

https://dspace.org/

The destruction of communities 1930-1980: The Indian working class of Durban and the Group Areas Act

Freund, Bill

1993-08-30
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8676

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

FREUND

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

African Studies Seminar Paper
to be presented in RW 7003 SEMINAR ROOM
AT 4.00pm 30th August 1993

Title: The Destruction of Communities 1930-1980: The Indian Working Class of Durban and the Group Areas Act.

by: Bill Freund

No 346

AFRICANA LIBRARY

THE DESTRUCTION OF COMMUNITIES 1930-1980

The greatest event in the post-war history of the Indian population of Durban, including the working class whose history we have been trying to conceptualise, was the forced removal of the majority from their existing homes into purpose-built townships which contained both state-owned and private accommodation. Recent popular history has characterised the Group Areas Act of 1950 as "doom at the stroke of a pen."[1] According to a 1954 estimate, some 75.000 Indians would be moved after the proclamation of segregated "group areas; in fact, the numbers ultimately involved were certainly enormously higher.[2] In the heyday of apartheid policy making, it appeared that perhaps 80% of all Indians in Durban would be forced to move.[3] For the whole Indian population of Durban, the process was one that reminded them of their vulnerability to the power structure, defined in racial terms, of the city and the country, and one that would alienate them further from that power structure. At the same time, the creation of legally constituted Indian group areas would have a major role in shaping economic structures in Durban and in the development of consciousness, cultural, social and political.

---

1. Alan Mabin, "Comprehensive Segregation: The Origins of the Group Areas Act and its Planning Apparatuses", Journal of Southern African Studies, XVIII(2), 1992.

2. Brij Maharaj, "The 'Spatial Impress' of the Central and Local States; The Group Areas Act in Durban", in David Smith,ed., The Apartheid City and Beyond, London & New York & Johannesburg: Routledge and Witwatersrand University Press, 1992,81.

3. The Leader, 11 October 1963.

Large as was the scale of Indian removals, it was one side of the story. The rapidly increasing African population was simultaneously being resettled in new townships located further afield, mainly under the administration of the Kwa Zulu homeland. Few whites were forced to leave their homes but many benefitted from the availability of relatively cheap land for home purchase and rent and an improved infrastructure, above all a superb highway system.

Two trajectories came together in the making of Group Areas. The first was white racism, the desire to define Durban as a city built around a white core. Indians were to be expunged from this core with little say on their own position in the urban environment. However, at the same time, the Group Area idea was closely allied to notions of progress, hygiene and modernity. For the bureaucratic planners of Group Areas, restructuring the Indian population in terms of family life, defining of class contours and creation of new sources of jobs needed by the national economy was to be complemented by an improved and more modern physical environment. As such, it was an undeniable good. They aligned themselves to the massive movement to reconstruct working class housing in Britain and other European countries at the same time, a movement which certainly had major parallels and affinities with processes in South Africa.[4] It has even been suggested that the colonial and extra-European terrain was something of a model for the latest in capitalist town planning in the metropolitan countries. Modern Durban was to be reconstructed on the basis of the clearance of slums.

It can be argued that this vision of modernity was not only tied into racial ideology but that it also pursued a physical reconstruction of the city which was inimical to the flourishing of networks of small enterprise. Such

---

4. Alan Mabin looks critically at the extent to which South African urban planners thought of themselves as part of international practises current in this era in "The Witwatersrand Joint Town Planning Committee 1932-40: Of Rigour and Mortis", Planning History Workshop seminar paper, Johannesburg, 1992.

networks appeared to be a symbol of backwardness, dirt to sweep under the rug or eliminate.[5] Ironically, with hindsight this may have been a disastrous thrust in terms of the prospects of late twentieth century capitalism, where heavily protected "modern" industries imitating those in the most advanced countries and restricted to serving local consumers, are becoming less and less viable and are unable to provide many jobs. Economic relationships and forms that once seemed archaic might have been the key to economic development in this context. The South African state and the most powerful business interests in the 1940s and onwards rejected such networks as backward and archaic, however, and sought to undercut their survival.

While officials thought that they were engaged in the noble art of slum clearance and urban beautification and refused to consider the racist implications of the form this was taking, their anti-Group Areas antagonists emphasized the racist aspects of the reconstruction of the city and ignored the problem of slum clearance.[6] Not only did they not comprehend the bureaucrat's urban vision, they also did not really reflect the housing needs of many poor Durban residents. To an important extent, this reveals the dominance of bourgeois and petty bourgeois concerns within Indian politics.

---

5. For a particularly relevant study, see C.M. Rogerson, "From Coffee-Cart to Industrial Canteen: Feeding Johannesburg's Black Workers, 1945-62" in Alan Mabin, ed., Organisation and Economic Change, African Studies 5, Johannesburg:Ravan, 1989.

6. For an early exception, see the speech of A.I. Kajee to the Indo-European Council in 1929 which does suggest the need for both urban amenities extended to the Durban periphery and for land to be released specifically to create public housing for Indians. "Indian Housing in and around Durban", ms. Mabel Palmer, File 28, Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of Natal, Durban.

