold water to prolonge their shelf life.\(^{146}\) One man stored foods in a large suitcase constructed of zinc, while a family kept food underground to preserve it (see Figure 9).\(^{147}\) As well, meat would be cured and consumed whenever it was desired.\(^{148}\) Women who worked as domestic workers, which required them to spend most of the day outside of the squatter camp, might rely more on tinned or prepared foods than those women who stayed within the camp and could devote greater time and effort toward the preparation of food.\(^{149}\)

Without refrigeration, squatters could not buy food in bulk. Buying food in small quantities invariably meant paying premium prices, especially when purchases were made at shops in the vicinity of squatter camps, since they charged much higher prices than those in shopping centers in built-up areas.\(^{150}\) Without automobiles or satisfactory bus and train service, squatters were prevented from buying in large quantities, even if they had the

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\(^{146}\) Jim, 4; Makele, 3; Moses, 3; Mzwakali, 3; Mr. N, 6.


\(^{148}\) Mabija, 4; Ngquitse, 3.


Although this hole with a roof was constructed of flattened drums had once been a shelter for two squatters, it was normally used for storing foods, sometimes by placing them in a receptacle of cold water to extend their shelf life. In this instance, the hole was currently in use as a clandestine storage facility for liquor. Although barely discernible, the figure on top of the hill was a sentinel, on watch to warn of the approach of strangers or the police. NTS 4503; 581/313, 1940/1941, H.S. Walker, “Some Homes of the Cape Peninsula,” p.14. (Courtesy of the Central State Archives, Pretoria)
financial resources to do so—which in most cases they did not. In this way, squatters were
doubly penalized for their isolation, their lack of access to adequate transportation
facilities, and their poverty.

Preparation of food took place both outside and inside shacks. Using a brazier (or
drievoet), many inhabitants would light fires and cook over the flame.¹⁵¹ When the flames
died down, the remaining embers or coals would be carried into the shack in a fire-bucket
for cooking. These red-hot coals would be useful both for the purposes of cooking and of
throwing off heat. When utilized to create heat, the fire-bucket was called mbamula,
which was a familiar method among amaXhosa for heating their huts. The tin fire-bucket
which held the heated coals would itself be fitted into another tin receptacle filled with
sand to prevent the coals from spilling out and igniting a fire.¹⁵² Although minimal smoke
would be generated by the coals (since they were only taken inside once they ceased
producing smoke), another more immediate risk was presented by their use. Coals emit
high levels of carbon monoxide—especially as they are dying out—and anyone, who
through negligence, fatigue, or inebriation left coals in the confined space of their shack
for the night risked carbon monoxide poisoning.¹⁵³ Naturally, even for those who escaped
its most extreme consequences, constant exposure to such noxious emissions exercised

¹⁵¹ A drievoet was a tripod, constructed of steel tempered in fire with wire wrapped around it for
reinforcement. Siyo II, 5.


¹⁵³ Mrs. C, 8-9; Ntloko I. According to Sindiwe Magone, “[a]mong blacks, carbon monoxide
poisoning is as constant a threat as drowning in white homes where swimming pools abound . . . whole
families have been discovered ice-cold in the morning, victims of their attempts to keep from freezing to
death.” Magona, To My Children’s Children, p.32. Mphahlele, Down Second Avenue, p.58.
deleterious health effects. In the evenings, as women were preparing dinner, a pall of smoke from the hundreds of coal braziers would collect and hang over squatter camps.\textsuperscript{154}

Alternatively, primus stoves, which burned paraffin fuel, were frequently used to cook food.\textsuperscript{155} Coal stoves were also utilized by some squatters, although primus stoves were more common. A coal stove was fueled by coal or wood, and of the two types of stoves, the coal stove was preferred for its superior ability to throw off a great deal of heat that would serve to provide warmth for a shack’s inhabitants. However, to cook quickly, the primus stove was the obvious choice.\textsuperscript{156} By attaching a zinc wire to the stove’s heating elements, primus stoves could also be modified to serve as heaters.\textsuperscript{157}

Given the dangers, hardships, and squalor, squatters not surprisingly chose to send their children to the Eastern Cape to live with their grandparents or aunts.\textsuperscript{158} A study conducted during 1955-1957 of 631 African workers in Cape Town revealed that of their 188 school-going children, 96, or slightly more than half, attended school in the rural areas. The predominant reason offered by parents to explain why they had relatives raise their children in the countryside rested on the opinion that the city was an inappropriate environment for children. The belief that the rural area was more conducive to moral

\textsuperscript{154} Mphahlele, \textit{Down Second Avenue}, pp.23,56.

\textsuperscript{155} Jim, 4; Moses, 3; Mnyatheli II, 6; Mzwakali, 3; Ngquitse, 3; Ntsababa, 2. Paraffin fuel and matches added to household expenses. Paraffin could be purchased either in tins or in smaller quantities in bottles. Lipschitz and Greshoff, “Living Conditions in a Squatters’ Camp,” p.22.

\textsuperscript{156} Yoyo, 15. Mphahlele, \textit{Down Second Avenue}, p.22.

\textsuperscript{157} Gontsana, 5.

development and the imbibing of Xhosa traditions was common among the men and women who themselves spent the majority of their productive years in Cape Town. As one man expressed it: children raised in the city “have no respect for adults.” In addition to the desire to prevent moral laxity among youth, in instances where the mother worked full-time, it would be difficult to find someone suitable to mind the children, since most extended family members resided in the countryside.159

When children did stay with their parents in Cape Town, they were usually expected to contribute to the household by way of performing certain chores and even contributing to household income. For instance, girls would assist their mothers with laundry.160 Fetching water would usually be a woman’s task, although she might delegate the responsibility either to her own children or other children in the neighborhood.161 Children were also taught to wash, do dishes, make bread on the fire outside, to clean sheep heads, and make ginger beer.162 On the weekend, children might perform odd jobs for pocket money. With their parents unable to extend them allowances owing to their dire poverty, children had to rely on their own resourcefulness for money with which to purchase treats like sweets, fruits, and vetkoeks. They fetched water for women making mqombothi, or served as lookouts for this illegal enterprise. Foraging for empty bottles and secondhand clothes for the itinerant Coloured traders who collected such items on

159 Van der Horst, African Workers in Town, pp.43-44,83.
160 Mabija, 5.
161 Koto, 3; Mabija, 5; Ntloko 1.
162 Ntsababa, 5.
horse cart, provided a meager but important source of income for children.\textsuperscript{163} (See Figure 10)

Occasionally grandmothers assumed the role of primary care-givers to children of urban squatters.\textsuperscript{164} If they were fortunate, working women might also have a neighbor willing to care for their children. Grandmothers and babysitters were valuable assets in that they allowed women to leave the home to earn income. Crèches (as day care centers are known in South Africa) were rare on the Cape Flats. The Union of Jewish Women ran one in Windermere, providing supervision for 80 to 100 children, from one to six years of age, but this was exceptional.\textsuperscript{165} The Nyanga emergency squatter camp, which by 1956, harbored a population of nearly 4,000 children, only claimed one crèche, which was run by the National Council of Women. And it contained space for only 25 children. But the earliest instances of crèches in squatter examples originated not with outside philanthropic organizations but among squatters themselves, specifically with enterprising individuals like Esther Bangani and Dora Tamana.\textsuperscript{166}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{163} Proctor, "Class Struggle, Segregation and the City," p.74. Kamana.
\item \textsuperscript{164} Fukusana, 1; Tshapile, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{166} In 1953, Cafda, in concert with the Athlone Nursery School Committee considered establishing a crèche in Retreat but had to defer the project in light of the uncertainty about the prospects of Retreat’s African community in light of threats issued by the central government and CCC to remove the African population and establish a Coloured township. 3/CT 4/2/1/3/2551; B43/53, CCC NAC Minutes, November 2, 1953. According to Phyllis Ntantala, in addition to Tamana’s crèche in Retreat, another African woman ran one in the Parkwood squatter camp, in both instances on a not-for-profit basis. Ntantala, A Life’s Mosaic, p.132.
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\end{footnotesize}
Figure 10 Squatter children, probably in the Retreat/Vrygrond area. NTS 4503; 581/313, 1940/1941, H.S. Walker, "Some Homes in the Cape Peninsula," p.12. (Courtesy of the Central State Archives, Pretoria)
By way of summary, a brief examination of Dora Tamana’s life will be useful in highlighting many of the issues discussed above in this chapter with respect to the ethic of neighborliness and the pivotal role played by women in the organizational and social life of squatter camps. Tamana exemplified many of the opportunities women carved out for themselves in the attempt to transform a ramshackle conglomeration of hovels into a community where a shared sense of identity and reciprocity prevailed.

Beginning in 1948, Tamana ran a crèche out of her iron and wood shack in Blaauwvlei. The idea of offering this service came to her from meetings that the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) regularly held in the Grand Parade, in the heart of Cape Town. Initially, Tamana’s crèche accommodated only 17 children, but when her charges grew in number, she moved the crèche to a nearby church hall. She received no outside funding and sought to operate the crèche along economic lines. Reflecting the meager resources available, Tamana had the children sleep in cardboard boxes. In the spirit of providing a community service, she kept accounting books which were available for public scrutiny. After Tamana raised fees to cover overhead costs associated with

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food, water, and related necessities for the children in her care, she had to close it in 1951. Parents found the fees beyond their budgets and Tamana could no longer subsidize the financial shortfalls (see Figure 11 and Figure 12).\textsuperscript{170}

Typical of the many of the migrants who were drawn to Cape Town, Tamana came of humble origins in the Transkei, claiming only a Standard Four education.\textsuperscript{171} One of three children, she came to Cape Town in 1930 at the age of 29 to join her husband, and shortly thereafter, divorced him.\textsuperscript{172} Owing to the impoverished conditions of the Transkei, Tamana had lost six of twelve infant children, who variously succumbed to starvation, tuberculosis, and meningitis.\textsuperscript{173} As was true of other women and men who made their way to the Western Cape, Tamana braved the unknown for better living conditions, medical care, and economic opportunities.

As a long-time resident of the Blaauwvlei squatter camp, Tamana took it upon herself to ameliorate the quality of life for its inhabitants. In the attempt to sensitize fellow squatters to the structural disabilities they suffered as Africans and as squatters, each week she sold four dozen copies of the socialist paper, the \textit{Guardian}. She would travel shack to

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\textsuperscript{170} \textit{New Age}, November 25, 1954, "Police Reign of Intimidation Against Cape Africans." Ntloko II.


\textsuperscript{172} Ntloko I. Tamana was born in 1901 in Hlobo, the Transkei. During the 1930s, she lived in Queenstown, but with her husband in Cape Town, and mired in desperate poverty, she lost three of four children. Walker, \textit{Women and Resistance}, pp.12,43.

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{New Age}, September 1, 1955, "I Tasted a New World and Won Confidence for Our Future."\
\end{flushleft}
Figure 11 Dora Tamana with some of the children who were enrolled in her Blaauwvlei crèche. (Courtesy of the South African Library, Photographic and Special Collections)

Figure 12 Dora Tamana with some of the children who were enrolled in her Blaauwvlei crèche. (Courtesy of the South Africa Library, Photographic and Special Collections)
shack in Blaauwvllei, or stand in the open hawking copies. Tamana’s commitment to the larger countrywide issues was further reflected through her participation in the African National Congress (ANC), and the CPSA. Tamana served as the active and prominent secretary for the Retreat ANC. Her involvement with the CPSA first began when she aided in its campaign to resist state efforts to demolish squatters’ shacks in Blaauwvllei, joining as a member in 1942. Tamana was also a long-time member of the inter-racial Federation of South African Women (FSAW), and even served as acting secretary as well as sitting on the national executive.

In addition to her formal association with large political organizations that functioned at the national level, Tamana also became involved in various local and grassroots initiatives. For instance, she participated in the Women’s Food Committee protests against rising food prices and shortages in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As a delegate of this movement, she later participated in a delegation that met with the Minister of Finance to discuss their grievances. Along with her father, Jeffrey Ntloko, Tamana was a member of the Retreat Vigilance Association, which was active during the 1940s in championing the rights of Retreat’s squatters. Additionally, Tamana also sat on the

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174 **Guardian**, March 15/16, 1951, “They Help with Guardian Sales.” Since the paper was repeatedly closed down, it was variously reconstituted as the **Guardian, New Age, Advance,** etc. As a overtly socialist newspaper, it was primarily concerned with workers, but the bulk of its coverage focused on the plight of Africans, both as exploited laborers and as victims of apartheid.

175 Walker, **Women and Resistance**, pp.76,97.


177 Muthien, **State and Resistance**, pp.128-132. Walker, **Women and Resistance**, pp.83,139. The food committee delegation succeeded in convincing Minister Havenga to reduce a proposed increase on bread prices.
executive committee of the Cape Flats Distress Association (Cafda). Also through the auspices of Cafda, Tamana engaged in relief work, distributing blankets and second-hand clothing to squatters who suffered loss as a result of fire or flooding. Not content with organizational responsibilities and occasional relief assistance, Tamana ran a satellite store for Cafda in Blaauwvlei, selling fresh fruits and vegetables, and miscellaneous items at close to cost. Tamana earned very little money from this venture, but that was not its purpose. The shop was meant to provide a service for the inhabitants of Blaauwvlei who were otherwise at the mercy of local shop owners on the main street, who sold articles at high mark-ups.

Owing to her role as a prominent and militant political activist, as well as a community leader undermining the control of local capitalists (white and Indian shop owners), Tamana was arrested and jailed on a number of occasions. She was one of the principal activists protesting against the imposition of passes for women in Cape Town, which had long enjoyed a pass-free environment. On one occasion, she was detained for

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178 *New Age*, November 25, 1954, “Police Reign of Intimidation Against Cape Africans.”

179 The Cafda truck could not drop off her goods at her shop, since the area lacked proper hard roads. Instead, it deposited them within a half-mile of Tamana’s store, where her younger brother, Ebenezer, would load them onto the family’s donkey cart and deliver them to her shop. Ebenezer Ntloko supplied Ntloko I.

180 Passes, or reference books, were the documents that Africans were required by law to carry on their persons at all times or risk arrest. *Advance*, January 8, 1953, “Strong Protest Against New Pass Law: African Women To Discuss Action.” Speaking at Langa in 1953 against the introduction of passes in the Western Cape under the Native Laws Amendment Act, Tamana declared that “We women will never carry these passes . . . This is something that touches my heart. I appeal to you young Africans to come forward and fight. These passes make the road even narrower for us. We have seen unemployment, lack of accommodation and families broken up because of passes. We have seen it with our men. Who will look after our children when we go to gaol for a small technical offence—not having a pass?” *New Age*, November 25, 1954, “Police Reign of Intimidation Against Cape Africans.”
not being in possession of a pass permit, even though she was exempt from this requirement owing to her continuous residence in Cape Town for over 15 years. A month following her arrest, Tamana was finally acquitted.\(^1\) But the arrest did not dampen her ardor. Within a couple of weeks of her acquittal, she was leading a delegation of women, elected by the Blaauwville chapter of the ANC, to interview the Manager of Native Administration in Cape Town.

In the aftermath of the imposition of the Bantu Education Act, African children were forced to receive instruction in a curriculum that was designed for African and meant to be of an inferior quality to the education that mission schools had previously offered African students. For two years, Tamana defied the law by operating a school without government sanction, and which did not comply with the mandatory government curriculum. In November 1955, police raided their Retreat school which operated under the guise of being a cultural club. The police confiscated all the materials in the building and arrested Tamana’s father for running an illegal school in contravention of the Bantu Education Act.\(^2\) However, the police never found the pencils and chalkboards that the teacher Tamana employed and the students quickly hid at the approach of the police. Eventually, Ntloko was acquitted for lack of material evidence.\(^3\) During a subsequent

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\(^2\) *New Age*, December 2, 1956, “Blaauwville Leader Arrested After Raid on Cultural Club.” The shack in which the school was housed had been built in the late 1940s by Jeffrey Ntloko and he was arrested since he was the owner. Ntloko II.

\(^3\) Ntloko I and II.
raid in 1956, the school mysteriously burned down, presumably with assistance from the police.\textsuperscript{184}

Women from Windermere and Blauuwvlei were early targets of the NAD’s efforts to relocate Africans to the new official township built at Nyanga and to “repatriate” those women who were in Cape Town without authorization.\textsuperscript{185} It was no coincidence that the Windermere and Retreat branches of the ANC were the most militant in Cape Town, and within Retreat, Tamana stood at the forefront of this activism. Apparently the state perceived Tamana to be a sufficient threat to public security that occasionally she was shadowed by intelligence agents.\textsuperscript{186} As well, she was frequently subjected to police harassment. Tamana was later banned for five years starting in October 1955, which meant that she could not be quoted in print media or be in the company of more than one person other than a family member.\textsuperscript{187}

But a woman of Tamana’s ability and self-assurance was a rare commodity. And significantly, few enjoyed her security of tenure accruing from her long-term residence in Cape Town. It is unlikely Tamana would have been able to challenge the authorities so stridently had she not been assured of her legal right to reside in Cape Town and resist

\textsuperscript{184} Ntloko II. Ntloko also expressed the belief that the police had been tipped off to the real nature of his sister’s “Cultural Club.” Muthien, State and Resistance, p.41.

\textsuperscript{185} “Repatriation” was the euphemism employed by authorities to describe the process whereby Africans were removed from urban areas and placed in impoverished reserves designed for the exclusive residence of Africans. New Age, December 30, 1954, “‘Western Areas’ Removal Scheme For Cape.”

\textsuperscript{186} New Age, September 8, 1955, “Dora Tamana Comes Home From Europe.”

“repatriation”. Her divorced status also meant that she was able to act free of a husband’s control. Sadly, too few squatter women could claim her assertiveness or relative immunity from forced removal.
6 THE HAZARDS AND HARDSHIPS OF SQUATTING

Life in squatter camps was filled with an array of annoyances, dangers, privations, and glaring eyesores. In describing the ability of squatters to forge vibrant and cohesive communities in the previous chapter, it does well to bear in mind that the mundane existence of squatters was one mired in filth, abounding disease vectors, and generalized squalor. Enmeshed in a cycle of grinding poverty, squatters lacked a viable range of alternate living arrangements. Owing to the strictures of customary segregation and the later development of apartheid (after 1948), a limited range of alternate options offered themselves to squatters: return to the rural territories from where they came, take up residence in an official location, or live in a shack in one of Cape Town’s many squatter camps. Life in the countryside offered little in the way of opportunities for employment or to accumulate capital, and compared unfavorably with cities in terms of available attractions. Most squatters pointedly rejected location and township life, shunning the regimentation and intrusion that went hand-in-hand with being under the control of Department of Native Affairs (NAD) officials. For all its liabilities, the remaining alternative of squatting to some extent offered Africans space to live their lives in a manner consistent with their values, cultural practices, and desire for personal autonomy. Despite all the deprivation and wretchedness of squatter camps, inhabitants coped and
some even prospered. Capitalizing on the minimal opportunities that their harried existence afforded, some energetic individuals succeeded in making the most of a desperate situation. The obstacles confronting squatters were formidable, however, as conditions conspired against their health, well-being, sense of worth, and happiness.

**Up in Smoke: The Threat of Shack Fires**

Among the most daunting and lethal features of squatter life was the always imminent risk of fire. Not surprisingly, the dense concentration of tightly-packed shacks translated into a constant threat of fire for the inhabitants of squatter settlements. As a result of simple physical proximity, when one shack caught on fire, flames would quickly spread and engulf whole sections of a shack settlement, especially when a strong Southeaster blew.¹ The Cape Flats provided an ideal environment for the kindling and spread of fire. Settlements sprawling in the open plains of the Flats are windswept, buffeted by winds from both the Atlantic and the False Bay coast.²

All the ingredients for a combustible scenario were in place. Many of the materials used in the construction of shanties, such as wood, newspaper, cardboard, clothes, blankets, mattresses, and “dampcose” were highly flammable. Further exacerbating the

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¹ 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/17, 29/10/1951, City of Cape Town Council (CCC) Native Affairs Committee (NAC) Minutes, p.432a.

² Gontsana, 6. As Cape Town’s Native Commissioner (stationed at Salt River) (NCSR), S.J. Parsons, succinctly observed of these circumstances, “the cheek-by-jowl construction of whole blocks of shacks commonly results in disastrous fires.” 3/CT: 1/4/10/1/1/17, CCC NAC Minutes, p.204, March 10, 1951, “Control of Illegal Squatting.”
danger, the area is visited by long, hot, dry summers. The periodic shack fire was an unremarkable occurrence given the concatenation of so many factors conducive to fire. More significantly than just their frequency, when fires broke out, they spread rapidly and effected considerable damage. Shack fires resulting in the destruction of 80 or 100 shacks were not uncommon. When shack fires raged out of control, often the most effective method of dousing flames was to shower them with buckets of sand—a commodity always at hand on the Cape Flats. With water being hard to come by, often sand was the only readily available fire retardant.

The occasional shack fire was almost a foregone conclusion owing to the unsafe methods that squatters resorted to in order to produce illumination and heat. Squatters frequently used candles to light their shacks. Paraffin glass lamps were the standard source of light, but when paraffin ran out, or the need for additional light arose, candles were used. Candles, however, were a constant threat. If drowsiness overcame a squatter who dropped off to sleep before extinguishing the candle, disaster might result for the entire community. When cooking with open braziers in close proximity to their shacks, extreme caution also had to be exercised. A few moments’ absence from the shack, to run an

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4 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/6, CCC NAC Minutes, p.341, August 18, 1950, “Memorandum of Discussion between Members of the Cape Town Housing Commission and the National Housing Commission. Mr. N, 9.

5 Siyo II, 4.

6 Gontsana, 5; Mrs. F, 2; Mzwakali, 5.

7 Gontsana, 5.
errand like collecting water or stopping at a local shop, and an errant spark would be sufficient to ignite a shack, and within minutes, an entire community could be reduced to ashes.\(^8\)

Once a shack caught alight, neighbors would assist by removing belongings from the burning shack where possible.\(^9\) One woman remembered how when a shack close to hers caught on fire, neighbors immediately responded by attaching hoses to a water tap in the vicinity and spraying the burning shacks. Meanwhile, others attempted to inhibit the fire’s spread by throwing sand on the flames.\(^10\) In such cases, squatters were not merely animated by a sense of neighborliness; the fate of their worldly possession hinged very directly on their collective ability to contain shack fires. Faced with the approach of a spreading fire, neighbors would take the precaution of removing belongings from their shacks. This preventative measure involved yet another risk of a somewhat different kind. Unless belongings were closely watched or temporarily stored in the shack of a trusted neighbor, they were liable to theft.\(^11\) The dangers of fire were so real and present, that, as another informant explained, “[i]t’s not nice to have furniture in a shack because anytime the shack can burn down even if it’s not your carelessness. So, it’s not clever to buy furniture for a shack. Second-hand is better.”\(^12\)

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\(^8\) Siyo I, 9.

\(^9\) Koto, 2; Ngquitse, 2.

\(^10\) Gontsana, 6.

\(^11\) Cape Times, May 30, 1949, “Big Pondokkie Blaze at Windermere: Frenzied Natives Dance as Homes Burn.” Maria Baba Lucwaba lost a mattress in this fashion. Lucwaba, 4; Mr. N.

\(^12\) Mrs. F, 2.
Even from the comparatively small pool of informants who were interviewed, it was obvious that many of them had suffered losses from shack fires. One day, while she was in church, Harriet Makele’s shack was damaged by fire. Grace Siyo’s shack also caught fire, but fortunately it was located relatively close to a shop with a water tap and with the assistance of neighbors, she was able to bring the fire under control. The shack that Wilson Kolo inhabited along with his father was destroyed by fire. In the wake of this misfortune, they were given aid by neighbors, mainly in providing the men with food. Similarly, when Francis Mabija’s shack burned down, she benefited from assistance both from her employer and her relatives who were living nearby. In this instance, Mabija and her family received mattresses, beds, blankets, and clothes.

The constant and imminent danger posed by shack fires increased the insecurity of life in squatter camps. Much more was at stake than just the few material possessions that squatters could accumulate. In Margaret Mzwakali’s case, the consequences almost proved dire. As she related: “even mine [her shack] caught fire. That nearly cost me my child. I was outside busy with my laundry while a stove was on. On remembering the pot I went inside only to find that my shack was on fire. I only managed to remove the child while screaming for help. Fortunately, the neighbors came to my rescue.”

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13 Makele, 2.
14 Siyo I, 9.
15 Kolo, 3.
16 Mabija, 3-4.
17 Mzwakali, 3.
own carelessness was the cause of her misfortune, in most cases, squatters fell victim to someone else’s negligence or general ill-luck. This fact added to the precariousness of squatter life and also gave it a cruel arbitrariness. Mrs. F’s experience bore this out:

Mrs. F: . . . it wasn’t good to use those candles because careless[ness] might happen next door or a child while you’re at work. By the time you come back from work all the shacks are burned down and you have no place to sleep. That’s what happened in November 1954 [to] me and my sister. My sister was working in town and I was working at Rylands. When we came [home] there was nobody and we don’t know how the fire started. It started in the neighborhood. Everything was burned down. Remember, at that time, there was no Red Cross to supply us with food. We had to struggle on our own.

James Meier: What did you do then?
Mrs. F: Uhuh! My dear, if you had no relatives at that time . . . you go to your relatives or your employer. They would see how they can help you.18

It is difficult to document the frequency of shack fires, since they occurred in communities which were located with a view to avoiding both official and public scrutiny. But by all accounts they were commonplace. In the first six months of 1949 alone, Windermere was beset by three major fires. During the second of these fires, on March 19, 600 squatters lost their homes. The third such fire, on May 29, destroyed about 100 shacks and rendered approximately a 1,000 people homeless.19 The latter fire began at 6:40 in the evening, reportedly as the result of someone’s negligence in using a paraffin stove. Firemen who arrived on the scene could only attempt to limit the fire’s growth by

18 Mrs. F, 3.

19 In touring the site of the fire on Council land in the Windermere area the next day with the NC and representatives of the Friends of Windermere, the S.A. Rogers, the Manager of Native Administration (MNA) suggested “that the number of Natives rendered homeless by the fire is a good deal short of the 1,000 reported in the press.” He also pointed out that the Africans displaced as a result of the fire would first be screened to determine their legal right to reside in Cape Town before they were allowed to rebuild their shacks. Any squatters found lacking residency rights would be repatriated to their rural homes. Cape Argus, May 29, 1949, Fire at Windermere.”
breaking down shacks on the fringe of the fire and covering them with a layer of sand to thwart the spread of flames. However, there was no water available with which to extinguish the fire. Eventually, within a few hours, it burned itself out.

The response of squatters in the fire’s aftermath represented a testament to both the insecurity of life in shanty towns and the self-reliant energy of squatters. According to a Cape Times reporter: “The fire burnt itself out by 9 p.m. The embers were hardly cold before the homeless people were salvaging iron and other ‘building’ materials. By 11 p.m. they were building new shacks on the ashes of the old.”

Perhaps the most remarkable fact in this case was that the Fire Department was able to access the fire. Of Cape Town’s many squatter camps, Windermere was the most visible and the closest to the city. While it claimed a skeletal network of roads of varying surfaces, this was less true of the many, more remote squatter settlements in the Cape Town area, which the Fire Department would be unable to penetrate in the event of a conflagration.

The absence or scarcity of water pipes rendered the efforts of firemen doubly ineffectual. In response to a complaint from the local activists of the Communist Party of South Africa concerning the general absence of water mains or fire hydrants in Windermere, Cape Town’s Town Clerk (TC) explained that Windermere was “insufficiently developed to warrant the expenditure of laying water mains for fire-fighting purposes.” With Windermere’s population totaling between 25,000 and 50,000, this

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Figure 13 In the aftermath of a fire, Windermere squatters salvage what useful building materials remain among the debris. Cape Times, March 18, 1957. (Courtesy of the South African Library, Photographic and Special Collections)
seemed an improbable explanation. More to the point, the City of Cape Town Council (CCC) was unwilling to improve the area’s living conditions and thereby offer an incentive for additional squatters to swell the existing shanty town population. In fact, the CCC attempted to scale back the camp’s squatter population and was eager to demolish the thousands of shacks sited in Windermere. S.A. Rogers, the Manager of Native Administration (MNA) announced that before the squatters affected by the rash of fires in 1949 would be allowed to rebuild their shacks, their status would be reviewed and all those found to be living in Cape Town without authorization would be repatriated.22

It was common practice for NAD inspectors to attempt to prevent squatters from erecting new shacks on the same plot after their shacks had burned down. But their efforts were frustrated sometimes by their inability to patrol all the remote areas in which squatter camps were located on a regular basis.23 Since NAD inspectors patrolled the Cape Flats only on weekdays, squatters would struggle to rebuild the fire-damaged shack before Monday, in which event, the municipality would let the new structure stand and not take steps to evict the occupants. Capitalizing on this limited window of opportunity, shack

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22 Cape Argus, May 29, 1949, “Fire at Windermere.”

23 Mrs. F’s efforts to rebuild her shack after it had been ravaged by fire were facilitated by its isolated location, as the following exchange reveals:

JM: Did you build the shack again in the same place?
Mrs. F: Definitely, because it wasn’t easy to move to another place.
JM: Didn’t the police come around and knock down the new shack?
Mrs. F: No, if you put it in the right place where it had been they wouldn’t bother you.
Mrs. F, 3.
dwellers who lost shacks to fire on the weekend would begin the reconstruction of their shacks while the corrugated iron was still hot.\textsuperscript{24}

For all the danger that fires represented, they could be seized upon as an opportunity by some squatters. When fire destroyed shacks, especially on private property where no records of shacks or their occupants were kept, some enterprising Africans would “come from far and wide” to secure a plot of land and erect a shack. Since it was common practice among inspectors of the city’s Native Administrative Branch to allow Africans to rebuild their shacks in the aftermath of a fire, these people would claim that their shacks had been lost in the fire.\textsuperscript{25} As the efforts in the latter half of the 1950s to relocate squatters gained momentum, a few squatters even engaged in “deliberate incendiarism.” Volunteers from the Students’ Health and Welfare Centres Organisation (Shawco) felt the need to screen applicants for assistance carefully since some opportunists falsely claimed that their shacks and belongings had been consumed by fire in the hope of receiving donated blankets, clothing, food, building supplies, and assistance in making the move to Nyanga location, which was imminent in any event. In fact, the city was providing virtually no free building supplies, but this belief persisted and was probably responsible for inducing some shack dwellers to commit arson. The prospect of having the

\textsuperscript{24} Cape Times, October 26, 1959, “Africans Hurry to Rebuild Burnt Shack.”

\textsuperscript{25} Administrasie Wes-Kaapland (AWC) 59; 3/19, 3/CT; 4/2/1/3//2551; B31/53, March 10, 1953, Memo from D.B. Geddie, the Chief Inspector, Native Administration Branch, to the City Engineer (CE). Cape Argus, March 10, 1953, “Natives Supply the Answer: House-Proud Families Build Homes.”
city move their belongings to the new location and of evading their rent in arrears also contributed to this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{Flooding and its "Rheumaticky, Influenzal and Chilblainy" Results}

Since the Cape Flats is situated on an unusually high water table and the sand is unable to absorb significant amounts of moisture, the region was subject to frequent, and sometimes heavy flooding, especially in the wake of large volumes of precipitation, which tends to be a regular occurrence during the winter months when rains are heavy.\textsuperscript{27} Half-hearted attempts by the city to ameliorate the situation through a canalization project of city rivers only proved partially successful.\textsuperscript{28} Inadequate storm water drainage exacerbated the scale of flooding and led to the pollution of wells as stercus was washed into these bodies of water.\textsuperscript{29} The resultant health effects exercised a devastating impact on squatting communities, with intestinal-digestive disorders commonplace. Diseases such as diphtheria, diarrhoea, typhoid, cerebrospinal fever, and whooping cough were diagnosed

\textsuperscript{26} Since 1943, Shawco had operated as a philanthropic organization offering medical care to impoverished people living on the Cape Flats. It was jointly run by faculty and student volunteers from the Medical School of the University of Cape Town. See Elizabeth van Heyningen, \textit{The History of Shawco, 1943-1975} (Cape Town, 1975). \textit{Cape Argus}, November 3, 1959, "Aid Given at Windermere" (letter to the editor from Mr. A.B. Mathews, Warden, Shawco). \textit{Cape Argus}, October 27, 1959, "Police Told of Windermere Fears: Natives Said to be Burning Own Shacks."

\textsuperscript{27} 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/24, CCC NAC Minutes, p.571, April 30, 1959, memorandum from Rogers, the MNA, to the TC, "Emergency Camp, Nyanga West: Revision of Estimates and Staff Requirements." Numerous informants confirmed that at different times their shacks were flooded during the winter months, June through to September. Koto, 2; Mzwakali, 2; Ngquitse, 2. Taylor, "The Cape Flats Distress Association," p.6.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Cape Times}, July 12, 1947, "Floods on Cape Flats: Residents Blame Authorities."

\textsuperscript{29} Taylor, "The Cape Flats Distress Association," p.10.
at extremely high levels among squatters. Children were most vulnerable to this pathological environment. The shockingly poor health conditions in which squatters lived were highlighted repeatedly in the reports of the Medical Officer of Health (MOH), and the Social Survey of Cape Town, undertaken by Edward Batson of the University of Cape Town.30

Pointing to the failure of the city to provide adequate infrastructural support to this disadvantaged area of Cape Town, which served as home to a large percentage of the city’s poor, an editorial in the Cape Times condemned local authorities for allowing “the winter rains to lie about as rheumaticky, mosquito-encouraging, influenzal and chilblainy accompaniment to life from June to September.”31 During the winter months, vleis would form, sometimes to a depth of a several feet, while during the summer the sand would be so thick in most areas so as to render vehicular access difficult to impossible in Cape Flats communities like Windermere and Retreat.32

Flooding introduced other problems. The makeshift roads of squatters became impassable in the aftermath of floods, rendering sections of squatter camps inaccessible to motorized vehicles and in some cases, even to donkey and horse-drawn carts. This affected the delivery of services and spelled greater deprivation to squatters, since basic commodities like fuel, paraffin, water, food, and building materials had to be carted into

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30 The survey, for which data was collected in 1936, confined itself to only the Coloured population, excluding Africans from its purview.


camps. Flooded roads also meant that garbage and human waste removal were suspended. However, the propensity of the Cape Flats to flood was not without its advantages. It made affected camps less accessible to state supervision and police raids. As well, at a body of water that formed from storm water run-off and known as “the pool,” women would wash their clothes and children cooled off when it was hot (see Figure 14).  

The overall impact of flooding was one of abject misery. Streams would inundate shack areas and collect into stagnant pools of filthy water in pockets of depression. For weeks on end, shacks would be thoroughly waterlogged, making it impossible to keep anything dry. This involved clothes becoming damp, furniture being damaged, and food spoiled. When heavy rains fell, in addition to flooding, squatters had to contend with water entering shacks by way of leaks. Placing a bucket under the leak was one method, however imperfect, of dealing with this problem. The hodge-podge of scrap materials that went into the making of pondokkies certainly did not guarantee waterproof insulation from the elements, especially if the ground became waterlogged. The floor retained the moisture and introduced mold and an unpleasant odor. To counteract the dampness that formed on the ground, many shack dwellers laid a sheeting of dampcose on the ground.

33 Rondo, 6.

34 Mrs. E; Kolo, 3; Mabija, 3; Siyo 1. 4.

35 Mrs. S, 3; Ngquitse, 2.

36 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/25, CCC NAC Minutes, April 29, 1960, draft of a memorandum from Councillor C. Bakker, Chairman of the Housing Committee to Chairman and Members of the NAC. Vena, 2.
Figure 14 Children playing in a rain-swollen vlei of the Cape Flats. Cape Times, September 3, 1949. (Courtesy of the South African Library, Photographic and Special Collections)
To prevent moisture and mud being tracked into the shack, some squatters placed bricks outside the door as an elevated pathway.\textsuperscript{37}

The problems associated with flooding account for the seeming anomaly of shacks being clustered together while patches of open ground stood close by. Shacks tended to be situated in extreme proximity to one another, not only owing to the avarice of landlords eager to extract maximum revenue from their rented land, but also because shack dwellers sought to situate their pondokkies on pockets of higher ground (and avoid the many low-lying areas of the Cape Flats into which run-off would accumulate).\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{Dying of Thirst by the Sea: The Acute Shortage of Running Water}

It was ironic that the Cape Flats area was highly susceptible to flooding, and yet at the same time, lacked access to water. Pipe-delivered and potable water was normally in short supply in squatter camps, especially prior to the mid-1940s, when municipal authorities incorporated Windermere within the CCC’s jurisdiction, and made a general effort to provide water stands to forestall the medical menace squatting communities without running water presented to the city’s citizens. Still, relatively few water pipes were laid on in the areas typically inhabited by squatters; even in those which were surveyed and given an infrastructure of municipal services. In most instances, access to water involved considerable cost for squatters, especially relative to their meager earning power. The stand owners who rented plots, and who claimed a tap on their property,

\textsuperscript{37} Ntsababa, 2.