Perhaps the most valuable and influential detailed study on the subject of Group Areas is John Western's Outcast Cape Town.[7] Much of what Western says is very relevant to Durban. However, it may be useful to put the emphasis rather on what was different about Durban compared to Cape Town. Western concentrates most of his attention on Coloureds (and a handful of Indians) who were thrown out of a predominantly white suburb, Mowbray. Mowbray offered all its population convenient access to jobs and a myriad of small shops. Small-scale housing and intense social networks limited the danger of crime. Groote Schuur Hospital and other social amenities were very close and transport to the centre of Cape Town easy and inexpensive. Coloured Mowbrayites seem to feel encadred within a larger Cape Town identity and some were even successful in having themselves reclassified white after experiencing the pressure for removal.

For Coloured working class people, therefore, removal to state-constructed rental accomodation on the Cape Flats, with its extraordinary levels of violent crime, was a grim experience that offered little. It can, however, be objected that the pre-removal situation of many Coloured Capetonians, including a large number of squatters already on the Flats, was so much less favourable that the Mowbray situation cannot really be generalised to all of Coloured Cape Town. It is also true, according to Western, that for an important section of lower middle class Coloureds who were able to become homeowners in defined class-bound suburbs on the Flats, views on Group Areas removals were rather more ambiguous or even positive.

By contrast, in Durban, the bulk of working class Indians already were "outcast". Before 1930, as we have seen, and to some extent to their own advantage, they lived beyond the city limits and they certainly did not enjoy easy access to the centre. The principal study of the impact of Group Areas

---

7. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981. See also Shamil Jeppie & Crain Soudien,eds., The Struggle for District Six, Past and Present, Cape Town: Buchu Books,1990.

in Durban, written at an early stage of the process, stresses the extremely high level of racial segregation in the city even though heterogeneous neighbourhoods did exist on the border between different areas.[8] Although home ownership amongst Durban Indians was widely diffused, the access to even such basic amenities as piped water and electricity was poor and the appeal of affordable council housing, even if racially segregated, was not low.

Finally, even if honoured in the breach and very flawed, Western's stress on the opposition of the Cape Town City Council to the imposition of Group Areas legislation should be mentioned. By contrast, in Durban, the Council had never liked or accepted Indians as an inherent part of Durban and they shamelessly spearheaded and directed the drive towards segregation, acquiring an opprobrium amongst Indians in Durban which has lasted to the present day. In 1957 the mayor of Durban frankly pointed out that apartheid "was the traditional policy of the burgesses of Durban and their urban representatives long before the Nationalists came to power."[9]

The passage of the Group Areas Act, as Mabin and others have stressed, far from being any sort of break in South African urban history, was part of a thrust dating back to the early days of Union and before, for racially defined segregation of the city. In 1922, even before the arrival of the Pact government in Pretoria, the Durban Town Council initiated the passage of a provincial ordinance which enshrined the right of property owners to put racially exclusive clauses in deeds covering future sales.[10] Neighbourhood covenants and the activities of real estate agents kept parts of the city exclusively white. Thereafter two forms of state interference proved of particular significance. One was the process which led to the expansion of the municipal boundaries, an expansion which would lead the way to the

---

8. Kuper, Watts & Davies, op.cit.
9. Maharaj,76.
10. Ibid., 74.

restructuring of the city along new lines. The other was the passage of the Slums Act and its application to pre-war Durban.

The expansion of Durban beyond the Old Borough in 1931 represented an important challenge to the way of life of the heterogeneous population on the periphery of the city, particularly to Indians, who were estimated in 1927/28 to form 60% of the total in the annexed zone.[11] If one looks in more detail at a small corner of this periphery on the northern backside of the Berea called Puntans Hill, the disordered margins become perhaps more real. It was estimated that there were 150 houses in good condition there of which 120 were owned by "Europeans"; these were mostly in the most elevated section. One hundred Indian owned dwellings were described as being in fair condition. Then there were 160 shacks inhabited by Indians and "Natives" and described as slums. Many Africans were quarry workers. They and others lived in shanties by the roadside at the bottom of the hill. On lower lying sections, some sugar cane was grown. While there were almost as many African as Indian adults resident in the district, almost three quarters of the resident children were Indian.[12] Thus the family residents of the area were largely Indian.