\textsuperscript{38} 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/17, CC NAC Minutes, p.432a, October 29, 1951.
would typically charge squatter tenants on a per gallon basis. The sale of water was illegal, except in instances where tap owners were issued special licences by the CCC or Divco. Regardless, the practice of selling water at extortionate prices was common among both private individuals and persons commissioned by the city. Officials bemoaned the difficulty of finding suitable African tenants to sell water at fair prices. Efforts to curb price gouging were frustrated owing to the problems involved in securing witnesses willing to testify against the offenders, since they feared that their access to water would be cut off.

Because of the precious nature of water, a designated person would have to be posted at the tap to collect the pennies from the women and children who came to fill their paraffin tins. At night, the tap owner would usually remove the top of the tap to prevent

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39 Makele, 3. Prices for water varied somewhat, but most informants recalled paying approximately 1 pence or penny per gallon. Ngquitse, 3; Mrs. S, 3; Siyo II, 3. According to an informant from Parkwood Estate, a drum of water that would be dropped off by a man with a horsecart would cost 2s., 6 p. Vena, 3. Some private land owners who allowed Africans to squat on their land did provide free access to water taps as part of the fees they paid for rent and services, but this certainly was not true in all cases. Kolo, 4.

40 AWC 55; 3/17, December 13, 1955, Memorandum from A. Hirst, the Acting MOH, to the CE, “Selling Taps in Windermere” and December 21, 1955, Memorandum from Rogers, the MNA, to Geddie, “In re: Water Taps, Windermere.”


42 Cape Argus, June 1, 1943 “Relief for Poor People of Windermere: Proposals for Temporary Housing.”

43 Gontsana, 4; Mr. N, 6.
theft.\textsuperscript{44} Even where water was included in rent, access to it might be limited.\textsuperscript{45} If camp residents ran out of water or failed to get to the tap early enough, they would have to purchase additional tins supplied by the vendors who hawked water from carts drawn by horses and donkeys.\textsuperscript{46} These vendors offered convenience, but at a price. Furthermore, carting water from long distances under conditions that were not altogether hygienic, compromised the purity of the water.\textsuperscript{47} One woman even hired a man with a cart to bring her about six gallons of water at a time, which would fill one large drum. In this way, she would have adequate water for the purposes of drinking, bathing, laundry, and cooking for several days without the trouble of constantly lugging home water herself.\textsuperscript{48}

Most squatters could not afford this option and were forced to purchase and tote water in a piecemeal fashion. During the summer months, squatters at the Eureka Estate camp had to line up before dawn if they were to obtain that day’s water at one of the camp’s two taps. To ease the wait, squatters might sit on their water tins; women would

\textsuperscript{44} Cape Times, September 6, 1949, “City’s Homeless Natives: III: Fewer Pondoks Are Being Built.” Ntloko I.

\textsuperscript{45} Mr. N; Ntloko I. To prevent theft of water, the tap was locked when not in use. The water cost 1 p. per gallon. A tap servicing Retreat squatters was administered by a municipal employee who only dispensed the water at certain set hours.


\textsuperscript{47} AWC 55; 3/17, September 26, 1950, Memorandum from Rogers, the MNA, to the TC, “Water Supply: Windermere.”

\textsuperscript{48} Ngquitse, 3-4.
chat and nurse infants. One informant related how sometimes there was an alternative to queuing. She would rise early, leave a stone in the line for water to indicate her place, and go off to attend to other affairs until her turn came close.

In many instances, owing to extreme poverty or the gross inconvenience of distant water taps, residents would draw water from holes dug in the ground. Because of the Cape Flats' elevated water table, it was a relatively simple matter to excavate a shallow crater in the earth and scoop out ground water. But the water extracted from shallow wells was brackish, with a reportedly vile, salty taste. More important than its less-than-pleasant taste were the dire health consequences of ingesting water from the ground. It contained tiny tadpoles and people who used it for cooking or drinking, knew to boil it first in order to kill most of the germs. This prophylactic measure, however, was not altogether adequate. Given the common practice among squatters of defecating and urinating in the bush, the ground water was frequently contaminated. Similarly, where wells existed, the water they pumped was not suitable for consumption. Sometimes rivers, streams, springs, rudimentary storm water drains, and even standing pools would

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50 Siyo 1, 7.


52 Ntloko 1.

53 Yoyo, 1.
provide a source of water, but the water could always be tainted.\textsuperscript{54} In the case of rivers, the added contamination of women performing laundry by the banks exacerbated the potential for the transmission of pathogens.\textsuperscript{55}

The lack of available, cheap water carried serious consequences for squatters in terms of health, hygiene, convenience, and even the ability to generate income. As a result of the difficulty involved in hauling water relatively long distances to their shacks, women in squatter camps were unable to capitalize on the opportunity they might otherwise have had to earn extra income as washerwomen for nearby white households. Of course, poor, makeshift washing facilities and the lack of public transportation further conspired against this possibility.\textsuperscript{56}

Squatters were further inconvenienced by the scarcity and the expense of water in that members of a shack household would often have to share the same bath water.\textsuperscript{57} However, most squatters were not in a position to enjoy a bath as such, in that they were usually forced to perform ablutions with the aid of a large bucket, or some variety of watertight receptacle.\textsuperscript{58} The normally simple act of bathing required a good deal of preparatory work. Typically, one had to fetch water in some sort of bucket or tin and

\textsuperscript{54} Mrs. E, 3; Jim, 5; Mr. M, 4; Mzwakali, 3. Cape Times, September 6, 1949, “City’s Homeless Natives: III: Fewer Pondoks Are Being Built.” Cape Argus, June 5, 1943, “Tackling Abuse at Windermere.”

\textsuperscript{55} Jim, 6.

\textsuperscript{56} Lipschitz and Greshoff, “Living Conditions in a Squatters’ Camp,” p.13.

\textsuperscript{57} Ngquitse, 4.

\textsuperscript{58} Kolo, 5.
carry it back to one’s shack, which in many cases was far removed from an available water tap. Unless one was prepared to bathe in cold water, a fire would have to be kindled and the water brought to a boil. Of course, this in itself might involve foraging for fuel to burn. Then a tub which was usually both washtub and laundry tub would have to be dragged from its normal storage place (often on a peg against the wall), while pots of boiling water would be emptied into it until enough filled the tub to make a bath possible.59

Since they suffered such inconvenience in lacking adequate access to water, squatters were active in protesting against this deprivation. Squatter associations were sometimes successful in goading municipal authorities to improve basic facilities. As a result of pressure applied on the CCC by the Retreat Vigilance Association and a deputation of Retreat women, a water pipe was eventually laid.60 However, only this one tap provided for the entire Retreat area, forcing squatters to trek long distances. Carrying paraffin tins full of water through sandy tracks was not a welcome task. By 1947, however, owing to ongoing protestations of the Retreat Vigilance Association in the form of letters directed to Council members and deputations to the Housing and Health Committees, three taps had been installed in Blaauwville and additional taps were under consideration by Council.61

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59 Gontsana, 4; Moses, 4; Mzwakali, 4; Ntsababa, 4.

60 Ntloko I; Molteno Papers, BC 579 A7.1951. The Retreat Vigilance Association was comprised of influential African residents of Retreat. Donald Molteno, the Cape Western Native Representative, accompanied the women’s deputation.

Systems of Sanitation

The shortage of water, and specifically the lack of a viable system of water pipes meant that squatters were condemned to extremely low, and even dangerous levels of sanitation. As is true of many informal settlements throughout the world, sanitation presents one of the most formidable challenges to a squatter community.\(^6^2\) In Cape Town, the most common method for the removal of human waste was the “bucket system.” This involved the use of slop buckets, which were installed in latrines close to shacks. However, this system was only an option where gravel or hardened roads existed. Where roads allowed, buckets were usually removed once a week, although frequency varied and sometimes buckets were only serviced fortnightly.\(^6^3\) Invariably, the men who performed this distasteful task were either Coloured or the amaBhaca, the latter from a branch of the amaXhosa originating in the Mount Frere region of the Transkei.\(^6^4\)

Where squatter camps came under CCC jurisdiction, normally this entailed refuse and bucket removal. But Council authorities were not actuated by philanthropic concerns. They were concerned that the failure to provide these services would present an even greater health menace to the city at large. Responding to the barrage of paranoid


\(^6^3\) Gontsana, 3; Moses, 3; Vena, 3; Yoyo, 13; Rondo, 6.

\(^6^4\) To judge from the testimony of several Xhosa-speaking informants, the amaBhaca were regarded with a certain measure of contempt, in part for their involvement in this employment. Jim, 5; Mnyathehi II, 6; Ngquitse, 3; Ntsababa, 3. Mark Mathabane also relates how the residents of a squatter camp in Alexandra (a black location 10 miles north of Johannesburg) despised and ridiculed the men who performed “night-soil” removal. In that instance, the job was performed by non-Union Africans. For a colorful account of how Mathabane paid a high price for his disrespect, see *Kaffir Boy: The True Story of a Black Youth’s Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa* (New York, 1986), pp.83-85.
predictions of an armageddon of infectious diseases, the CCC finally incorporated Windermere within its jurisdiction in May 1943. To improve hygienic conditions in Windermere, the CCC installed a system of stand pipes and provided stercus pail removal service twice a week. Pails were also provided to squatters on Council lands in the camps of Parkwood Estate, Blaauwvlei, and Retreat in subsequent years. One problem that arose from this newly-introduced free sanitation service was that some squatters stole the pails placed in the outhouses to use them in the brewing and storage of *mgombothi*.65

The bucket system left much to be desired. Service could be irregular and conditions in outhouses were typically atrocious. As a Native Inspector offered: "the conditions in this area are disgusting--urine flows from the buckets into the streets and around the shacks."66 The MOH echoed this observation in noting of Windermere that "[t]here is also a good deal of fouling of the ground from promiscuous habits."67 In Windermere, some African tenants had occasion to complain that Coloured municipal workers deliberately tipped full buckets in the makeshift latrines to render them unusable and make their job easier. Additionally, squatters themselves, whether with deliberate malicious intent or while in an inebriated state, sometimes pushed over latrines and


66 AWC 55; 3/17, October 16, 1952, Memorandum from Geddie to Rogers, "In re Latrines--Windermere."

67 Native Affair Department (NTS) 4503; 581/313, Volume I, September 6, 1941, p.3 of a 6-page report from the MOH, Shadick Higgins, to the Chairman and Members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.
destroyed them in the process. Conditions were so odious that many squatters preferred to avail themselves of nearby bushes rather than venture into unhygienic outhouses.

Where squatter communities were remote and roads and other evidence of a municipal presence rare, or where only tiny, isolated agglomerations of shacks existed, pit latrines had to suffice. Many squatters were forced to dig their own pits, usually to a depth of approximately six feet. To minimize odor, prevent the spread of germs, and disinfect the latrines, squatters would treat them with lime, ash, or some commercially produced antiseptic. As well, special precautions had to be taken for the safety of children. They were accompanied by adults to ensure that they did not fall into the pit. The toilet seat, which was normally constructed of wooden planks, also had to be adjusted for children. As an additional safeguard, outdoor toilets were sometimes locked to make sure that children did not wander in and drown or asphyxiate in the pit.

In especially isolated, less densely populated areas, even pit latrines were rare. A more rudimentary system of sanitation was used. People would simply defecate in the bush.

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68 AWC 55; 3/17, October 9, 1952, Memorandum from the Acting TC (Jan Luyt) to the CE, “Sanitary conveniences at Windermere.” To prevent a recurrence of this, Luyt recommended joining the latrines together in a block (so that the added weight would render the latrines more stable) and relocating them at a distance from shacks.

69 Mrs. E, 3; Makele, 4; Mr. N, 6.

70 Moses, 3; Siyo I, 10.

71 Koto, 3; Moses, 3; Siyo, 10; Lipschitz and Greshoff, “Living Conditions in a Squatters’ Camp,” p.23.

72 Foloti, 9.

73 Siyo II, 7.
and sand close to where their shacks were situated. This solution was also not unheard of even where some form of sanitation removal was in place. Children, in particular, would opt for the convenience of the bush. As well, when municipal workers failed to make regularly scheduled pickups or where sanitation service did not exist, stercus buckets would be emptied in the bush and sand by residents.

Mired in Sand

Perhaps the most notable topographical feature of the Cape Flats is its sandy surface. Across the plain of the Flats the soil surface varies, but, generally, most areas consist of a thin matting of grasses and vegetation atop the otherwise sandy soil. In other locales, sand is more noticeable, and in some regions, dunes of sand undulate into the horizon. In preparation of the site that was to house Nyanga township, the City Engineer (CE) had to level a series of sand hills that reached 50 feet height. In remembering the camp in which she grew up, the author Sindiwe Magona recalled how Blauuwvlei “sprawled proudly in a splendid ocean of tin shacks . . . bordered far, far into the horizon by gentle white sandy hills, the barren dunes dotted with shrub. . . .” In fact, an aerial

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74 Mr. M, 4; Mehlwena, 6; Mzwakali, 3.


76 Mnyatheli I, 3.

77 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/19 CCC NAC Minutes, pp.343-346, December 2, 1953, Report from the CE, S.S. Morris to the NAC, “Re: Proposed acquisition and development of land south of the Nyanga Native Township for the provision of a site-and-service scheme and housing of Natives.”

survey conducted by the CE’s office in 1946 ascertained that 75 percent of Retreat was uncultivated ground and sand dunes (see Figure 15).79

Along with Windermere, Retreat (of which Blaauwvlei was part) formed Cape Town’s two largest squatter communities, and both were very sandy. As one official noted, Africans “are obliged to live for the most part under the most distressing primitive and insanitary conditions (with their families) amongst the sandy wastes and dunes dotted about between Wynberg and Muizenberg [two suburbs standing at opposite ends of the southern portion of the Cape Flats].”80 Sand permeated daily life in any number of ways. It rendered even basic mobility difficult for some squatters. In Retreat, except for one street (i.e., 8th Avenue), roads were neither paved nor hardened. Residents attempted to create tracks in the sand by laying down sawdust--which was obtained free of charge from the nearby General Box Company factory--but this proved a poor substitute for hardened roads.81 Walking, too, was often made arduous by the sandy terrain, particularly when pedestrians were loaded down with paraffin tins of water or when hauling home groceries. The only foot paths available were those forged by repeated pedestrian traffic.82 For residents of the camp, emptying the contents of one’s shoes before entering one’s shack was a routine ritual, as was removing grains of sand from one’s eyes when the winds

79 3/CT: 1/4/10/1/1/14, CCC NAC Minutes, pp.117-121, October 8, 1948, “Reports from the Town Clerk: #6 Retreat Native Township.”

80 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/9, CCC NAC Minutes, August 6, 1941, Letter from W.G.A. Mears, Chairman, Langa Native Advisory Board to the TC.


82 Molteno Papers, BC 579 A52.283, n/d, Draft Memo from Cafda.
Figure 15 The Retreat area’s sandy conditions translated into both physical isolation as well as opportunities for concealment. NTS 4503; 582/313, 1940/1941, H.S. Walker, “Some Homes in the Cape Peninsula,” p.4. (Courtesy of the Central State Archives, Pretoria)
blew. Magona related how when sitting down to eat at her family’s home in Blaauwvlei, sheets of newspaper would have to be held over dishes to prevent sand sprinkling down from the ceilingless roof of her family’s shack, and seasoning their food with unwelcome relish.

Amid the many daily annoyances and disabilities that a sandy environment like that of Windermere or Retreat presented, some individuals still managed to seize upon the opportunities that the situation presented. The Pohplonker Brothers, Indian shopkeepers and landlords, owned a four wheel-drive jeep and offered clients the convenience of groceries delivered to their doors in the Retreat area. This ensured that their business was a very prosperous one. More typically, entrepreneurial vendors offered their wares to shack dwellers from carts drawn by horse or donkey. Drinking water sold in one-gallon paraffin tins, coal, firewood, and building materials were the most common offerings and seemed to provide such merchants with a relatively good income (see Figure 16).

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83 Ntloko I; Kamana.
84 Magona, To My Children’s Children, pp.22-23.
85 Ntloko I. I. Although not a squatter himself, Ebrahim Pohplonker lived among squatters and capitalized on the many opportunities their proximity presented. Pohplonker housed African numerous squatters on his land and was unusually recalcitrant in acceding to the demolition notices that were served on him. Depending on one’s perspective of landlords who farmed squatters like sheep, Pohplonker was a ruthless petty bourgeois opportunist, exploiting his downtrodden African tenants, or a courageous, principled land owner, who defied a repressive state apparatus in championing the rights of African squatters. 3/CT: 1/1/4/10/1/11 CCC NAC Minutes, p.788, July 10, 1945, “Housing Natives in unauthorised shacks.” AWC 59; 3/519, September 18, 1947, Memorandum from the Deputy TC to the CE, “Housing in Unauthorized Shacks.”
86 Mnyatheli II. 5-6; Ntloko I.
Figure 16 A water vendor on horse cart of the Cape Flats. Owing to the lack of hardened roads and the frequently damp conditions of squatter camps, motorized vehicles were less practical than horse-drawn carts. *Cape Times*, September 3, 1949. (Courtesy of the South African Library, Photographic and Special Collections)
Considering the sandy terrain which many squatters inhabited, without hardened paths, the delivery of groceries by truck, panel van, bicycle, or horse cart was a welcome service.  

Sand also offered some advantages to squatters. Principally, it meant that squatter camps were less accessible to municipal and police officials. In many instances, the poor conditions of roads, or their complete absence, prevented police vehicles from entering certain camps. This made surveillance more difficult and raids much less effective. As the tempo of state repression was stepped up during the mid- to late 1950s, this proved a major advantage to those pockets of shacks that sand made isolated and less penetrable. As well, sand dunes, and the Port Jackson trees that dotted the sandy landscape, hid camps from view and kept them from the public mind. Many Capetonians were largely unaware of the scale and sometimes even the existence of squatter camps, even though settlements were frequently situated within 100 to 200 yards of major arteries.

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87 Mabija, 8; Moses, 6; Mzwakali, 5; Ngquitse, 5. Mr. N had the good fortune of having workers at the local shop frequent the shebeen that he owned, so he could have groceries and other items delivered to his home by van until late in the evening. Mr. N, 9.

88 Cape Argus, February 26, 1940, “Areas Cape Town Should Absorb: Windermere’s Hovels Condemned.”

89 In a less obvious way, sand also proved beneficial from an ecological standpoint by serving as a buffer against further soil erosion, brought on by high winds and the lack of vegetation on the Cape Flats. In the Langa location, Native Administration staff replaced sand that had blown away in order to prevent the affected areas from greater vulnerability to flooding during the wet season. Rogers, the MNA, even wanted to plant grass to counter the damage done by winds. 3/CT; 1/4/6/6/4/1/2, CCC NAC Minutes, July 10, 1939, Report by Rogers, “Sand Reclamation.” When the CCC removed shacks erected by Africans in Windermere opposite the Wingfield Aerodrome, it stripped the area of its vegetation, “leaving a sea of fine white sand.” Since the shacks’ occupants had been wartime employees of the Department of Defense, the latter was billed for the constant removal of sand from the affected area. 3/CT: 4/2/1/3/2/551; B43/53, December 17, 1953, Minutes of the Housing Committee.
A Plague of Pests

One unambiguous liability of sand was that rats flourished on the Cape Flats. The woefully inadequate building materials of which shacks were constructed facilitated the growth of the problem. With floors of earth and wooden slats, less than watertight roofs, defective doors, and imperfect walls, rats and verminous insects found access easy. Rats and mice are favored hosts for the fleas which transmit disease, including those that can carry the rickettsial organism that causes the typhus infection. To counter the threat posed by rats and fire, when the Housing Committee and the CE were exploring alternative temporary structures to replace shacks, they gave serious consideration to pre-manufactured asbestos huts. Although squatters used pesticides, in particular, one patented product called Rattex to counter the nuisance that rats represented, rats remained a persistent problem. In addition to rat traps, sometimes, cats proved an even more effective deterrent. Ratex offered some relief but presented a danger to children as well as to cats and dogs. It had to be placed in inaccessible corners since it was so toxic that it

90 3/CT: 1/4/9/3/1/2 CCC Housing Committee Minutes, Several dozen one or two-page reports from F.O. Fehrsen, the MOH, October 22, 25,26,29, 30 and November 1, 1945.


92 3/CT: 1/4/10/1/1/16, CCC NAC Minutes, August 18, 1950, p.317, “Memorandum of Discussion between Members of the Cape Town Housing Commission and the National Housing Commission”.

93 Mrs. E, 2; Mzwakali, 3; Mr. N, 5; Rondo, 4.

94 Ndiziba, Side 1; Siyo II, 11.
could prove highly injurious, even fatal to cats. As well, city health authorities employed a brigade of workers to spray for rats. During the war, this effort was undermined by a shortage of staff owing to the number of men needed abroad for active military service. More importantly, phosphorous poison, found to be the most effective substance in countering the spread of black and brown rats, was unavailable due to the requirements of the war effort.

Insects also thrived in the sandy, swampy areas where squatters lived, and especially prospered in an environment where waste removal was sporadic or entirely non-existent. Some squatters applied commercial insecticides to control the spread of insects like ants, flies, and mosquitoes, but their cost made them a luxury, and one that exercised only a palliative effect. Moreover, as one informant pointed out, “Xhosa people were used to them [insects].” Of more concern were vermin like the powder post and Italian beetles. The powder post beetle ate away at the untreated wood that squatters either scavenged or purchased, and over time, they came to present a structural risk to the free-standing shack. The Italian beetle also infested wood and initially the government

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95 Moses, 3; Mr. N; Ntloko 1. According to Gontsana, if a dog or cat “gets in touch with that Rattex, it’s a danger and you’re in for it if it dies.” Gontsana, 9.

96 Cape Argus, September, 25, 1943, “The War Against Rats in Cape Town.” Officials substituted barium carbonate for phosphorous poison, and also employed cyanide gas squads in the docks area where infestation was most acute. From September 1942 to September 1943, despite the unavailability of the proper chemical substance and a shortage of staff, health authorities were able to kill 12,711 rats in Cape Town.

97 Mabija, 4; Moses, 3; Mzwakali, 3.

98 Mr. N, 5.

99 Cape Argus, March 10, 1945, “M.P.s See Windermere Hovels.”
entomologist recommended destroying and removing the shacks that were constructed of wood and affected by the beetle. But once it was discovered that new, infected cutoffs were still being introduced from a few different sources in the Cape Town area, the initiative was aborted, since it would have been a futile gesture in a losing battle. During the late 1940s, the beetle’s spread resulted in a dearth of split-poles and squatters experienced difficulty in locating alternate sources to this staple product in the construction of shacks.

The Inadequacy of Municipal Services

Official intervention in shack settlements generally only occurred when there existed the threat that the deplorable, pathological conditions contained within might spill over into the city and suburban areas of Cape Town. As was clear from the unsatisfactory public systems of sanitation, storm water drainage, reticulated water, electricity, health, and emergency fire services, the municipal presence in squatter areas was minimal in most cases. Other basic services like paved roads, telephone access, and street lights were extremely rare. Since squatters did not directly generate income via property taxes or

100 AWC 55; 3/17, Extract from CCC NAC Minutes, July 3, 1952, “Infestation by Italian Beetle” and AWC 55; 3/17, July 4, 1952, Memorandum from Rogers to the Director, Entomological and Plant Quarantine Station, Rosebank, “Infestation by Italian Beetle.”


102 Mr. N, 6. In Kensington during the 1940s, only 11th Avenue was a properly paved road. Mnyatheli II, 3. Similarly, street lights were extremely rare. Noziptho Yoyo was the only informant whose area was illuminated by streetlights, and she lived in a region of Parow that encompasses a mixture of shacks and properly constructed homes. Mr. M, 5; Mr. N, 8; Yoyo, 9.
municipal fees, it was not surprising that the kinds of services that they received were so rudimentary. Of course, the fact that squatters were illegally residing on public and private lands did not endear them to municipal authorities. In many cases, city officials were simply unaware of small pockets of shack settlements. In explaining why the CCC did not service his specific corner of the Retreat squatter camp, one informant observed, "the government didn’t know us."\(^3\)

Virtually no shacks on the Cape Flats were hooked up to electrical wires. In the absence of electricity, most squatters used either paraffin glass lamps or candles for illumination as alluded to above.\(^4\) Typically, a household would use both methods of artificial illumination, depending on the different circumstances. Paraffin lamps would throw off more light and were generally the preferred method of producing light. But candles were particularly useful in certain situations. For instance, if one’s supply of paraffin was low or exhausted, candles served as a backup. As well, for situations which only required a momentary light or where a softer glow was desirable, candles might be used. For couples wishing to enjoy physical intimacy in a crowded multi-room shack lacking doors or proper room partitions, candles were a more appropriate source of lighting given their softer light and the discretion they afforded. Or for the purposes of breast-feeding in the middle of the night, candle light proved more convenient than taking

\(^3\) Mr. N, 6.

\(^4\) Gontsana, 5; Koto, 4; Mr. N, 8; Ngquitse, 4; Ntsababa, 2; Yoyo, 13.
the trouble to light a paraffin lamp. Light from a candle when rising in the night to urinate (in the outhouse or bush outside) would be the more logical alternative.

A family might also use both sources of illumination when using more than one room at night. Many households could only afford one paraffin lamp, which cost approximately 8s or 9s, so candles would be used to supplement this form of lighting. In addition to the initial outlay, the costs of operating a lamp were augmented through the consumption of paraffin fuel, and the occasional expenses incurred in replacing wicks or glass shades. By contrast, using only candles was not cheap, and might amount to as much 2s to 3s per week. Owing to the drafts running through many shacks constructed of makeshift materials on the windswept Cape Flats, candles burned quicker than normal. Moreover, the use of candles involved the risk of fire. Some squatters avoided their use for that reason. To reduce the risk involved, candles might be placed on a more solid surface like the seat of a chair or upon a table, but extreme caution was required under all circumstances when using them in a shack. When outside of shacks, people relied on flashlights to find their way at night in the absence of streetlights.

105 Gontsana, 5.
107 Ngquitse, 5.
108 Ntloko 1.
109 Rondo, 8.
Assessing the Damage: The Health of Squatters

All told, owing to a range of factors, which included the inundation of insects and rats carrying pathogens, inadequate sanitation, lack of running water, exposure to moisture and mold, prolonged inhalation of carbon monoxide, and the constant threat of immolation from shack fires, the health of squatters was severely compromised. The lack of proper sanitation represented probably the most lethal threat to squatters’ health. Whether human waste was dumped in shallow holes or merely on the surface of the ground, the resultant health risk was far-reaching and serious. Gastrointestinal disorders were rampant among squatters and the microbes spread through ground water or via airborne insects were undoubtedly significant factors in accounting for the high incidence of disease and death caused by enteric fever and other intestinal disorders. This trend was most notable in the exceptionally high infant mortality rates (IMR), since the immune systems of children were not equal to the challenge of the pathogens found in such high concentrations in squatter camps without proper sanitation. Figures from the City Health Department for 1949, revealed that in the Windermere shack settlement, the IMR. was a staggering 672 per 1,000. Even at the better regulated Langa location, the IMR. was extremely high at 254.2 per 1,000.110

In the latter half of the 1950s when large-scale forced removals were undertaken, and tens of thousands of African squatters were uprooted from Elsies Rivers and

Kraaifontein and moved to the Nyanga emergency squatter camp, the resultant health consequences were appalling. In the unhealthy conditions of the new transit camp, otherwise known as "the Nyanga graveyard," the death-rate among children was reported to be absurdly high, even by the already abysmal standards then prevalent in Cape Town's informal settlements. Most children became ill within two weeks of their move to Nyanga, presumably because of the swarm of flies that were attracted by the camp's pit latrines, which were located close to the shacks. Exacerbating the deplorable physical conditions of the camp were the deleterious psychological tensions experienced by removees who were displaced in the strange environs of the Nyanga emergency camp and constantly exposed to police raids. As well, Nyanga's removed location, far from the city resulted in dramatically increased transportation costs.111 These had to be absorbed by workers resident in Nyanga, which meant that there was less household money available for food. Invariably, the nutrition of children suffered, making them more susceptible to disease. Apparently, barely a day passed without a funeral procession in the streets of Nyanga.112

The nutrition of adult squatters was also negatively impacted in a variety of ways. Often in an effort to save an adequate sum of money for lobola in the shortest possible

111 Of the wages earned by African workers, 10-15 percent of them were consumed by transportation costs— as opposed to 5 percent in the case of white workers. 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/21, p.410 Minutes of a meeting between the Labour Consultative Committee (Cape) and the Cape Chamber of Industries, February 14, 1956.

period, many young Africans men deprived themselves of a nutritionally balanced diet.\(^{113}\) For the migrants who lived in overcrowded shacks, barracks, or dilapidated tenements, their potential exposure to disease was much heightened as a result of their surroundings. A number of these men would have undergone a tour of duty on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand, where tuberculosis was rife. The MOH's imperfect and understated figures indicate that for every 1,000 Africans, 9.8 had contracted tuberculosis.\(^{114}\) As well, some migrants came to Cape Town when suffering from poor health, in search of the superior and more readily available health care that Cape Town offered. In badly ventilated, overcrowded living conditions, Africans subsisting on vitamin and protein deficient diets, were exposed to other migrants suffering from various maladies.

Western bio-medicine was generally available to Africans, although its cost and relative inaccessibility rendered it a less than viable alternative for many squatters. Africans would often initially seek medical relief through traditional channels, namely through the services of a *sangoma* or through faith healing at one of the Zionist or Apostolic churches. Where these remedial measures failed to arrest the progress of a disease or illness, squatters would avail themselves of Western medicine. In most instances, squatters would attend medical clinics which various philanthropic association operated in or near to several squatter camps.\(^{115}\) After Windermere was incorporated into the CCC in 1943, the

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\(^{113}\) As one migrant explained: "I am not a bee, I cannot eat honey while still making it. I have nothing to do here in town except to make money, and then to go home..." Monica and Archie Mafeje, *Langa: A Study of Social Groups in an African Township*, (Cape Town, 1963), p.39.

\(^{114}\) *New Age*, September 25, 1958, "Migratory Labour, Poverty Cause T.B. Increase Among Africans."

\(^{115}\) Mzwakali, 4; Mr. N, 7; Ntloko I; Vena, 5.
city increased the frequency with which clinics for venereal disease, tuberculosis, and antenatal care were offered.\textsuperscript{116} Residents of Nyanga’s emergency squatter camp had a free dispensary at their disposal and on Wednesday mornings could attend the Nyanga Clinic and Welfare Centre, which was sponsored by the Institute of Race Relations and Divco.\textsuperscript{117}

Most notably, medical students from the University of Cape Town, under the supervision of doctors, organized the Students’ Health and Welfare Centres Organization (Shawco), which ran medical clinics in Kensington, Retreat, and Elsies River.\textsuperscript{118} These clinics were either free or only charged patients a nominal fee.\textsuperscript{119}

In the case of extreme emergencies, doctors would sometimes visit patients in squatter settlements.\textsuperscript{120} Where they made house calls to shacks, it was common practice to charge rates according to a sliding scale dependent on the financial ability of patients or the patient’s family to pay.\textsuperscript{121} Even so, patients paid an added fee for house calls.\textsuperscript{122} To make a house call in certain camps, where the absence of roads and the abundance of sand

\textsuperscript{116} Cape Times, February 20, 1948, “Problems of Windermere.”


\textsuperscript{118} Cape Argus, March 4, 1952, “Students Learn Much from Clinics.” The Kensington clinic had treated approximately 7,500 patients since opening its doors in 1943, while the Retreat clinic had seen some 3,000 people since it started operations in 1947. The Elsies River clinic had opened only recently.

\textsuperscript{119} Lipschitz and Greshoff, “Living Conditions in a Squatters’ Camp,” p.29.

\textsuperscript{120} Mzwakali, 4; Koto, 3-4.

\textsuperscript{121} Ntloko I; Vena, 5.

\textsuperscript{122} Gontsana, 10; Mabija, 6.
made motorized transportation difficult, the visiting doctor or district nurse might have to make the visit by horse cart.\textsuperscript{123} Midwives were relatively rare, but one did operate in Cook's Bush and a couple more offered their services in the Retreat area.\textsuperscript{124} In Windermere, the Cape Hospital Board established midwifery service as well as a school meals program.\textsuperscript{125} In exceptional cases, where the situation warranted it, and lacking access to their own vehicles, squatters would have to hire taxis or call an ambulance to pick them up and deliver them to the hospital.\textsuperscript{126}

Squatters who were confronted with a variety of health risks owing to their unhealthy environment, and to malnutrition and stress, were the least able members of society to secure adequate medical care. Over time, doctors became progressively less willing to venture into squatter camps. In addition to the absence of a proper network of roads, it was not a simple matter locating a specific shack when thousands looked much the same and were not generally traceable by either road or number. Moreover, into the 1950s, doctors increasingly were at risk of being robbed by gangs of *tsotsis* (juvenile delinquents).\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{123} Ntloko I.

\textsuperscript{124} Kamana: Ntloko I; Siyo II, 7.

\textsuperscript{125} Cape Times, February 20, 1948, “Problems of Windermere.”

\textsuperscript{126} Ngquitse, 4; Siyo I, 11.

\textsuperscript{127} Vena, 5.
In light of all the factors conspiring against hygiene and good health in squatter camps, there seems little doubt their squalid environment represented a formidable challenge to the health of inhabitants. As one outside researcher observed:

Situated around a stagnant vlei, without sanitation or drainage, where pigs, dogs, and children moved amongst the refuse of old food, excreta, and rusty iron, where every shack was draughty and damp, and food and clothing inadequate, sickness and accidents were inevitable. Children cut their feet on the rusty tins and nails in the sand, and rapid infection resulted; young children playing in the small space near fire buckets frequently received severe burns which became septic.\(^{128}\)

Despite the best efforts of doctors, nurses, *sangomas*, and the volunteers who staffed the health clinics, the health of squatters was jeopardized, and a high incidence of disease and mortality was the very direct result of squatters’ poverty and marginalization.

**Unnatural Hazards: Crime and Gangs**

In addition to the hazards and inconveniences that naturally occurred on the Cape Flats, squatter life was made more unpleasant and dangerous through forms of antisocial behavior among residents. Chief among these were the gangs of youths who terrorized other shack residents. Squatter camps were ungovernable in more than just once sense. Most obviously, the state was incapable of imposing control over them. Precisely because they lacked a recognized system of justice and law enforcement, squatter camps operated on an informal structure of law and order.

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\(^{128}\) Lipschitz and Greshoff, “Living Conditions in a Squatters’ Camp,” p.29.
Curiously, the vast majority of informants recollected little in the way of crime or organized gangs during the 1940s and 1950s. In this instance, there is reason to believe that their recollections might be flawed and that their memories were being filtered through the prism of nostalgia. In contrast to the endemic gangsterism and lawlessness that prevails on the Cape Flats today, the 1939-1960 period may well appear as an uncomplicated, largely crime-free age. The contrast in the scale of violence and crime may have colored informants' perceptions of the past, as they looked back longingly to an idyllic time when life was simpler, social harmony among black people the rule, prices affordable, and violent crime an extraordinary and noteworthy event. Added to this proclivity is the general tendency among elderly persons to recall their youth in overly positive terms, casting to the background less palatable elements of strife and discord in order not to undermine their remembered image of their best years. The collecting of oral histories is not an unproblematic process, and in certain respects, extreme caution must be exercised. With regard to crime, this may be one such area. In his dissertation exploring how former residents of Windermere came to the terms with the psychological trauma of being forcibly removed from the area in the wake of the Group Areas Act, Sean Field frequently encountered instances where people romanticized past events which were humiliating and painful, and cast their past in the pall of nostalgia as an involuntary mechanism to deal with the pain.

129 Foloti, 4; Jim, 7; Lucwaba, 7; Mnyatheli I, 7; Moses, 5; Mzwakali, 5; Nonzaba, II, 7; Oniwe, 7; Siyo I, 15; Tshapile, 8.

Some informants did indeed depict life in squatter camps as violent. Apparently
gangs, comprised of both Coloured and African youths, would target women and on
Fridays, when most workers were paid, anyone who looked like they might have a pay
packet in their possession. Partly for safety, partly from custom, women did not usually
move around at night outside their homes, unless they were coming home late from
work. Most people knew better than to stay out past 10:00 p.m. to avoid being
victimized. Gangs and violence were perceived as sufficient risks that they occasioned
the creation of vigilante organizations which patrolled camps and aided victims of crime.
In the words of one former squatter who served in a vigilante association, even if he and
his compatriots could not prevent crimes like robberies, they “used to try and find those
tsotsis and beat them. In a way we were assisting the government.”