This kind of uncontrolled area was defined as a problem by the city fathers. Weak, small municipalities such as that in Sydenham, Umhlatuzana or South Coast Junction were no substitute for the Durban Council and its dependent structures. The question was rarely put of control <u>over</u> Indians (as opposed to Natives) directly. However, from the view of the state, the periphery was the site for illicit activities of all sorts.[13] Taxes were low and difficult to

---

11. Durban. Borough Boundaries Commission, Natal Archives, 3/DBN; 14/4/1.
12. Durban. Borough Boundaries Commission, Natal Archives, 3/DBN, 14/4/1.
13. See Natal Archives. 3/DBN. Durban. Borough Boundaries Commission; 14/4/1-3; 14/6/1.

collect. Small businesses were difficult to regulate. Health hazards (such as malaria breeding swamps) and poor road construction and other services needed to be remedied. An informant remembered how the family laundry business operated on an unregulated basis beyond the Borough boundaries. Incorporation (as well as mechanisation) were the mechanisms, through the agency of the Health Committee, that destroyed the business.[14]

To Durban industrialists, the periphery contained desperately needed level ground. Land was needed for industrial expansion, particularly after economic activity began to take off in the middle 1930s and some of the most favourable possibilities for such expansion, such as the land at Bayhead on the southern end of the Bay, was thickly and inconveniently peopled by Indian shack-dwellers. In addition, the white population could no longer be effectively housed on the seaward slopes of the Berea Ridge alone. The urban planners sought to create solid white population zones that linked up the Berea with somewhat less desirable slopes and lower land into which the whites could expand.

Consulted about annexation, the Natal Indian Congress reaction had been rather hostile. Representatives had expressed concern about the racist nature of borough licensing, the incumbent introduction of rates for which voteless Indians would have no representation and the likely increase in taxes that would squeeze the small property-owner.[15] Removals, to take a phrase from the Natal Indian Congress at a somewhat later date shortly after the passage of the Group Areas Act would represent a "disruption of our economic life".[16] The inexpensive life of the Durban poor on the urban periphery could no longer be afforded by the

---

14. Interview, K.G., 19 January 1990.

15. Evidence, Natal Indian Congress, Durban. Borough Boundary Commission. Natal Archives. 3/DBN, 14/4/2.

16. Natal Indian Congress, 5th Congress, 1951, Agenda Book (ms.V.Padayachee).

city establishment. After annexation, numerous unlicensed traders were effectively closed down and "the more serious crime of selling yeast to natives" substantially tackled.[17]

Moreover, in some areas, such as the Umgeni estuary not very far from Puntans Hill, thick population densities were forming and more conventionally defined slums coming into being. Moreover, there was the problem of the squalid and miserable workers' barracks, above all the Magazine Barracks north of the city centre, which existed in defiance of the planners' ideas of how a modern city should develop. Built in 1880, the Barracks were already condemned in 1914 to no avail.[18] Two room flats housed large families in insanitary conditions. Other miserable accomodation housed railway and harbour workers elsewhere in Durban. A 1937 report on such housing at the Point to which Indian waiters, cooks, hospital attendants and others were forced to repair, was more expensive than the Magazine Barracks as well and it was claimed that workers there were desperate for public housing being made available.[19]

In response to this kind of situation, the Slums Act was devised in 1934 and applied nationally. Its most acute observer, Susan Parnell has written that "in instigating slum clearance projects in the 1930s, the Johannesburg Council had set three objectives. First, to ensure industrial expansion, second to guarantee the removal of any menace to public health, and finally to enforce residential segregation."[20] Parnell points out that realising such objectives within bureaucratic structures that existed and the cost constraints of the 1930s was another story;

---

17. Natal Archives,3/Dbn; 14/6/1. Durban Borough Extension Enquiry Committee, 1935.

18. Omar, 8ff.

19. Natal Archives, DBN/3; 1/2/6/1/1. Durban. Public Health (Slums) Committee, 5 August 1937.

20. Susan Parnell, "Racial Segregation in Johannesburg: The Slums Act 1934-39", South African Geographical Journal, LXX, 1988, 123.

policies were applied piecemeal and in more pragmatic ways than might be imagined. The poor moreover did not disappear and the housing question was not possible to solve through such measures.

However, it is important to stress the growing prominence of a discourse about slums and slum removal in the 1930s and to reiterate Parnell's point about how this discourse was married to the drive towards segregation.[21] It is a striking feature of Kuper et al's account of Durban in the 1940s and 1950s that the planning for segregation was often organised through what was called in sanitised language that evoked technocratic neutrality a "technical sub-committee." A major theme in the history of South Africa in the twentieth century has been the conjoining of capitalism and segregation/ "apartheid" as I have once tried to argue in a general review article trying to conceptualise the logic of forced removals.[22] In a seminal and widely-known article by Martin Legassick, he expressed the view that "the specific structures of labour control which have been developed in post-war South Africa are increasingly functional to capital".[23] This is a difficult view to sustain for the period after 1970 but in the years of the long boom, from 1933 to 1970, it is resonant; such functionality seemed plausible to actors in the state and in business.

In Johannesburg, considerable segregated public housing was constructed in response to the slum question. Durban was by

---

21. See the evidence of the Town Clerk, who could not conceive of how to improve the quality of Indian housing unless Indians were prepared to give up opposition to housing segregation. Durban Borough Boundaries Commission. Natal Archives, 3/DBN; 14/4/2. Or look at the assumptions of white speakers in the records of the Special Committee re Housing, Natal Archives, Dbn/3; 1/3/3/1/2.

22. "Forced Resettlement and the Political Economy of South Africa", Review of African Political Economy, 29, 1984.