Violent acts of crime among squatters did not garner headlines or much attention
in the popular media of Cape Town. This might have been attributable to an unwillingness
among victims to duly report crimes to the police, whom they understandably perceived as

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131 Vena, 6. Some informants more readily associated crime with Coloured youths than Africans. Ngquitse, 5; Rondo, 9. Other informants recalled the threat of crime and violence as real dangers. Francis Mabija was afraid to stay in her shack in Kensington alone, since she recalled that innocent people were killed in the area. Mabija, 8. Wilson Kolo also remembered crime being a problem in Kensington, and corroborated that people were killed by gangsters. Kolo, 6. According to William Koto, crime was prevalent, gangs posed a threat to the safety of squatters, and women were at risk when out abroad at night. However, in the latter’s case, it may be significant that Mr. Koto’s perceptions formed from his experience in a “controlled” emergency squatter camp called Kraaifontein. These emergency camps lacked an organic sense of community and brought together people of many different backgrounds in circumstances of incredible uncertainty and stress. Koto, 4,8.

132 Mabija, 7; Makele, 4.

133 Mr. N, 8.

134 Mehlwena, 10.
unsympathetic. In light of their inherently illegal nature, squatters were ill-prepared to approach the police for assistance. According to one shopkeeper, interviewed in 1945, the police would not respond to calls for assistance after 8:00 p.m. because it was deemed too dangerous for them. When asked by a reporter whether there had been any murders in the vicinity of his Windermere store, he responded: “No, not lately,” and went on to explain the last murder had occurred “[n]early two months ago.”

Although violent crime was not an everyday threat, petty theft was rife. However safe squatter settlements were, people still locked their doors at night. Simple precautions were also advisable during daylight hours. As one woman commented: “if you haven’t locked your room, even if you’re gone for a while in the neighborhood, you’ll lose something in your house through theft.” Tsotsis would break into shacks during the day when residents were at work. Vegetables might be pilfered from a garden plot, clothes snatched from the clothesline while drying, or furniture discreetly lifted from a shack. But gangs of tsotsis did not normally disrupt the lives of most shack inhabitants. Elmina Gontsana argued that crime and gangs were not unknown in Elsies River, where she lived in the late 1950s, but they were not particularly prevalent or menacing. However, as she

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135 *Cape Argus*, February 13, 1945, “Dirt and Squalor at Windermere”. On the occasion of this foray into Windermere, it was explained to the staff reporter writing a story on Windermere, that the reason one of the accommodations he observed was unoccupied was owing to the fact that the man who lived there was assaulted in Windermere the previous evening, receiving eight stab wounds, including in the head and face.

136 Ntloko I; Tshapile, 13.

137 Oniwe, 4-5.

138 Koto, 8.

139 Mr. N.
pointed out, most of her neighbors “had dogs with them because we were afraid of skollies (toughs, gangsters) to come around.” Gontsana herself had a large Alsatian chained outside her shack. In addition, her yard was surrounded with a steel fence, something which was extremely rare among squatters, who generally could ill afford such an innovation.\textsuperscript{140}

Crime was sometimes exported from squatter camps too. Domestic workers might steal from their madams to supplement their meager wages. Apparently, this practice was easier where the employer was a bachelor.\textsuperscript{141} Based on their findings among workers from the Langa location, Wilson and Mafeje found that pilfering was common among many types of African workers. It was regarded as an obvious means of adding to their extremely low wages to render them more equitable.\textsuperscript{142} In this way, it was deemed morally justifiable and unlikely to excite unfavorable comment among other Africans.

The Insecurity of Squatter Life

The general insecurity that Africans experienced both as a result of crime, as well as from a whole range of natural factors, was the source of high levels of stress. The prevalence of shebeens and what must have been high rates of alcoholism gave some indication of the tensions inherent in such an uncertain life. Related to insecurity was the

\textsuperscript{140} Gontsana, 8-9. Gontsana’s husband was able to acquire the fencing at the lumber and building supplies company where he worked as foreman.

\textsuperscript{141} Siyo II, 9.

itinerant nature of African existence in Cape Town. African squatters were mobile, often moving between city and countryside, and from one squatter camp to another. Many workers preferred to live close to their place of employment, hence moves might be frequent since it was rare for employees to stay with any one employer for any extended period of time. 

It is easy to imagine that squatters might experience unease when they lay down at night, uncertain whether an overturned candle or a primus stove left unattended might spark a shack fire nearby that would engulf their own shack. Never knowing if one’s home would be raided at any time for passes or beer, obviously could give rise to a deep-seated sense of anxiety. Reflecting on the contrast between the political dispensation of 1998, four years since the dismantling of apartheid, Michael Mehlwena pointed to a significant advantage to the present situation: “I am sleeping in peace without fearing that the police will come during the night and harass us.” As well, the menacing prospect of being forcibly removed and having one’s home bulldozed to the ground, hung over the heads of many squatters throughout the 1950s.

The hazards and liabilities of squatter camps made life precarious, unpleasant, stressful, and uncertain. While it is one matter to chronicle the obvious deficiencies and challenges that characterized the day-to-day grind in informal settlements, it is a rather

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144 Mehlwena, 6.

145 Mehlwena, 13.

146 Yoyo, 14.
difficult task to elucidate the untold hidden costs afflicting squatters. The toll exacted by all the hardships, humiliations, and uncertainties on the mental and emotional welfare of squatters cannot be easily assessed, but obviously, the repercussions were deleterious and far-reaching. As the tempo of state harassment, degradation, and terror escalated during the course of the late 1940s, and into the 1950s, the psychological trauma suffered by squatters under the new political dispensation of the National Party government was undoubtedly considerably increased.
Intensified efforts to remove African women, children, and unemployed men from the Cape Town region resulted in enormous personal hardship among squatters. The National Party (NP), however, was determined to demonstrate the viability of separate development in the Western Cape and was relentless in prosecuting this cruel and ill-fated vision. Squatters resisted the heightened offensive on their precarious tenure within Cape Town, but the inexorable progress of the bulldozer and the implementation of massive programs of relocation continued unabated. Black opposition politicians were active in squatter camps, but although a spirit of resistance was pervasive in many communities, it rarely translated into mass mobilization. Squatters were preoccupied with their own survival and generally evinced reluctance to risking police harassment, imprisonment, or expulsion from Cape Town for their involvement in organized resistance. In the latter half of the 1950s, squatters were systematically herded into the new townships of Nyanga and Guguletu, and although some scattered clusters of squatters continued to evade forced removal even after 1960, by mid-decade squatter camps had disappeared from the Cape Town landscape.
Squatters and the Introduction of Apartheid

With the coming to power of the NP in 1948, a marked escalation of state efforts to circumscribe the movements and space of Africans in the urban locale followed. While many indications of a gradual hardening of the government position toward urban Africans predated the ascension of the Afrikaner nationalist alliance, fundamental differences in philosophy characterized the approach of the NP, and its predecessor, the United Party (UP).

Although the new government adopted a more repressive stance with respect to African urbanization and squatting throughout South Africa, Cape Town in particular was singled out as a social laboratory of sorts for the new political dispensation. Under the guidance of apartheid's architects, H.F. Verwoerd and W.W.M. Eiselen, the Minister and Secretary respectively of the Native Affairs Department (NAD), Cape Town became a test case for influx control and racial segregation.1 Eiselen and NP ideologues argued that the Western Cape was “the natural Lebensraum” of the Coloured population.2 In light of the fact that within the Cape Town area, Coloureds represented a population group of approximately equal size in relation to whites, and additionally, could boast a centuries-long presence in the region, the claim that the Western Cape was the homeland for the Coloured population contained some merit. Eiselen was not actuated by a desire to promote the interests of the Coloured community as such. The NP, however, regarded the


2 Address by W.W.M. Eiselen to January 1955 conference of the South African Bureau for Racial Affairs, 3/CT; 1/4/10/1/1/20, City of Cape Town Council (CCC) Native Affairs Committee (NAC) Minutes, p.21.
latter as an effective buffer between the white and African populations, which, theoretically, could fill the position occupied by African workers in the economy of the Western Cape as the African presence was phased out.

If influx control was to prove workable, the Western Cape offered the greatest likelihood of success since it boasted large white and Coloured populations, the latter of which was presumably well-suited to performing the menial tasks normally assumed by African workers. Africans would only to be allowed to enter the Western Cape insofar as their labor was temporarily required. Its great distance from large concentrations of Africans (in the Transkei and Ciskei) further recommended Cape Town as a showcase for apartheid planning. Most importantly, in relation to the numbers of whites and Coloured people, relatively few Africans inhabited the Western Cape.³

The NP was determined to eliminate all “redundant” Africans from the Western Cape, which in effect meant expelling the vast majority of African women. The massive increase in Cape Town’s African population was long a source of concern for officials, and in the mid-1950s, when apartheid authorities took measures to roll back this immigration, they struck at the cornerstone of African social organization—African women. The African family came under direct assault by the state through the imposition of passes for African women and vigorous efforts aimed at “endorsing” them “back” to the reserves while pursuing a concomitant policy of retaining a workforce of single migrant male

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³ For example, in 1951, the census recorded for the greater Cape Town area: 247,442 whites, 280,413 Coloureds and Asians, and 49,793 Africans (i.e., 8.6 percent of the total population). Even allowing for underestimation, Africans would not have accounted for more than 15 percent of the demographic composition of the Cape Town area. Monica Wilson and Archie Mafeje, *Langa: A Study of Social Groups in an African Township* (London, 1963), p.2.
workers. As Doug Hindson has argued, the initiative to eliminate economically unnecessary ("undesirable") Africans was only one part of a double strategy that also required the stabilization of a class of urbanized, semi-skilled Africans in order to meet the needs of industry as its complement. The grand apartheid scheme envisaged the eventual removal of the remaining African population of the Cape Town area over time, except for a limited migratory population composed primary of "bachelors."

African men resented and rejected their classification as bachelors. Many lived with wives in town, others had wives in their home districts. However, if their marriages were solemnized by Xhosa ceremonies without benefit of civil sanction, government officials did not recognize them as legally binding. Their designation as bachelors was doubly inapplicable for some African men who not only claimed wives in the reserves, but who had also taken additional wives in Cape Town.

The trend in NAD policy of the 1950s, which aimed at deporting women and weakening the integrity of African families in the Cape Peninsula, was at odds with the recommendations of successive government reports which were issued over the course of previous decades by several influential government commissions. But their findings were

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6 The 1932 Native Economic Commission, the Smit Report, the Landsdowne Commission report, and the Native Laws Commission (Fagan) report, had all to varying degrees argued that Africans had become permanent fixtures within South African cities and that successful economic development required their continued labor power. With these considerations in mind, they had insisted that it was futile to continue with the fiction that Africans were merely temporary sojourners in the urban environment.
dismissed by NP ideologues as the product of an overly liberal approach adopted by the UP, which held office prior to the coming of power of the Nationalists in 1948. The latter pointed to the enormous increase in unregulated African settlements, such as Cape Town’s infamous squatter camps as proof of this supposedly lax, wrongheaded strategy. Their contrasting views on African urbanization were most notably highlighted in their respective blueprints of African urban policy during the late 1940s. The UP’s Fagan Report recognized African urbanization as inevitable, and possibly as a necessary development for the continued health of the national economy. However, the NP-sponsored report of P.O. Sauer urged reversing African urbanization, with the ultimate goal of eliminating all Africans from “white areas.” Sauer argued for the repatriation of Africans to their reserves, from where they could commute either to the cities or to the industrial concerns that were encouraged to relocate close to the reserves.7

Adding their voice to the chorus of those opposed to the central government’s shift toward more repressive measures to undermine the basis of the African family, many officials among Cape Town’s various local authorities criticized the NP’s social engineering efforts. The city’s Manager of Native Administration (MNA), S.A. Rogers, for one, observed that “a labour force, be it of whatsoever racial group, living under satisfactory family conditions is definitely preferable to large concentrations of men living

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under unnatural bachelor conditions." Arguing in a similar vein, Mr. A.H. Honikman, Member of Parliament of the Cape, argued:

If we are going to continue to regard the home as the pivot of our so-called Western civilization, and if we are prepared to acknowledge as a fact the existence of large, established, urbanized Africans communities, then in the name of all that is moral and strategic, we must adapt our economic structure and do our planning in a manner that will ensure the provision of decent and properly situated homes, schools, and other amenities for the urban African so that he may lead a normal, healthy and fruitful life without suspicion, without hatred, without fear of the White race.⁹

Many other Cape Town officials did not relish a potential future scenario in which Cape Town would harbor a large population of single African men. Consistent with common racist attitudes entertained by white Capetonians, both private citizens and public officials frequently expressed concerns about the potential dangers to which white women would be exposed when left to the tender mercies of African men. Expressing related anxieties, some public voices spoke out against the seemingly inhumane policies of the NAD and the NP. In an editorial, the Cape Argus argued for allowing wives to remain in Cape Town with their husbands since the alternative was to have African men "consort" with Coloured women and produce "a larger and darker Coloured population." The editorial contended that "[t]he only enlightened policy is to enable the Native worker in


⁹ Quoted in his article in the Cape Argus, April 13, 1954, “Housing of Natives: Points Minister Has Not Clarified.”
industry to live the life of a family man in a home of his own.\textsuperscript{10} Churches too, were vocal in their opposition to the explicit government program of splintering urban African families. The Archbishop of Cape Town, Owen McCann, condemned the migratory labor system and warned that the prolonged and forcible separation of wife and husband would lead to immorality and a loss of discipline. He argued that it was incumbent on the city’s white community to allow Africans the opportunity to lead normal family lives if their labor was needed.\textsuperscript{11}

These varied voices decrying the disintegration of the African family drew on a deeply embedded discourse of paternalism, as well as a dread of miscegenation, a general fear of perceived African violence and immorality, and, of course, a large measure of self-interest. But despite the different concerns animating these diverse perspectives, they were all predicated on a mutual appreciation of the potentially destructive impact of severing family ties among Africans in Cape Town.

In addition to a battery of legislation aimed at segmenting and segregating population groups according to race, acts passed by the NP-led central legislature directed especial focus against squatter settlements.\textsuperscript{12} The 1951 Prevention of Squatting Act served as the lynchpin of the assault on informal settlements. The act gave teeth to state efforts to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] The expression, “larger and darker Coloured population” was quoted from Major van der Byl (the former Minister of Native Affairs). \textit{Cape Argus}, June 2, 1954, “It Is a Family Affair.”


\item[12] Among the key pieces of legislation signaling the new direction in “native policy,” the following were the most notable: the Population Registration Act (1950), the Group Areas Act (1950), the Abolition of Passes and Coordination of documents Act (1952); the Separate Amenities Act (1953), and the Bantu Education Act (1953).
\end{footnotes}
not only limit, but roll-back the proliferation of squatter settlements. The act's most notable component was the provision it made for the establishment of emergency squatter camps, and the legal levers it authorized for local authorities to effect the removal of Africans who were "illegally" squatting to these emergency camps.13

African squatters did not quietly acquiesce to this unwelcome development. A heightened degree of militancy met the NP onslaught, and the nature of resistance altered. Where previously black opposition groups like the ANC, the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), and the African Peoples' Organisation (APO) advanced the interests of a relatively narrow constituency of well-educated Africans and Coloureds, they realigned their elitist orientation. In response to the dire challenge posed by the new apartheid regime, they adopted objectives and tactics more consistent with grassroots struggle. The transformation of the ANC into a genuine mass organization, dedicated to ameliorating the lives of ordinary Africans had slowly emerged in the 1940s and early 1950s, spurred on partly by Dr. Alfred Xuma, the ANC president 1939-1948, but mainly through the younger generation of activists who formed the Congress Youth League (CYL).14 Following the massive recruitment of members during the course of the Defiance Campaign of 1953, the ANC took a more active interest in the issues confronting the African urban masses, including squatters.

13 The Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, No. 52 of 1951, came into law July 6, 1951 and was subsequently amended in 1952, 1976, 1977, 1980, 1988, and 1990. According to Section 6 (1), the Minister of Justice or NAD could direct a local authority to establish an emergency camp within its jurisdiction.

The ANC's presence in Cape Town's squatter camps was sporadic, although the Langa, Elsies River and Retreat branches were considerably more active. However, most oral informants averred that they were unaware of the ANC as an active political force in squatter camps during the 1940s and 1950s. Even Africans who subsequently became supporters of the ANC in the late 1950s, believed that black resistance was non-existent in the squatter communities during the earlier part of the decade.\(^{15}\) One woman stated of her experience of living in Windermere: "There were no political organizations there, if there were, they were underground. Then we never knew of politics. We just attended schools, churches, and back to home."\(^{16}\)

Other squatters purposely shunned participation in what they considered radical political organizations.\(^{17}\) In some instances they did not join because "we were afraid of being arrested" and feared the possible social opprobrium associated with repeated incarceration (that was the likely result of participation in black opposition politics).\(^{18}\) Despite the dangers and sacrifices involvement posed, a handful of interviewees were either ANC members or supporters.\(^{19}\)

Other organizations like the National Liberation League (NLL), the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), and the APO at different times exercised influence in Cape
Town's squatter camps. In the 1940s, the NLL and the APO were especially important in spearheading protest, given the ANC's relative absence from the realm of popular politics. By the early 1950s, the CPSA (along with the ANC) became increasingly vocal in promoting the rights of squatters. Mrs. C was a member of the Communist Party while a resident of Langa during the 1940s, and recalled the party being active in both Langa and Retreat. Her husband, who was a minister, also served as the CPSA Secretary for Cape Town. They eventually became estranged and divorced since he was forced to go underground after suffering repeated arrest and being subjected to intense police harassment. Although the Retreat's CPSA branch was small, it benefited from the dynamic leadership of Dora Tamana and the support of the Native Representative, Sam Kahn.

At a more localized, less overtly political level, squatters formed organizations to protest their treatment as squatters and as Africans. Most camps formed vigilance committees, although some were clearly better organized and more assertive than others. The Retreat Vigilance Association was among the more active, drafting letters of protest and sending deputations to city officials. Viable vigilance associations also emerged in

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20 Both the NLL and the APO were comprised mainly of Coloureds, although Africans were also among its ranks. However, in Retreat, the APO was mainly comprised of Africans with some Coloured members. Ntloko 1.

21 Mrs. C, 9-10. Mrs. C's ex-husband escaped to Touwsriver (outside of Cape Town), where he passed as a Coloured.

22 Kahn was an ardent CPSA member and in his capacity as a lawyer assisted Africans charged under various charges. Ntloko 1.
Cook's Bush, Goodwood-Vasco, and Nyanga. Often, they were comprised of not only Africans, but claimed Coloured and Indian members too.

Since women were made targets of the state's pointedly gendered attack on Cape Town Africans, women were responsible for engaging in some of the most spirited resistance. The imposition of passes upon women and the weeding out of those without Section 10 rights struck directly at the family life of squatters and highlighted the precarious nature of their status in Cape Town. Adamantly opposed to being removed from their homes and torn from their families, women organized their resistance in localized protests and more generally under the aegis of the ANC. Numerous well-attended meetings, deputations to Council officials, and the establishment of a special committee to contest removals in the courts were the most visible signs of this spirit of opposition.

State Control and Its Successful Evasion

Life in an unauthorized squatting camp offered distinct advantages to inhabiting a regulated township. Landlords did not intrude into the homes of squatters nor seek to restrict their personal liberties, as was true of township dwellers. As long as squatters paid

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rent, they were largely left to their own devices. Africans in Cape Town proved very jealous of their freedom. As one newspaper reporter observed,

Few Native squatters . . . want to be brought under control. This was proved in the past winter’s floods when the Divisional Council had difficulty in persuading families living knee-deep in water to leave their sodden shacks for better housing in Nyanga. Many Natives prefer to pay exorbitant rents for filthy shacks and live in the remote areas where they are free of supervision rather than occupy a decent house, often at less rent, in a proper township.

However, as the government stepped up attempts to rid Cape Town of squatter communities, it became increasingly difficult for Africans to escape the widening net of state repression. Finally in 1953, after more than a decade of deliberations and conferences, the NAD, in concert with the Cape Town City Council (CCC), began comprehensive measures to “cleanse” Cape Town of its “black spots” and squatter camps.

With the enactment of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, the final piece was put in place for arming local authorities with the necessary powers to remove African squatters and either relocate them in locations and townships, or “endorse” them out of the urban area to the reserves. As the socialist newspaper, New Age, observed: “All Africans at present living in squatters’ camps because they have nowhere else to live will be hounded from their shacks and driven to live in identical or worse shacks elsewhere-- with this

26 Mrs. C, 6.

27 Cape Times, November 3, 1954, “17,000 Squatters To Be Moved: Urgent Plan to Clear 38 Black Spots.”

28 Endorsing Africans out of an urban center was a euphemism for removal and deportation (insofar as the latter term can apply to citizens of the country from which they are being deported. The “reserves,” at different times in South Africa’s history, referred to as the “homelands” or later, “bantustans” were the (mainly) rural areas originally established by the Natives Lands Act of 1913 (and enlarged upon by the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936) for the exclusive use of Africans.
difference, that they will be surrounded by a barbed wire fence and that they will be
'sorted' into ethnic groups."

The state systematically proceeded to uproot and relocate the African inhabitants of one squatter camp after the other. Squatters were issued notices requiring them to demolish their shacks and move to temporary, emergency (i.e., controlled) squatter camps, where they were screened by NAD officials. Depending on the latter’s determination, they would be accommodated in new official townships arising on the city’s outskirts, instructed to take up residence in the Langa location (in the case of single men), or forced to leave the Cape Peninsula altogether. For squatters discovered in CCC jurisdiction, their end destination was the newly constructed township of Nyanga West (later known as Guguletu), while those inhabiting Divisional Council of the Cape Peninsula (Divco) property were deposited in the older Nyanga (East) township.

Failure to heed removal and demolition notices resulted in continued harassment and the eventual bulldozing of shacks. The squatter settlements at Kraaifontein, the Northern Suburbs, and Elsies River were among the first to be removed in 1953. Where squatters demonstrated tardiness in moving, the police and the bulldozers were called in order to force squatters to resettle in the official township. Resistance to forced removals seemed futile to squatters:

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29 *New Age*, April 28, 1955, “Govt. Plot for Tighter ‘Control’ of Africans: Vicious Camp Regulations Published in Site and Service Scheme.”

30 *Advance*, “2,500 Ordered to Demolish Their Homes.” *Advance*, October 29, 1953, “Africans Critical of Nyanga Housing Scheme.”

31 Yoyo, 5,14.
JM: Did the black property owners try to talk to a lawyer [to challenge removal notices]?
NY: How can we do that? You know with us, we just look, because they do anything to us. To be safe is to keep quiet . . . [she laughs] . . . because you want to live . . . [she laughs again].

Years of harsh state oppression had reinforced the perception among many squatters that resistance would entail a prohibitively high cost in retributory state reprisals and ultimately fail to achieve desired goals.

Depending on which camp they inhabited, squatters in other areas could elude removal and resettlement until late in the 1950s. Celiwe Makosa was living in the Windermere area as late as 1959, at which time she and her family were given pamphlets instructing all Africans to depart the area on certain specified dates for Nyanga West. As she stated, “we had no alternative, we had to leave. . . . If you are refusing they will bulldoze your house.” The Makosas were relocated to a transit camp where they were assigned a pre-constructed shack in which they lived for four years before their home was built and ready for habitation. In the end, it was not worth the wait: the shack that they were assigned was constructed of corrugated iron, possessed no ceiling, and the floor consisted of nothing more than sand.

Squatters in the CCC who were moved to Nyanga West were treated differently according to their residency status as specified by NAD officials. Squatters with Section 10 rights were assigned pre-built, temporary homes while those without such status were

32 Makosa, 8.

33 Municipal trucks also assisted the Makosa family in moving their belongings to Nyanga West. Makosa, 3-4,8-9,11-12.

34 Makosa, 4,9.
forced to fend for themselves. The latter group, if they were not adjudged to claim rights for residence in Cape Town, could be summarily deported to the reserves. Or if NAD officials found that they qualified for the right to remain in Cape Town, they generally had to construct their own shacks and outdoor toilets. Another factor in the apportioning of homes related to the applicant’s marital status. Mrs. C was separated from her husband and for that reason, ineligible for a house. The apartheid state was determined to rid Cape Town of African women insofar as possible, since their presence served to regularize residence among African urban dwellers.

**Differential Treatment - African and Coloured Squatters**

A much more egregious example of differential treatment concerned the different approaches taken by the state with respect to Africans and Coloureds. The systematic removal of squatter camps during the latter half of the 1950s further exacerbated relations between Coloured and Africans. Contrasting with the inhumane herding of African squatters into the Langa location and the townships of Nyanga and Guguletu, Coloured squatters were either permitted to remain in squatter camps or provided with permanent housing in special townships designed for their exclusive habitation. They often moved into the shacks that had been evacuated by the Africans who had been driven out en route to the emergency squatter camps. Furthermore, the principal areas in which squatter camps were sited, most notably at Windermere and Retreat, were converted into

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35 Makosa, 10-11.

36 Mrs. C, 14.
subsidized housing schemes for Coloured residents. According to the Group Areas Act, passed in 1950, Cape Town was partitioned into a patchwork of distinct ethnic communities, each specifically designated for use by a single racial group. Based on the criteria established by law as a result of the passage of the Population Registration Act, all South Africans were classified in one of four racial categories: African, Coloured, white, and Asian. While social custom had previously dictated where different groups lived in Cape Town according to color, these new laws made such informal residential segregation statutory and imposed legal sanctions on those who defied the new dispensation.

One informant pointedly blamed the implementation of apartheid for disrupting the once harmonious relations that Africans had enjoyed with Coloured neighbors:

Sarah Vena: In that time they [Coloured people] were very nice. They did mix with the black people. They weren't so bad. They used to live very nice.

James Meier (JM): What happened?

SV: ... The Coloureds didn't want to mix with the Africans whom they called “the Natives”.

JM: Why not?

SV: They had the idea that Coloureds come from Europeans and we Bantus [black Africans] ... (Vena laughs). ... They were with Apartheid.37

Lending added weight to the position of NP ideologues who maintained that Africans were an undesirable element within the Western Cape, in 1955 the government implemented the Coloured Labour Preference Policy (CLPP). Africans were prevented from entering the boundaries of the CLPP unless in possession of a firm offer of employment. Employers were encouraged to employ Coloured workers instead of their

37 Vena, 4.
African counterparts and government labor bureaux reinforced this policy.\textsuperscript{38} The CLPP was predicated on the assumption that the Western Cape was the preserve of Coloureds, and Africans were interlopers whose presence was to be suffered temporarily until they could be gradually removed from the area. The South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA), a think-tank for the Afrikaner national alliance, advocated the expedient of temporary migrant African labor until such time as mechanization and greater efficiency among white workers render that necessity obsolete.\textsuperscript{39} In enacting these measures, the government was less concerned with the well-being of the Coloured community, than it was anxious to reduce the number of Africans resident in the Western Cape.

Casting a Widening Net: Emergency Squatter Camps

As a further measure to expel a portion of the city’s African population, while imposing stringent control over those who were allowed to remain, the CCC and Divco finally acquiesced to government pressure and agreed to establish emergency squatter camps. The acceptance of the CCC to this particular solution of the squatter issue was not readily forthcoming. The CCC had already considered erecting an emergency squatter camp at Retreat in the late 1940s when faced with the seemingly intractable nature of squatting in the region. Such an approach offered distinct advantages. Emergency squatter

\textsuperscript{38} The boundary was popularly known as the Eiselein Line and encompassed the area south of the Orange River, west of the magisterial districts of Gordonia, Hope Town, De Aar, Hanover, Richmond, Murraysburg, Aberdeen, Willowmore, Uniondale, and Knysna. Muthien, \textit{State and Resistance}, p.75.

camps would allow authorities to exercise greater control over residents and through a selective screening process, those African migrants who were deemed redundant or undesirable could be excluded and repatriated. Furthermore, through the provision of essential services, authorities could alleviate the health threat emanating from inadequate water and sanitation services. Balking at the expense and the degree of coercion such a plan would entail, the CCC originally rejected it. But the NAD successfully applied a carrot-and-stick approach to Cape Town, combining a policy of financial incentives and political pressure.

In 1951, the government introduced a Native Services Levy which imposed a tax on employers of African labor who did not provide accommodation for their workers. The collected monies from this tax were channeled into the Native Services Levy account which was available only to those local authorities which complied with the government request of building emergency squatter camps. The funds could be utilized toward the costs of establishing and maintaining townships once emergency squatter camps were established and aggressive steps were undertaken to cleanse the city of “black spots” and haphazard squatter camps.

While Divco, and especially the CCC, demonstrated reluctance toward the scheme, failure to participate would have involved the loss of substantial funds, and after more than a decade of paralysis with regard to the problem of housing Africans, emergency squatter camps

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41 Department of Native Affairs (NTS) 5961; 77/313 N(2), Pt. II: 12/10/1951 and 13/11/1951.
camps promised to provide a speedy, if objectionable solution. The remedy of an
emergency squatter camp had been applied in the Johannesburg area, with the Moroka
camp. At least until the Moroka riot of 1947, which resulted in the deaths of three white
policemen, the experiment had been deemed an unqualified success.42

Moroka camp and others like it that sprang up on the Witwatersrand, in Durban,
Port Elizabeth, and New London, however, were different in their orientation. In official
nomenclature, they were not emergency squatter camps, but site-and-service camps. The
distinction rested on the assumption that site-and-service camps would evolve into full-
blown townships for African residents, and on the plots apportioned to African residents
would eventually emerge well-constructed, self-made homes. To encourage this process,
the government supplied basic services like roads, latrines, ablution blocks, concrete
floors, and community water taps. In some instances, residents were even provided with
essential building materials at cost. Whereas emergency squatter camps in Cape Town
were merely a temporary palliative until occupants returned to home districts or could be
housed in the townships that were in the process of construction at Nyanga and Guglethu,
site-and-service camps were designed to become permanent townships.

The NAD proved prescient in its predictions that relocating squatters in emergency
squatter camps would represent a significant step in permanently resolving the issue of
squatting and introducing a greater measure of control over urban Africans. Although the
process took several years to achieve owing to the necessity of building sufficient quarters

42 NTS 7688; 310/332, Rex vs Andrew Matsepi, March 24, 1948, “Summing Up and Verdict.”
Baruch Hirson, Yours for the Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa (London, 1989),
for all the city’s African inhabitants at Nyanga and Guguletu and relocating tens of thousands of unwilling squatters to these new locales, it proved an effective, if inhumane solution. Its ultimate success relied upon a arsenal of repressive measures deployed in conjunction with the provision of housing accommodation in emergency squatter camps and townships.

**Police Harassment**

Central to the campaign of repression aimed at urban Africans were enforcement efforts aimed at pass violations. Passes or reference books were a constant nuisance, and served as a degrading reminder of the racial hierarchy upon which South Africa operated. Africans who did not enjoy Section 10 rights experienced considerably more insecurity than those fortunate enough to qualify. Lacking the legal right to reside and work in Cape Town, they lived in constant fear of being discovered, or having their spouse or children taken from them and endorsed to the reserves. Police launched countless raids into shacks in search of squatters who were not in possession of the necessary pass authorization. In addition to raiding for passes, police would search for evidence of beer brewing, possession of “European” liquor, and dangerous weapons.43 Raids would often be carried out at night when squatters were asleep in their beds, or at daybreak, just before they set off to work.

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43 Ngquitse, 6; Oniwe, 5. “Dangerous weapons” usually meant the sticks that Africans had grown up using for mock fighting in the Eastern Cape. Mehlwena, 5,8.
Squatters frequently alerted one another of impending raids. As Grace Siyo explained: “When pass raids were to be pursued someone from the raiders would make us aware. Those who weren’t in possession of passes had to go and sleep somewhere else.”

Even where squatters lacked forewarning, a less formal system operated. Usually, moments in advance of the appearance of policemen, a cry of alarm would be raised to warn the neighborhood of an imminent raid. Many squatters would flee to the bush, some even hid in the outhouses to evade detection, at least until the police caught on this devise. Into the early 1950s, as the frequency of police raids in Blaauwvlei was greatly increased, residents decided that running off into the bush made it easier for the police to locate squatters who were not in possession of residency rights. They resolved to collect in Blaauwvlei’s meeting hall and present themselves for mass arrest in the event of future police raids. Irrespective of the effectiveness of fleeing to the bush and remaining there for several days, such a radical course of action exercised an extremely disruptive impact on family life and greatly added to the sense of insecurity. The kind of stress that resulted from raids is amply illustrated by the case of Elmina Gontsana (EG):

James Meier (JM): Do you remember any police raids in Elsies River?

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44 Siyo I, 12, II, 8. One black CID agent would warn of forthcoming raids in exchange for a payoff of £5.


46 Foloti, 9; Lucwaba, 5; Mehlwena, 5,8; Mzwakali, 6.

47 *Ach'ance*, December 17, 1953, “Police Terrorism in Western Cape: Thousands of Africans Rounded Up in Raids.”
EG: A lot of trouble then. I didn’t have a pass myself. On seeing a policeman it was a hell of a fright. Sometimes I had to be arrested. They took me to the municipal office and gave me a temporary pass. He [her husband] told them I’m not going anywhere, he won’t find another wife. Sometimes I was caught having a baby, maybe it’s ill.

JM: While in Elsies River, you avoided pass raids. How did you do that?
EG: I didn’t go much to the streets. They didn’t know where I was staying.
JM: How did you go to church?
EG: I didn’t even go. I had to stay indoors.  

Like Gontsana, numerous other informants related personal experience of the humiliation involved in suffering arrest for a pass offense. The pass system dealt with Africans in an inhumane and arbitrary manner. Harriet Makele was once picked up on her way to work and arrested for failing to be in possession of a pass. Instead of incarcerating her to await a court appearance, the police merely drove her around in a police van all day and then deposited Makele at her shack late that same night.

Heightening the sense of arbitrariness, many Africans regarded the whole pass system a mysterious process which lacked a rational basis. As Steven Richards explained:

“I remember when I was arrested for a pass. It was during winter. The magistrate said I was charged for not having a pass. When I demanded to know what a pass was he said I was arrested for a reference [book]. On asking him what a reference [book] was he sentenced me to three month’s imprisonment.”

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48 Gontsana, 10.

49 Elsie Jim was arrested in 1956 for forgetting to take it along and served time in prison as a result. Margaret Mzwakali was arrested several times for the same offense and she too was incarcerated. William Koto’s cousin who was staying with him in his shack, was arrested during a raid and fined. Immediately after he was discharged from police custody upon payment of the fine, he returned to the Transkei. Jim, 9; Koto, 5; Mehlwena, 8; Mzwakali, 7; Mnyatheli, 5; Tshapile, 6-7.

50 Makele, 5.

51 Richards, 4-5.
Mounted Patrolmen and the Containment of Squatting

In many instances, the squatters who lived on public or Council land successfully evaded the payment of rents altogether. In the late 1940s, recognizing that the squatting phenomenon would only be more satisfactorily resolved through a concerted and consistent effort over the course of many years, the CCC and Divco began to assess and collect rents from squatters on their lands. This offered the advantage of regularizing shack settlements as well as raising funds for basic improvements to infrastructure in squatter areas. The CCC collected rent every six months and demanded that residents pay lodger permits for extra tenants in their shacks.\(^{52}\) Such efforts encountered obvious hurdles. For instance, it was not always an easy matter to locate squatters across a far-flung region inhabiting remote areas difficult to access. Additionally, in the event that squatters on Council land evaded or refused to pay rent, it was unclear what Council authorities might do to enforce payment. More fundamentally, Council experienced some ideological discomfiture in demanding rent. To do so gave the appearance of legitimizing the rights of squatters to reside on Council property. As one official complained, in collecting rent, Council was “doing something which it prohibits private landowners from doing.”\(^{53}\) Moreover, since squatting on public lands was in flagrant violation of the law, in effect, Council was benefiting from the proceeds of an illegal activity. Council eventually


overcame its moral qualms concerning collecting rent, but met with problems from an unanticipated quarter.

As early as 1945, the CCC hired three mounted building inspectors with the Building Survey Branch of the City Engineer (CE)'s Department to monitor squatting and demolish any structures in the process of construction.\footnote{On the Witwatersrand, mounted police also patrolled squatter areas. Philip Bonner, "African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930s and 1960s: Its Social Character and Political Consequences," \textit{Journal of Southern African Studies}, 21 (1995): 124.} Immediately, their efforts bore fruit. Within the first year, the inspectors earmarked some 211 shacks for demolition, of which 156 were subsequently destroyed. They additionally prevented the erection of approximately 70 shacks by interrupting squatters in the process of putting up their shacks (see Figure 17 and Figure 18).\footnote{City of Cape Town Agenda and Minutes, September 1945 - August 1946; July 30, 1946, Ordinary Minutes, Underdeveloped Committee, p.1817. City of Cape Town, Agenda and Minutes, September 1945 - August 1946, The Underdeveloped Areas Special Committee Minutes, p.1015, March 28, 1946, and p.1817, July 30, 1946. Divco Council Minutes, July 1958 - September 1958, Book 113, p.61, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Works Committee, July 29, 1958, and p.348, September 30, 1958.} In Divco territory, over the space of several weeks in Goodwood alone, patrolmen discovered approximately 200 shacks in the process of erection and demolished them.\footnote{\textit{Cape Times}, September 7, 1949, "City’s Homeless Natives: IV: Demolition Policy No Solution."}

These promising results, however, were undermined when a well-publicized scheme among mounted inspectors to extort rent from squatters was exposed. One inspector was charged with 43 counts of accepting bribes of between £1 and £3 for
NOTICE

ERECTION OF PONDOKKIE at:

1. It is reported to me that you are in the course of erecting on the above land, which is in the Municipality, a structure commonly called a pondokkie.