23. Martin Legassick, "Capital Accumulation and Violence in South Africa", Economy and Society, III (3), 1974.

no means in the vanguard in this area. Yet by 1935, the borough was proud of having already demolished 752 dwellings.[24] In Durban too all-white council housing was in fact created. Lamontville was established for the supposedly tiny section of respectable urbanised Africans.[25]

The enormous housing needs of the Indian working class were, however, largely neglected. Only on the eve of World War II was a small, "sub-economic" housing estate created for poor Indians in Springfield Estate. The quality of this housing was spartan, if not lamentable and the scale on which it was constructed quite small.[26] During the war, it lacked electricity or street-lighting, sanitation was poor and thereafter many houses had to be restructured or torn down. It was often difficult to convince shack-dwellers to consider moving there. Residents found the asphalt floors dismal and were unhappy that no purchase scheme existed.[27] Indeed after the war the attitude of the Council at first was to devote all attention to white housing needs and simply to ignore any objections raised by Indians.

Indeed, perhaps very understandably, few Indians imagined that removals would be coupled with any programme of mass

---

24. Durban Borough Extension Enquiry Commission, 1935, Natal Archives, 3/Obn; 14/6/1.

25. Louise Torr, "Lamontville-Durban's Model Village; The Realities of Township Life, 1934-60", Journal of Natal and Zulu History, 10, 1987.

26. For a kinder view, see B.A. & J. Naidoo, 44. In 1945, only 221 houses had been completed in Springfield Estate with 269 more under construction and 168 on tender. Special Committee re Housing, 26 July 1945, Natal Archives, Obn/3; 1/3/3/1/3.

27. Special Committee re Housing, 3 August 1939, 26 January 1940, 8 March 1940, Natal Archives. Obn/3; 1/3/3/1/2.

housing construction.[28] A sympathetic councillor, S.J. Smith, pointed out in 1938 that the Indian community feared that the application of the Slums Act would be for "political reasons, racial reasons and other reasons than that of slum clearance."[29]

During the 1940s, measures aimed at containing so-called Indian penetration, the Pegging Acts of 1942-43 and the "Ghetto" Act of 1946 became a major focus of Indian community activism that cross-cut race lines. The penetration scare particularly involved middle class housing on the lower slope of the Berea above the Indian business core in town into which some Indian families were moving; resistance to it focussed on racism and property rights. As late as 1953, an indignant Greyville Indian Ratepayers Association wrote that "...under guise of providing housing for the homeless Indians, the Council seems to be working hand-in-hand with the Government to clear Durban of all non-whites and make it a wholly white area."[30]

The environment was one of intensified white racism.[31] In 1936, for instance, a Hindu ritual ceremony at the beach was disrupted by a violent attack on the part of a Special

---

28. See the characteristic view in A.I.Kajee, P.R. Pather and A. Christopher, Treatment of Indians in South Africa, Cape Town & New York: South African Indian Congress, 1946. These, moreover, were relatively conservative figures. This could be said as well for Kuper et al. Perhaps for that reason, this crucial analysis seems to over-estimate the possibilities for successful resistance to application of the Group Areas Act.

29. Evidence of S.J. Smith, Councillor to Durban. Public Health (Slums) Committee, 25 February 1938 in Natal Archives, Dbn/3; 1/2/6/1/1.

30. David Bailey, "The Origins of Phoenix 1957-76: The Durban City Council and the Indian Housing Question", M.A., University of Natal, Durban, 1987, 100.

31. The malevolence of white opinion in general is a constant theme in Kuper et al.

Service Battalion, effectively a militarised force of unemployed whites. The beating of men, women and children went unpunished. The post-war climate was worse, if anything. The Indian press hinted at the existence of vigilante groups aimed at punishing Indian men who might be found ogling white women.[32] It was a cliche that few whites sympathized with the Indian victims of the 1949 riot and many were even happy to abet African attacks on Indian shops and individuals. It is very difficult to prove such a cliche but it is likely to reflect widespread white attitudes. In 1947, a poll was taken of white municipality voters to ascertain approval of Indians getting some segregated representation on Council. It was turned down by a vote of 15066 to 1639, or some 90% against. The Kuper et al study of Group Areas segregation in the 1950s presents a sense of the constant (if not always successful) white pressure to cut down on any significant white property being made available for Indian Group Areas.