2. I hereby call upon you, in terms of Regulation No. 828 (bis), promulgated under Provincial Administration Notice No. 450 of 1946 (a copy whereof is printed on the back of this notice) immediately to cease erecting such structure and to pull it down.

3. If you fail to comply with this notice by NOON on 

[Signature]

you will be guilty of an offence and I shall enter upon the land and cause the said structure to be pulled down, and recover from you the expense involved in so doing.

Personally served on: ____________________

Date: ____________________

Time: ____________________

Erector: ____________________

Owner of Ground: ____________________

W. S. LUNN,
CITY ENGINEER.

INSPECTOR.

Figure 17 A 1947 notice of demolition issued to squatters in Retreat by mounted inspectors of the Building Survey Department (of the City Engineer's Department). Donald Molteno Papers, BC 579 A52, J74. (Courtesy of the University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives Library)
REGULATION 828 (bis).

"828 (bis). The City Engineer may, if it is reported to him that any person is in the course of erecting on any land in the Municipality a structure commonly called a pondokkie, by notice in writing call upon such person immediately to cease erecting such structure and to pull it down, and if such person fails to comply with the notice of the City Engineer he shall be guilty of an offence and the City Engineer may immediately enter upon such land and cause the said structure to be pulled down, and recover from such person the expense involved in so doing."

Figure 18 The reverse side of the demolition notice. Donald Molteno Papers, BC 579 A52, J74. (Courtesy of the University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives Library)
allowing Africans to build shacks in Windermere and not reporting them for demolition. Another patrolman was also found guilty of this practice, while a third patrolman against whom no charges were brought, was transferred to another department six months later--since by himself, he was unable to give effect to the inspectorate’s mandate. The permit system was flawed to begin with, since it was common practice to pass a permit on to other squatters who would pretend that the permit had been issued for their shack. Owing to the difficulty of specifically distinguishing one shack from another, inspectors typically failed to detect this deceit. The difficulty encountered by Council officials in determining ownership for the plots of land upon which Africans squatted also complicated enforcement. Usually the plots were unfenced and lacked identification of any sort.

Squatters were extremely adept at exploiting the loopholes in the system of enforcement. It was illegal to erect a new shack, or add to an existing one. So squatters frequently began building a shack on a Friday evening, and by Monday morning it would be completed and inhabited. Council policy then prevented patrolmen from demolishing the structure. Given this situation, Council concentrated on preventing the erection of shacks, attempting to surprise squatters in the act of putting up their shacks. But even squatters who were discovered building shacks would invariably argue that they were

57 *Cape Argus*, October 24, 1949, “Accepted 43 Bribes: Inspector Allowed Pondokkies.” Carel Willem de Beer explained that when he first assumed his duties, he discovered that other inspectors collected bribes from Africans. After reporting to a senior official, who took no action, de Beer continued the practice.

58 Kevin Greenback, “‘Into the Wild Bushes of Nyanga’,” pp.30-31.

merely repairing, weatherproofing, or modifying their shacks, and not actually constructing them from the ground up. Since all the materials used in a shack’s construction were old and worn, it was difficult for mounted patrolmen to render a fair determination.\textsuperscript{60} Where enforcement action took the form of demolition, shacks would be pulled down by workmen from the Public Works Department in concert with the mounted inspectors. In an attempt to intimidate residents and discourage further shack growth, on occasion, Public Works employees would serve demolition notices on squatters, even though they had no intention of carrying through on the threat.\textsuperscript{61}

As a further deterrent to squatting, Council officials periodically prosecuted property owners under provisions of the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945. In renting land to Africans, land owners contravened Section 6 of the Act, and in theory, were liable to prosecution. In fact, it was a standing policy of Council to prosecute neither property owners nor squatters. In general, it was established Council policy to refrain from demolishing existing shacks unless alternate accommodation was available for the occupants potentially affected. Given the chronic and massive shortage of legal housing accommodation in Cape Town, neither the CCC nor Divco could provide adequate housing for Africans until the early 1960s. Recognizing the problems inherent in applying strictly the provisions of the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, the Acting Senior Public Prosecutor in the Magisterial District of Wynberg [which had jurisdiction over

\textsuperscript{60} Cape Times, February 20, 1948, “Problems of Windermere.” Cape Argus, May 7, 1948, “Pondokkies Going Up ‘Like Mushrooms’: Chaotic Crowding on Cape Flats.”

\textsuperscript{61} Molteno Papers, BC 579 A52.386, May 23, 1945.
much of the Cape Flats] warned of grave consequences should large land owners who rented to squatters be prosecuted.\textsuperscript{62}

\textbf{Squatters and Popular Protest}

During the 1940s, squatters and Africans, more generally, periodically mobilized to protest food shortages, especially with respect to bread and potatoes.\textsuperscript{63} These local protests exposed a generation of Africans to the benefits of organization, and set the stage for the better orchestrated, national opposition struggles of the 1950s.

In Cape Town, protest normally centered on the most visible and hated aspect of apartheid rule, the passes. On several occasions during the 1950s, the government attempted to extend pass books to women as well as to African men. These initiatives stimulated a concerted and vehement opposition in Cape Town, as it did in many regions of South Africa. Many informants who were not active in politics during the 1950s did aver to participation in the anti-pass campaign in Langa during March 1960, culminating in the march on Cape Town and a stay-away, led by Philip Kgosana.\textsuperscript{64} The majority of domestic workers participated in this protest, in part because the new restrictions made it more difficult for them to continue as live-in domestics.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{62} Department of Health (GES) 902; 591/13A, 17/6/1947 quoting Mr. Basson, Acting Senior Public Prosecutor. His decision as cited in the reference concerned Mr. Jack. J. Solomon, who owned 68 plots in Blaauwvlci, which represented a significant portion of the area.

\textsuperscript{63} Muthien, \textit{State and Resistance in South Africa}, pp.128-132.


\textsuperscript{65} Siyo I, 17; Tshapile, 10-11.
Despite the sense of futility engendered by constant police harassment and the specter of bulldozers, squatters did not acquiesce passively to the destruction of their homes and the disruption of their lives. As the tempo of police harassment and forced removals increased into the 1950s, spontaneous attacks on policemen and state officials became more frequent. For instance, demolition of shacks entailed certain risks for the city officials involved. In 1953, a Native Administration Inspector, Mr. P.A. Terblanche, who was accompanied by four laborers and a carpenter, encountered violence when attempting to pull down a shack that had been served previously with a demolition notice. The shack’s owner, Alfred Maliko, attacked one of the laborers with a stick and also assaulted Terblanche. Then numerous African and Coloured women surrounded the demolition party, pelting them with bottles, sticks, and stones. The six men ignominiously fled to the safety of the Retreat police station, abandoning their tools. Undeterred, Terblanche returned the following morning in the company of two additional inspectors and an escort of policemen, along with four African laborers from Langa’s workshops. This time the only barrage the demolition party met with was in the form of insults and threats—from Maliko and several fellow African squatters--so it proceeded about its business without further incident.\(^66\) As Terblanche and Rogers, the MNA, saw it, more was at stake than merely the issue of whether one shack more or less was demolished. According to Rogers:

\(^66\) The African workers were from the workshops at Langa, lent to Terblanche by Rogers, the MNA. The Supervisor of the Works and Buildings Department refused to allow his men to expose themselves to further risk of bodily harm. Administrasie Wes-Kaapland (AWC) 231; 3/65, 4/3/1953, 6/3/1953, and 13/3/1953. 3/CT: 4/2/1/3/2551; B31/53 March 4, 1953.
"if we had not gone back to finish the job, our control and authority in that area would have been seriously impaired, if not completely destroyed."\(^{67}\)

Rogers himself had been assaulted when he, along with a couple of assistants, raided a home for excessive beer. The two women responsible for the illegal cache of beer attacked Rogers and his men. The police were sent for and when two white policemen arrested and led off the women, they were further assaulted by about 60 African women who demanded the release of the two arrested women.\(^{68}\) In another related instance, when police arrested Dora Tamana for a bogus pass law violation during a raid in September 1957, they got more than bargained for. The four policeman, two of whom were white and two African, were quickly surrounded by 80 incensed women who demanded either that the police arrest all of them or that Tamana be released. The two white policemen "turned tail and disappeared over the sand dunes, leaving the African constables to face the music." The African constables, obviously in fear of their safety, prudently opted to release Tamana.\(^{69}\)

Fighting a Losing Battle

The outcome of confrontations between squatters and state officials rarely yielded such successful or satisfying results for squatters. Denied the statutory right to reside in

\(^{67}\) AWC 231; 3/65; 13/3/53, p.1.

\(^{68}\) All the 60 women were arrested and charged with riotous behavior and disturbing the peace. In the case of the two beer brewers, they were additionally charged with assault and handed stiff sentences. 3/CT; 1/4/6/6/4/1/2, CCC NAC Minutes, Nay 12, 1939, "Hostile Demonstration by Native Women Residents."

\(^{69}\) New Age, September 19, 1957, "Dora Tamana Arrested--And Released."
Cape Town, much less illegally inhabit shacks on lands not their own, placed many squatters in a highly precarious position and undermined their collective and individual ability to challenge the heightened levels of state repression that they encountered in the 1950s.

With the completion of Nyanga and Guguletu townships in the early 1960s, sufficient accommodation became available to house Cape Town’s African population for the first time. Consequently, squatters were progressively hounded out of their squatter camps and forcibly moved to the new townships. The change of scenery was an unwelcome one and was bitterly resented by squatters, but the coercive apparatus of the state proved irresistible. The vast majority of squatters in the Cape Town area had been resettled by 1960, although stragglers in isolated pockets continued to defy state efforts to relocate them in Nyanga and Guguletu for a few years more.

Through a systematic and concerted effort, local authorities following the lead of the NAD, finally achieved the long-sought control over the problem of African squatting by 1960. The price paid to bring about this development proved exorbitantly high. In addition to the huge debt that the CCC and Divco incurred through the establishment of Guguletu and Nyanga respectively, many squatters suffered profound distress and a prevailing sense of dislocation in the aftermath of their removal to the two townships. The vibrant and cohesive communities they had created in squatter camps had been bulldozed over and were not easily replicated in the regimented and sterile environment of the townships.
**The Crucible of Apartheid**

Squatter camps were the crucible on which the struggle between the state's attempt to limit African urbanization and the concomitant efforts of Africans to exercise autonomy and exist with a modicum of dignity in the city was hammered out. Clearly, squatter settlements were contested territory, even if the interstices which squatters occupied were highly undesirable spaces. At stake was the state’s ability to maintain white supremacy and, into the 1950s, carry the grand apartheid vision of separateness to fruition. For Africans, their very ability to reside in the urban realm was under assault. Access to the better employment opportunities, education, and health facilities available in cities was vital for rural Africans to sustain themselves and their families. The freedom to live unencumbered by state intervention actuated urban Africans to take up residence in squatter camps, where they succeeded in varying degrees to evade state control.

During the 1940s, the state proved incapable of effectively limiting African influx and its failure to come to terms with the housing needs of Africans significantly undercut its ability to regulate their lives. By degrees, Department of Native Affairs (NAD) officials came to the conclusion that gaining an appreciable measure of control over the entry of Africans into cities required the eradication of squatter settlements. Such camps harbored
an ungovernable population which defied state supervision. Highlighting the state’s loss of control, despite stringent efforts aimed at restricting African influx. Cape Town’s African population rose dramatically during the 1940s and 1950s, and officials could only hazard rough estimates of the number of squatters inhabiting the city’s burgeoning informal settlements. In recognition of its manifest inability to halt the proliferation of African squatter camps, the City of Cape Town Council (CCC) incorporated Windermere, the worst squatter eyesore. This solution yielded mixed results and failed to decelerate the growth of Cape Town’s many other squatter camps.

Although the dictates of logic would have recommended the provision of subsidized housing for African workers to bring their residential patterns into closer conformity with apartheid city planning, successive governments continued to regard African urbanization as an aberrant and temporary development. Owing, however, to the legal stipulation that squatters could only be removed from their hovels if there were alternative accommodation for them, authorities were hamstrung in their ability to clear squatter camps until they undertook expensive housing schemes. In the Cape Town area, the implementation of a remedy along these lines was delayed as a result of ongoing disputes between local authorities and the central government concerning the apportionment of responsibility for the costs incurred through the construction and maintenance of housing schemes for Africans.

Until the state coordinated its onslaught against the rights of Africans in a systematic manner, its repressive measures proved ineffectual for the most part. Only in the years following the coming to power of the National Party (NP) did a new
determination yield tangible results toward the goal of imposing some degree of control on
African urbanization. Previously, the efforts to regulate the movements and spaces which
squatters inhabited were fundamentally flawed, and from the late 1930s until the early
1950s, probably contributed to the spread of squatting as opposed to slowing it down.
Clumsy early state attempts at curtailing the rights of Africans to enter Cape Town and
requiring them to live in closely monitored locations and townships, inadvertently
encouraged the growth of irregular squatter communities. Squatter camps offered an
escape hatch through which Africans could elude state surveillance and police harassment.
Simply by moving beyond the jurisdiction of city officials and taking up residence in
squatter settlements on the periphery of Cape Town’s boundaries, Africans could
successfully defy government control.

In the ramshackle and deplorable conditions of squatter camps, Africans lived
among the filth and rubbish in unsightly and unhygienic circumstances. Although forced to
contend with the multitudinous liabilities attending life in irregular camps lacking basic
municipal services and isolated from networks of transportation and communication,
Africans invariably took up residence in these camps. The generalized misery of squatter
camps was the price paid by people fiercely jealous of their personal liberties and their
fundamental right to live together with spouses and families. Squatting was not just an
economic strategy for subsisting at minimal cost, it served as a means to maintain the
viability of family life and accordingly, to invest urban life with companionship, romance,
camaraderie, and worth.
Against the backdrop of hardship and squalor, African squatters managed to create settlements that functioned as socially cohesive communities. Despite the horrid and unsanitary surroundings, squatters came to regard squatter camps like Windermere, Eureka Estate, Vrygrond, and Blaauwvliei as home. Through the associational and informal bonds they formed with one another, squatters transformed a patchwork of haphazard collections of shacks into vibrant, tight-knit communities. For all the divisions engendered by personality conflicts and differences in background, squatters were linked together by a shared sense of oppression and hardship. A spirit of community informed the shape that social institutions and practices assumed and this ethos of neighborliness was amply borne out in the widespread appeal of stokvels, shebeens, burial societies, and the ways in which squatters rendered assistance to one another when someone was in especial need.

The informant who opined that the caring and neighborly fashion in which people of his “nation” engaged in a loose network of mutual assistance is what made them remarkable, may have pin-pointed an essential characteristic of what defined the squatter camps of Cape Town. Coming from various villages in the Transkeian and Ciskeian territories, and also from many other corners of South Africa and surrounding countries, squatters were thrown together in an indiscriminate manner in Cape Town’s many settlements. Out of their varied and disparate origins, squatters found common ground and created an environment remarkable for its environment of mutual tolerance and

1 Ntloko I.
harmoniousness—especially notable in the absence of a generally recognized and legitimate system of justice and law enforcement.

Attempts among squatters and national political organizations to protest their treatment were undermined by the inherently vulnerable position of African squatters in South African society. Despite the various protest movements that emerged within squatter camps, the overall level of mobilization was not particularly high. With respect to degree of militancy and broad-based support, protest and resistance in the Western Cape were significantly less pronounced than was true on the Witwatersrand. In light of the intense assault on the residency rights of Africans in the Western Cape, one might reasonably have expected a more assertive response among these harried Africans. Without Section 10 residency status, however, and potentially subject to the revocation of their rights to reside and work in the city, many squatters chose to refrain from participation in political agitation. The sobering prospects of prison and repatriation, in conjunction with the over-riding desire of most squatters to earn the greatest amount of money in the shortest time possible conspired against widespread involvement in protest among squatters. In effect, the sustained offensive against urban Africans created a heightened sense of vulnerability and insecurity, which more than any other factor accounted for the relative political quiescence among Cape Town squatters.

Squatter resistance could more productively be sought in everyday acts of resistance. In a significant way, squatting itself was a form of resistance, in that it was illegal and emerged as an explicit attempt to evade official regulation and supervision. Although the proliferation of squatter communities did not precipitate a direct
confrontation between squatters and the state, it did subvert the latter’s attempts to stem the flow of African urbanization and closely regulate the lives of Africans in Cape Town.

The progress of apartheid, however, exacted a high toll on squatter women and their families. Officials deemed the presence of African women in Cape Town as undesirable since women served to stabilize and lend permanency to the African population. Their contribution to the economy was restricted normally to the field of domestic work in private homes and local hotels, so unlike their menfolk, women were economically expendable. Proceeding on the basis of this logic, the NAD undertook a callous program of intimidation which culminated in the endorsing of thousands of African women out of Cape Town altogether. The widespread trauma this initiative inflicted on the women affected (and all women were affected, directly or indirectly), their men, and their children was incalculable.