At the same time, the 1949 riot as we have seen, bloodily revealed growing African assertiveness in the urban context. The core of African settlement in Durban, Cato Manor Farm, was largely Indian property. As that settlement built up, situations were common such as the one on the edge of Hillary at the southern end of Cato Manor where Africans dwelling in no less than 100 shacks were paying 5 rent p.a. to a Mrs. Ranjalai collected by "her induna".[33] Such an arrrangement collapsed or was dangerous for the landlord in the wake of 1949. In sections in and on the fringe of Cato Manor such as Mayville, there was a very substantial and concentrated Indian population. While these were bitter at the potential loss of their homes, they were also frightened by the events of 1949 and not entirely hostile to removal to a safer place. The riots, of course, represented a powerful argument in favour of the white Establishment view that segregation was the key to "peaceful race relations."[34]

---

32. The Leader, 24 April 1948.

33. Public Health (Slums) Committee, 24 June 1947, Natal Archives, DBN/3; 1/2/6/1/2.

34. Kuper, Watts & Davies.

In these circumstances, Indians themselves confused the desire to save neighbourhoods with the struggle against Group Areas to a certain extent. In the wake of the riots, the Cato Manor Ratepayers' Association at first called for repatriation of Africans from Cato Manor, the institution of curfews on them and a ban on the construction of shacks.[35] The 1950 annual conference of the Natal Indian Congress "opposed the expropriation of Indian-owned [but not in fact occupied] land in Cato Manor for the purpose of a temporary African housing scheme" only to agree to such a scheme a year later because "if the shack development in the Cato Manor area is not checked, then the shack settlements will overflow into adjacent areas now occcupied by Indians."[36] A decade later, the Mayville Indian Ratepayers' Association, pointing out the contrast between themselves and African tenants, requested that Cato Manor be made a "model Indian town."[37] Clairwood residents, perhaps only because they thought it would fit the prejudices of the authorities, described their neighbourhood as a "veritable Group Area of our own choosing and a model of self help and separate development".[38] Concerned at the distance between the centre of town and Chatsworth, the Durban Indian Municipal Employees' Society suggested in 1964 that instead of removing Magazine Barracks residents to Chatsworth, it might be best to eject Africans from Lamontville and replace them with Indian workers instead.[39] To some extent, conservative leadership amongst the Indian bourgeoisie abandoned any real struggle against removal and instead tried to ensure more favourable terms and arrangements.[40]

---

35. The Leader, 19 March 1949.

36. Natal Indian Congress, 1951 conference resolutions, (ms. V.Padayachee).

37. The Leader, 22 July 1960.

38. Clairwood & District Ratepayers & Residents Association to the Mayor of Durban, 5 October, 1964, University of Durban-Westville, Documentation Centre.

39. The Leader, 20 March 1964.

40. Bailey, 100-01.

Despite the general anger at the threat of removals, the leadership of Indians in Durban had no answer to the problems of exploitation and rack-renting in the slums. Indeed some of the big Natal Indian Congress dignitaries from the pre-1945 period were themselves slumlords who made large amounts of money from their properties.[41] P.R. Pather, leading light in the post-1945 breakaway conservative Natal Indian Organisation, was unusual as a "community leader" in emphasizing in a 1955 article that "portions of the Magazine Barracks, the slums at Jacobs, Umgeni Newlands and Merebank were a blot on the name of the Durban City Council." [42] The latter two locales were the sites for large resettlement shack areas that awaited further municipal housing construction.[43]

Once it became clearer that land and houses would become available for Indian settlement on a large scale, the reaction amongst Indian people was in practise a very divided one. At one end of the spectrum, were individuals who owned substantial property in predominantly white areas, who felt justifiably the harsh sting of racism.[44] At the other were those who felt delivered from the worst abuses of landlords and were very grateful for the availability of

---

41. The Paruks alone, for instance, collected rent from no less than 900 tenants in Riverside slums in 1936. For this and other information on slum ownership, see Natal Archives. Durban. Public Health (Slums) Committee, 21 July 1936 and other correpondence, in Natal Archives, DBN 1/2/6/1/1. The file does show, however, that Indian slum dwellers were far more apt than "Natives" to own their own shacks, even where they lived together closely.

42. The Leader, 7 October 1955.

43. For conditions there, see Gavin Maasdorp and Nesen Pillay, Urban Relocation and Racial Segregation; The Case of Indian South Africans, Durban: University of Natal Department of Economics, 1977.

44. Goonam, ch. 17, is a good example.

houses which might be improved and purchased over time.[45] According to testimony collected in a popular history:

> "We were happy to move to Merebank. We had moved from Durban North to Rippon Road. From Rippon Road we moved to Wireless. Because of industrial development we were forced to leave Wireless. We saw our houses bulldozed while we stood there. Our things were out on the street. From [t]here we moved to Jacobs. We were forced to leave Jacobs because of industry. But we were happy to leave.The house had no ceilings. We had to cover our heads and sleep because the dust and sand kept getting in. The Merebank house was a neater house to live in."[46]

The comment of a youth from this category quoted in the Leader on the possible expulsion of Indians from the central business district, the heartland of the Muslim trader class, gave expression to class antagonisms: "I like the Group Areas. For the first time we have a home of our own. All my life I have been living with my parents in a hovel we call a home, paying exorbitant rents to a well-known businessman in town."[47]

In practise, many people fell between these stools. There were numerous rather poor Indian home-owners who lived in shacks but had invested something in their properties. It is

---

45. Interview with A. R., 13.1.92, which stressed how pleased the family, which had waited in vain for a council house at Springfield, was to move to Chatsworth to their own house. There was as well resentment of the undemocratic and racist nature of the process but, as my informant said, "anger wouldn't help you."

46. Marie, 94.

47. The Leader, 4 October 1963.

remarkable that Indians owned homes in larger proportions than whites in the Durban of the 1940s.[48] Again, however, some of these were in such debt because of repayments that it is not entirely accurate to see them as home-owners.[49] Others rented on short leases.[50] A pair of Indian researchers pointed out that "a great deal of Indian shack dwelling is no more than 'hoveldom'.[51]

While some people were delighted to have access to better quality homes or homeownership for the first time, others were concerned for the loss of access to very cheap housing. The municipal workers in Magazine Barracks lived in squalid and overcrowded surroundings but their rent was very cheap. As late as 1964, rents were as low as 87 cents per month (for a two room flat with electricity and water) compared to R2-R10 in Chatsworth township, apart from the cost of utilities and transport.[52] Removal made the availability of casual work in town much scarcer. Yet according to one survey, some two-thirds of removees claimed to be "satisfied" in Chatsworth, a notably higher figure than for those who had come from Cato Manor.[53]

At the same time, large numbers of Indians lost relatively high-quality property in such areas as the lower slopes of Sea View and Bellair south of Cato Manor and the pleasant heights above the central business district and the racecourse where Indian "penetration" had been so

---

48. Halliday, 1940, 94.

49. See the evidence of Councillor S.J. Smith, Natal Archives, Obn/3; 1/2/6/1/1.

50. Halliday, 1940, 30.

51. B.A. & J. Naidoo, 42.

52. The Leader, 14 September 1962; 24 January 1964. This low rental figure was estimated to be only about three per cent of the monthly wage on average.

53. Maasdorp & Pillay, 123ff. See also their Urban Relocation and Racial Segregation, where more negative reactions are also recorded.

resented.[54] (and even the poshest new neighbourhoods were less well serviced than otherwise comparable white suburbs). A particularly unpleasant aspect of the removals from the Bluff and the southern suburbs was the sense that the state placed the interests of the white working class before anyone else in this regard. Moreover, since whites received the lion's shares of land in Durban, Indian land, just as in the countryside, was relatively scarce and overvalued.

For the Indian middle class, the state made available for the first time ever distinct neighbourhoods modelled on white suburbia. By 1950, the Indian press was containing advertisements for modest new homes for purchase in an "exclusively Indian" suburb, Umhlatuzana. Later Red Hill, on the edge of Durban North and Silverglen in what later became Chatsworth was added to the list. Reservoir Hills and the Indian section of Westville which adjoined property where a university college was created for the Indian community contained lots suitable for more well-to-do people. North of Durban a section of beach was made a residential area for Indian property owners at La Mercy. A small white middle class suburb, Isipingo Beach, was in time proclaimed Indian, the most substantial transfer of built-up urban land out of white hands in the whole Group Areas process in South Africa. For some individuals, certainly, these zones contained attractive possibilities. From the late 1950s, in the increasingly less politicised Indian press, large advertisements bearing new home offers jostled oddly next to declining amounts of news about Group Areas protests.

In some cases, purpose-built housing replaced poor settlements of agglomerated dwellers in temporary housing as in Merebank, vaguely known at first as "Marine Settlement".[55] By the end of the 1950s, Merebank offered

---

54. Margo Russell, "A Study of a South African Interracial Neighbourhood", M.Soc.Sci., University of Natal, Durban, 1961.

55. For the early planning of Merebank in the late 1940s, see Natal Archives, Obn/3, 1/3/3/1/3 & 1/3/3/1/6. For the survival of shacks into the 1960s, see The Leader, 15 December 1961.

numerous cheap houses made of breeze blocks and roofed with asbestos for which purchasers had ten years to pay.[56] However, the most important community of working class Indians was Chatsworth, south-west of the white core of Durban as now defined, constructed on 500 acres of banana farmland much of which was thinly peopled by Indians already.[57] Indeed, the expansion of Indian townships itself drastically reduced the available space in some sections of peripheral Durban for market gardening and other rural activities.[58]

Planned from 1960, Chatsworth opened in 1964. By 1980 Chatsworth consisted of eleven neighbourhood units containing 7000 "sub-economic" and 14000 "economic" houses.[59] It was not accidentally built as a kind of buffer between white residential areas and the large new African township of Umlazi constructed on mission land. Both Kuper et al and Western have emphasized the attempt to use natural features such as rivers, major impediments to movement such as railway lines and highways to differentiate Group Areas as well as the tendency to create Coloured and Indian population buffers between whites and Africans. Chatsworth was intended to house 165000 people but perhaps held 250.000 at its peak.[60] By the late 1970s, many more people crowded into the small houses than the official planners' allotment.

---

56. The Leader, 2 September 1960.

57. The Leader, 26 August 1960.

58. Menaka Padayachee, 4; Maasdorp & Pillay in van der Merwe, 245.

59. According to Margaret Sugden, Chatsworth per capita income was R33 compared to the Durban average of R42. The Potential Indian Labour Force: Durban/Pietermaritzburg Region; Pietermaritzburg Town & Regional Planning Commission, 1978, Town & Regional Planning Reports XXXVII, part 2, 48.