In all its facets, squatting proved a precarious enterprise, one that made the men and women who resorted to it exceptionally vulnerable to the vagaries of state policy and dumb luck. Buffeted by the natural elements, in the form of flooding, shack fires, and sand; subjected to ongoing police harassment and the threat of violence from youth gangs; and living under the constant specter of forced removal and resettlement, squatters experienced insecurity in a highly personal and immediate way. A large measure of this pervasive sense of insecurity was purposively engineered by the NAD and local authorities, who in general sought to discourage Africans from establishing themselves permanently in the city, and specifically, to deter the growth of squatter camps.
In the Aftermath of Forced Removals

The progressive implementation of apartheid also eroded the once congenial and close relations which Coloured and African people had previously shared. It created divisions through the differential treatment accorded to both and ultimately spatially divided them to preclude the coalescing of closer relations. The tried and tested colonial policy of divide and conquer was utilized by the NP with a high degree of effectiveness, and sadly bequeathed a lasting legacy of faction and discord in the Western Cape. An indication of this enduring division is discernible in the curious result that the NP (for many, synonymous with apartheid), has succeeded in retaining power in the Western Cape despite South Africa’s transformation to democratic rule in 1994. It has done so with the support of both the white and Coloured electorate; a curious development given that Coloured people suffered grievously under the system of apartheid. Observers normally explain this seeming anomaly by suggesting that many Coloured people fear majority African rule as embodied in their minds with the African National Congress (ANC), and opt for the NP, which has traditionally extended favorable treatment to the Coloured vis-à-vis the African population.²

Owing both to the comprehensive campaign of intimidation, and more pointedly, to the forcible resettlement of squatters in the townships of Nyanga, Guguletu, and Langa, the social fabric of squatter communities was rent apart. The rigidity and sterility of official townships was inimical to the successful grafting of squatter culture. Founded in

part on illicit *mgombothi* and *shebeens*, and the tight, helter-skelter geographical layout of irregular clusters of shacks, the unique communities of Cook’s Bush, Sakkiesdorp, Raapkraal, and other camps could not be replicated nor flourish under the careful gaze of city officials in the townships. Not only were relations with Africans and Coloureds undermined by this process; relations among different ethnic Africans also suffered in the wake of the state’s policy of congregating people of one ethnicity in well-defined quarters, segregated from others.

Another lasting legacy of the state’s onslaught against African urbanization is profound African poverty. Even with the lifting of restrictions on the movements of Africans in the mid 1980s and the final collapse of the apartheid state in 1994, most Africans remain destitute and face bleak economic prospects. They also continue to constitute the overwhelming majority of the squatter population in Cape Town, and other cities. The lack of access to education and training, ongoing discrimination in the workplace, and high levels of unemployment continue to impact negatively the economic prospects of Africans, who have to fall back on squatting as a strategy for survival. Meanwhile, impoverished rural South Africans continue to stream into cities in search of employment, to reunite with family members who already migrated to the urban locale, and simply for the prospect of a better life.

Today in Cape Town, squatting has grown to such enormous proportions that few observers are willing to estimate the size of the squatter population, which probably numbers well over a million people. The conditions in the squatter camps that spring up in vacant fields in and around Cape Town’s townships are still appalling, as was true of their
prototypes 50 or 60 years earlier. The factors impelling Africans to reside in squatter camps today, however, are different. While statutory segregation served as the principal determinant in extruding Africans to the periphery of cities in squatter camps in the past, the structural disabilities that Africans inherited from apartheid currently impair their efforts to ameliorate their living circumstances. The ANC-led government lacks the financial resources to supply adequate housing for the existing urban population of squatters who subsist in shack settlements, and certainly is not in a position to meet the needs of the tens of thousands of Africans who migrate to South African cities each year.

Although the reasons accounting for the continued existence and growth of squatter settlements in the Cape Town region and in other urban centers of South Africa have changed, squatters remain among the country's most marginalized, downtrodden citizens. Municipal services provided to squatter camps remain rudimentary, and periodically, squatters are still uprooted from their homes and relocated in areas which are invariably more remote and unsatisfactory than those they previously occupied. The South African state has yet to adopt policies which reflect the recognition that urban squatters are not marginal, but integral to the life of the city.
GLOSSARY OF SOUTH AFRICAN TERMS

The following terms are commonly understood by South Africans, especially by the African population, but generally unfamiliar to American readers.

barbaton  a popular and very potent adulterated liquor made from malt, yeast, stale bread, and sugar

Boer  literally “farmer”; the term has become synonymous with Afrikaans-speaking people of mixed European ancestry (mainly Dutch, German, and French Huguenot); today used as a pejorative term for white Afrikaans-speakers who more readily identify themselves as “Afrikaners”

kaffir  extremely derogatory term used in reference to Africans

kilimiquik  powerful liquor concoction; also known as “isikilimiqiki” or “kill-me-quick”; made from porridge, bread, sugar, and syrup

manyano  association of Christian women meeting regularly over tea

dagga  marijuana

lobola  bridewealth or brideprice paid by a groom to his bride’s family, usually in the form of cattle

mqombothi  sorghum beer, brewed throughout Southern Africa

pondokkie  shack, shanty, or hovel (also sometimes referred to as “pondok”)

reserves  rural or peri-urban areas legally designated for African occupation according to the Natives Land Act of 1913; also known as homelands or bantustans during the apartheid era
| **runner** | Coloured person who purchased liquor on behalf of an African client |
| **sangoma** | African healer |
| **shebeen** | illegal drinking establishment situated in a private home of an African township or squatter camp; often the site of live entertainment, dancing, and prostitution |
| **skokian** | like “barbaton” and “kilimiquik,” an adulterated liquor with a high alcoholic content; made from yeast and warm water |
| **skollie** | hood, petty criminal |
| **stokvel** | social and economic association with members usually meeting once a week, rotating from one member’s home to the next; serves as a savings club and is also an occasion to throw a party with music and alcohol |
| **tsotsi** | gangster or thug; a young man engaging in criminal activity |
| **vlei** | small lake, pond, or natural water catchment area |
APPENDIX I
PHOTOGRAPHS OF INFORMANTS

Mrs. C

Vuyelwa Miriam Foloti

Gertrude Fukusana

Edmina Gogela

Leonard Malungelo Gogela

Elmina Gontsana
### APPENDIX II
PERSONAL DATA OF INFORMANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Place of origin</th>
<th>Year of arrival (if available), and place of residence in Cape Town</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. C</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Qumbu, Transkei</td>
<td>1943: Retreat, Langa</td>
<td>N/A¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. E</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Cofimvaba, Transkei</td>
<td>Retreat</td>
<td>Domestic worker, child care provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. F</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Transkei</td>
<td>1952: Kensington, Windermere</td>
<td>Laundress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vuyelwa Miriam Folotí</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>New Brighton (Port Elizabeth)</td>
<td>1954: Retreat, Nyanga West</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gertrude Fukusana</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Queenstown</td>
<td>1925: Ndabeni, Langa</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmina Gogela</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>neither transcribed nor translated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonard Malungelo Gogela</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Tsomo, Transkei</td>
<td>1944: Nyanga, Port Elizabeth</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmina Gontsana</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Lady Frere</td>
<td>1958: Elsies River, Nyanga</td>
<td>Dressmaker, vendor of drinks, cigarettes, sweets, and cakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsie Jim</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Aliwal North</td>
<td>1944: Retreat, Paarl, Nyanga East</td>
<td>Domestic worker, sold meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindiswa Kamana</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Retreat</td>
<td>Donkieskraal</td>
<td>N/App²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹N/A= Not Available

²N/App= Not Applicable
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Place of origin</th>
<th>Year of arrival (if available), and place of residence in Cape Town</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wilson Kolo</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>East London</td>
<td>Kensington</td>
<td>Dock worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Koto</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Molteno</td>
<td>1948: Kraaifontein</td>
<td>South African railways, refuse removal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Baba Luewaba</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Qumbu, Transkei</td>
<td>District Six, Elsies River</td>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. M</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Mqanduli, Transkei</td>
<td>1944: Kensington</td>
<td>Messenger for a bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis Mabija</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Ngamakhwe, Transkei</td>
<td>1954: Kensington, Windermere</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Brightman Madaka</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Elsies River</td>
<td>1947: Elsies River, Loyolo (Simonstown)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnie Mahlathi</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Ciskei</td>
<td>1955: Athlone, Gardens, Elsies River</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Makele</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Middledrift</td>
<td>Parkwood</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celiwe Mavis Makosa</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Middledrift</td>
<td>1952: Kensington, Nyanga West</td>
<td>N/App</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Mncedisi Mehlwena</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Cofimvaba, Transkei</td>
<td>1942: Philippi, Parow, Goodwood</td>
<td>Cement worker, driver, contractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrinet Mnyatheli</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Idutywa, Transkei</td>
<td>1953: Kensington (Mtsheko, Patosi), Nyanga West</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnes Moses</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Steynsburg</td>
<td>1946: Elsies River</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Mzwakali</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Grahamstown</td>
<td>1950: Vlakenburg, farm near Cape Town</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. N</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Mga Flats, Transkei</td>
<td>1933: Retreat, Groote Schuur, Muizenberg</td>
<td>Cleaner, stable worker, airport, department store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. N</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>District Six (Cape Town)</td>
<td>1941: Langa, Blaauwvlei, Simonstown</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Ndaleni</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Loyolo (Simonstown)</td>
<td>Guguletu</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Year of birth</td>
<td>Place of origin</td>
<td>Year of arrival (if available), and place of residence in Cape Town</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Ndongeni</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Queenstown</td>
<td>1953 Wynberg, Simonstown</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Ngquitse</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Engcobo, Transkei</td>
<td>1940 Kensington</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia Nkata</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Ndabeni (Cape Town)</td>
<td>1952: Langa, Jakhalsvlei</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Zodwa Nondzaba</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Tsomo, Transkei</td>
<td>1948: Kensington (Mtshiko), Simonstown, Guguletu</td>
<td>Hotel, nursing home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebenezer Ntloko</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Hermanus</td>
<td>1936: Retreat, Benoni, Guguletu</td>
<td>Woodworking factory, student, policeman, commercial driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia Ntloko</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>New Brighton (Port Elizabeth)</td>
<td>1947: Newlands, Rondebosh, Retreat</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon Themba Ntsababa</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Athlone (Cape Town)</td>
<td>Athlone, Nyanga West</td>
<td>N/App</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgina Daki Oniwe</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Bedford</td>
<td>Langa</td>
<td>Housewife, domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson Platjie</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Transkei</td>
<td>1952: Elsies River</td>
<td>Vendor of building material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty Qoto</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Lady Frere</td>
<td>1949: Sea Point, Vasco</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven Richards</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Lady Frere</td>
<td>1950: Grassy Park</td>
<td>Worker in a timber shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Rondo</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Tsomo, Transkei</td>
<td>1943: Simonstown, Guguletu</td>
<td>Dishwasher in hotel, quarry worker, hotel cook, window firm, butchery’s assistant, steel company, garage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. S</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Chalumba (near East London)</td>
<td>1944: Kensington</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eulalie Stott</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stott was not a squatter</td>
<td></td>
<td>City Councillor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Year of birth</td>
<td>Place of origin</td>
<td>Year of arrival (if available), and place of residence in Cape town</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Tshapile</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Engeobo, Transkei</td>
<td>1943: Kensington, Rondebosch, Sea Point</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Vena</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1931: Various employers' homes</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nozipitho Yoyo</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Bhaziya, Transkei</td>
<td>1951: Parow</td>
<td>Nurse, midwife, informal vendor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX III
CONSENT FORM

James Meier
Department of History
Turlington Hall
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida, 32611  U.S.A.

Consent Document

I, James Meier, am a History graduate student from the University of Florida in the United States working under the supervision of my academic advisor, Professor R. Hunt Davis, Jr. I study the history of squatting communities in the Cape Town region during the years 1935-1960. In order to obtain a more faithful portrait of the life and conditions of squatter camps in this time frame, I need the help of people who lived in these camps. When I finish my research, I will write a dissertation based upon my findings in Cape Town to fulfill the requirements of my doctoral program. This dissertation would be available for anyone wishing to read it and might subsequently be published as a book.

I would like you to understand that you do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. I anticipate that this interview will last approximately 20 minutes to one hour. It shall be recorded on an audio cassette recorder with your permission. The audio cassette(s) used to record the interview will be housed at the Manuscripts and Archives Department of the University of Cape Town Libraries as part of the Western Cape Oral History Project Collection. If at any time you wish to discontinue the interview please feel free to do so. I sincerely appreciate your willingness to assist me but there are no potential benefits or compensation offered for your participation.

I do not work for any government agency or political organization. My research is to be used solely to complete my doctoral degree and to depict as accurately as possible the history of squatters in Cape Town. I do not anticipate that your participation would expose you to any risks, but if you believe that it might, your name will be withheld. You have the option of being identified by some descriptor mutually agreed upon. Audio cassettes and transcriptions of your interview would also bear this descriptor to keep your
identity anonymous. If however, you are willing to be identified by your name in my work, then I need to have you sign this consent form.

If you require further information on this interviewing process, please contact the University of Florida Institutional Review Board office at PO Box 112250/SC PSY, Gainesville, Florida, U.S.A. 32611-2250

I, ____________________________, have received a copy of James Meier’s Description of Research Project. I voluntarily agree to participate and I do not have any objections to being directly quoted and identified in Mr. Meier’s writings as the source of any statements I make during this interview today.

Participant’s Signature

Dated __________________________

Investigator’s Signature

Dated __________________________
## APPENDIX IV
### CAPE TOWN’S PRINCIPAL SQUATTER CAMPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Squatter Camp</th>
<th>Approximate Population (year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaauwvlei</td>
<td>6,000 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10,000 (1949)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,249 (1950)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook’s Bush</td>
<td>3,500 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4,200 (1949)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,640 (1952)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7,100 (1953)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,668 (1956)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 (1959)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkies-Kraal</td>
<td>600 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62 (1950)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsies River</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7,085 (1956)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epping Forest</td>
<td>858 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4,051 (1943)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodwood Acres</td>
<td>481 (1941)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardevlei</td>
<td>1,500 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakdale Estate</td>
<td>334 (1943)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,300 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,336 (1951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,250 (1953)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkwood Estate</td>
<td>120 (1937)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippi</td>
<td>879 (1941)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raapkraal</td>
<td>800 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75 (1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>256 (1949)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>107 (1957)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retreat</td>
<td>10,000 (1937)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,000 (1945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,331 (1951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,000 (1952)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4,384 (1959)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

321
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Squatter Camp</th>
<th>Approximate Population (year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rylands Estate</td>
<td>1,158 (1943)^33 1,572 (1947)^34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakkiesdorp</td>
<td>288 (1949)^35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey Estate</td>
<td>160 (1949)^36     161 (1956)^37 0 (1959)^38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiervlei</td>
<td>30 (1941)^39      700 (1953)^40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner's Bush</td>
<td>1,500 (1945)^41   790 (1952)^42 1,167 (1956)^43 1,130 (1957)^44 0 (1959)^45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasco</td>
<td>2,200 (1945)^46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vrygrond</td>
<td>2,000 (1945)^47   2,500 (1949)^48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome Estate</td>
<td>480 (1949)^49     553 (1957)^50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windermere</td>
<td>2,146 (1941)^51   19,000 (1943)^52 15,000-20,000 (1945)^53 35,000-40,000 (1949)^54 7,094 (1951)^55 15,000 (1953)^56 5,127 (1959)^57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. This list of squatter camps is not comprehensive, but it does include the most populous settlements in the jurisdiction of the Council of Cape Town and the Divisional Council of the Cape Peninsula. The information provided in this table is at best approximate. Most of these estimates were offered by state officials—typically in the employ of the Native Affairs Department, the South African Police, or the Building Survey Department. Since squatters were engaged in an illegal activity and often without recognized residency rights for Cape Town, they would have been anxious to elude official detection and enumeration. In the absence of precise estimates as to the number of inhabitants in specific squatter camps, a family was estimated to include four members and a shack six individuals.


5. Department of Health (GES) 2985; PS 15, March 28, 1949, p.3. This figure is based on a rough calculation of an average of four members per family (1050 families reported).
6. City of Cape Town Native Affairs Files (GN) 4/4/1/2/12, June 2, 1952.
8. Department of Native Affairs (NTS) 6482; 77/313S, May 2, 1956.
21. Cape Town City Council Housing Committee (H) 15/233, January 16, 1937.
24. GES 902; 591/13A, September 26, 1947.
26. NTS 6482; 77/313S, January 18, 1957.
30. 3/CT 1/4/10/1/1/17, November 15, 1951, p.2.
31. 3/CT 1/4/10/1/1/18, November 6, 1952, p.3. The same number is reported a year later. GN 4/4/6/3/2, March 23, 1953.

32. NTS 6482; 77/313S, December 31, 1959.


34. GES 621; 113/13B, January 21, 1948, p.1.

35. GES 2985; PS 15, March 28, 1949, p.4.

36. GES 2985; PS 15, March 28, 1949, p.4.

37. NTS 6482; 77/313S, May 2, 1956.


42. GN 4/4/1/2/12, June 2, 1952.

43. BC 880, p.2.

44. NTS 6482; 77/313S, January 18, 1957.


47. SAP 431; 15/48/48, approx. 1945, p.3.


49. GES 2985; PS 15, March 28, 1949, p.4.

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57. NTS 6482; 77/313S, December 31, 1959.
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The following persons interviewed informants, or in the case of Mr. Linda Brightman Madaka and Mr. Michael Nduna, generously lent their assistance.

LM  Linda Brightman Madaka
JM  James Meier
MM  Mbulelo Mrubata
AN  Andile Ncula
WN  Weziwe Ncame
MN  Michael Nduna

Informants are in some instances referred to by an indicator mutually agreed upon to protect their anonymity. For each informant, their interview date(s) are provided, along with the initials of the participating interviewers.

Mrs. C  April 9, 1998  (JM, MM)
Mrs. E  June 4, 1998  (WN, JM)
Mrs. F  June 22, 1998  (JM, AN)
Vuyelwa Miriam Foloti  April 27, 1998  (WN, JM, AN)
Gertrude Fukusana  May 22, 1998  (MM, JM)
Edmina Gogela  June 9, 1998  (AN, JM)
Leonard Malungelo Gogela  June 12, 1998  (MM, JM)
Elmina Gontsana  May 29, 1998  (JM, AN)
Elsie Jim  May 28, 1998  (WN, JM)
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

James Eric Meier completed his B.A. at the University of Toronto in 1985 with a major in philosophy. After a six-year hiatus from higher education, he returned in 1991 for a one-year term at the University of British Columbia as a qualifying student in order to acquire the necessary course work required for admission to a graduate program in history. From 1992 to 1994, Meier studied under the supervision of Professor Alan Jeeves at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He graduated in 1994 after successfully defending his master's thesis "The African National Congress and the Black Working Class, 1937-1948." In 1994, Meier was admitted to the University of Florida, where he pursued a Ph.D. degree in the Department of History, with Professor R. Hunt Davis, Jr. serving as his academic advisor. In addition to his major field of African history, Meier completed course work for a minor in pre-1877 United States history and an outside minor in anthropology. In October 2000, Meier defended his dissertation "'On the Margins': The Emergence and Growth of Squatter Settlements in Cape Town, 1939-1960."
I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

K. Hunt Davis, Jr.
Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Timothy Cleaveland
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Associate Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Bertram Wyatt-Brown
Eminent Scholar, Professor of History

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 2000

Winfred M. Phillips
Dean, Graduate School