60. G.C.Oosthuizen & J.H.Hofmeyr, A Socio-Economic Survey of Chatsworth, University of Durban-Westville, Institute for Social & Economic Research, Report 7, 1979, 17. The 1961 figure given was 150.000, The Leader, 3 March 1960.

At first, Chatsworth was a grim place to observe. A Principal Planning Officer in the Durban Town Engineer's office, L.G. Vinton, said himself that it had a "military and inhuman look".[61] This certainly reflected the extent to which town officials and planners designed Chatsworth according to their own ideas with little consultation or thought of requirements unfamiliar to their own preferences. A study of the construction of Phoenix suggested that town planning in Durban is best understood as "...determined by a 'bureaucracy-centred coalition' entered into between the senior bureaucrats and their Council supporters", with the former as the real generators of significant schemes.[62] A Phoenix activist pointed out to me that, in fact, despite the fine language in planning discourse, in the first years of settlements the lack of even basic amenities apart from the houses was glaring.[63]

However, Chatsworth offered Indian residents extensive possibilities for upgrading and for home purchase over time.[64] Sales for those occupying property for seven years were made available and tenancies could be taken over by heirs. In its early phase, rented accomodation was relatively cheap.[65] It has often been used as an indictment that city officials "colluded" in the expulsion of Indians to Chatsworth and elsewhere but it is probably this collusion that also explains how the planning of new settlements tended to fit well with the industrial expansion of Durban.[66] A survey from 1974 pointed out that in fact

---

61. Bailey, 147.
62. Ibid., 107-08.
63. Interview with S.M., 15 November 1989.
64. The Leader, 5 January 1962.
65. The Leader, 28 February 1964.
66. Such an indictment is made very forcefully in Maharaj, op.cit. Bailey's Masters' thesis is also insistent on the crucial shaping role of the Durban town bureaucracy.

Chatsworth, well-located from the point of view of the rapid industrial expansion on land south of the city for worker-commuters, had low levels of unemployment.[67] A striking feature of resettlement in Durban was the wholesale removal of communities to physically new locales. Thus the fishermen settlements, first displaced in favour of port-based industry, were removed en mass to a section of Chatsworth called Havenside in 1963, in part with the intervention of A.I. Kajee[68]. Some Cato Manor people were also able to establish themselves wholesale in another network of settlement.[69] Ratepayers, according to this report, were involved in negotiating compensation rates and plans. Another example was the distincive community of "Zanzibaris", Muslims of obviously African origin who were assimilated by the state into association with Indians and also packed off as a community to a particular section of the new township.[70]

The most spectacular example lay in the removal of the 6.000 inhabitants of the Magazine Barracks, whose working component were employees of the municipality. Plans to remove this apparently classic slum population went back a long way. By World War I, the barracks were condemned as insanitary. In 1933, there were plans to remove the population to Cato Manor.[71] Thereafter, focus partly fell on upgrading and improvements, particularly because the city had such meagre plans for urban renewal in general apart from the white population. Improvements did occur--double-story brick structures were erected by 1933-- but they were coupled with ever greater population densities.[72] A

---

67. See Sugden.

68. Scott & Criticos, "Hanging Up the Nets."

69. J.S.Gabriel papers, University of Durban-Westville, Documentation Centre.

70. Zubeida Kassim Seedat, "The Zanzibaris in Durban; A Social Anthropological Study of the Muslim Descendants of African Freed Slaves Living in the Indian Area of Chatsworth", M.A. University of Natal, Durban, 1973.

71. Omar, 16.

72. Ibid., 17.

population estimated at 5.089, or four persons per room almost, actually rose to about 6.000 by 1944.[73] Many were really only kin to Council workers.[74] Attempts were made in the 1930s to restrict the Barracks to sober, clean, well-behaved families with no more than two children and strictly to employees but policy proved unenforceable.[75] Removal of Magazine Barracks residents (no longer viewed by the city fathers as potential radicals) to Chatsworth took place finally in 1966.[76]

The other great site of working class settlement was north-west of Durban in the Indian portion of Newlands and, particularly, Phoenix. Phoenix, "a rough place" [77] with a smaller component of detached middle class suburbia, was first demarcated in 1964, (just as Chatsworth was opening up), provided with an overarching plan considered to be the equivalent of a British New Town in the middle 1960s and founded in 1976.[78] Early projections were for a "self-contained", isolated "Indian City of the Future."[79] Its initial core population came from Tin Town, a shack settlement where people had come from the northern side of Durban, and poor settlements along the Umgeni in the context of dislocation following a flood. In an echo of the extremely violent street life of the new townships on the Cape Flats, the raw settlement was characterised by gang activity and considerable amounts of crime at first.[80] The early settlers were joined by most of the remaining population of Cato Manor, people from nearby Riverside and Asherville south of the river, by those living, sometimes in

---

73. Ibid., 17-18.
74. Ibid., 22.
75. Ibid.,24.
76. Ibid., 79.
77. Interview, P.B., 30 November 1989.
78. Bailey, 89-90, 120, 147; Fiat Lux, XI(1), March/April 1976; The Leader, 24 April 1964; Interview with S.M., 15 November 1989.
79. Bailey, 89-90.
80. Interview, P.B., 30 November 1989.

shack settlements, on the edge of the sugar villages of the North Coast and by a large overspill of Chatsworth inhabitants on the list for housing with the council. Phoenix has been a harsher place than Chatsworth, slower to take on urban services, affected by more crime and anti-social behaviour. There was no equivalent industrial expansion on the ribbon of low land north of the Umgeni in the 1970s to anchor a working class with factory and commercial employment near to home. South Africa's industrial boom had stopped and even when growth occurred, it did not lead to the expansion of factories employing large numbers of workers.

The patchwork process of removals petered out after 1980 and was never fully completed. Some Indian families remained even in Cato Manor, in good part through dint of their fierce resistance to removal. Cato Manor, was "proclaimed" but never really settled by whites; it became a huge empty green and brown hole in the centre of Durban. The City Council had in fact lost interest in its prospects as white suburbia. It seems likely that its proclamation as white stemmed from Pretoria notions of creating a secure white block extending down the hills of Natal to the centre of the city in defiance of any other planning rationality.[81] One small core of South Coast Junction-Bayhead, once the largest single concentration of Indians, especially working class Indians, around Durban, the community of Clairwood, fought a long and to this day successful battle to avoid expulsion by expanding industry.[82] Plans to expel the Indians entirely from the so-called Indian Central Business District around the Grey Street mosque were never carried out. Thus by contrast with Cape Town, where by far the largest part of the population inhabiting the edge of the business district--District Six-- were entirely expelled, leaving a strangely (and dysfunctionally) empty urban core, the centre

---

81. Maharaj, 84-86.

82. See the account by Dianne Scott,"The Destruction of Clairwood: A Case Study on the Transformation of Communal Living Space" in Smith, op.cit.,87-98.

of Durban retained a large, intensely urbanised population on its edge.[83]

By the middle 1980s, however, Phoenix was as large as Chatsworth and the Indian working class of Durban were primarily to be found in one or the other township. Poised above Phoenix were the vast African settlements of Inanda, once an African mission station whose sections nearer to Durban had become very intensively populated. A wave of violence in 1985 affected the still important Indian shop and landowning community of Inanda, in some respects similar on a smaller scale to the 1949 riots in Cato Manor and several thousand people came, at first as virtual refugees, to shift into Phoenix as a result.

Underlying the entire Group Areas experience (Group Areas ceased to be legal entities in 1991) was the extent to which changes in the physical environment drastically shifted the balance in family life and orientation amongst Indian people. As Chapter Three tried to suggest, the Indian "community" in reality consisted of networks of community linked together through dense human contacts that reflected family relationships and a myriad of economic connections. There is frequently a sentimental association of the idea of community with homogeneity and total, organic harmony. This is not the way the word is used here. Community relations invariably embrace (but perhaps to the outsider, mask) conflict and inequality. It is the sense of network and the mediation of relations through networking that gives the concept of community some value.

Residents of particular areas had built up mosques, temples and schools which now had to be abandoned or could only be

---

83. See Jeppie and Soudien,1990. There is a section of the urban core of Durban, its old northern edge, Block AK containing a great cross-section of people, which was levelled but it is quite small and much of it has been replaced through commercial property use.

reached through a special journey. The Indian population of Durban had been quite highly segregated but it had internally not divided up physical space on class lines so sharply. The new townships were by contrast clearly demarcated, particularly between sections with homes for sale and council housing; patronage in access to resources and land was of limited value. Emigration to Chatsworth marked off the fishboat owners and captains who began to move into new business opportunities and the fishermen, who were more clearly identifiable as workers where previously the community had been tangled up.[84]

Even more dramatic in effect was the impact on the life of the joint family.[85] In the new purpose-built housing, the patriarchal homestead, which had gone together with home construction linking up room onto room in a mushrooming shack or tin-and-iron construction, no longer fitted the built environment. The state was in fact quite explicit in promoting construction that suited commuter-workers living directly on wages and in nucleated, small family structures.[86] One of the informants who most impressed this author pointed out that, despite the many practical advantages of life in Phoenix, he often still dreamt of the complex, patriarchal homestead in Clairwood where he had grown up and the way of life it represented although he chose never again to visit the physical site of his

---

84. Scott and Criticos.

85. For a famous parallel study in Britain, see Michael Young and Peter Willmott, Family and Kinship in East London, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957. For a similar perspective see also Kogila Moodley, "South African Indians: The Wavering Minority" in Leonard Thompson and Jeffrey Butler, ed., Change in Contemporary South Africa, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

86. J.F. Butler-Adam & Win Venter, "Public Housing and the Pattern of Family Life: Indian Families in Metropolitan Durban" in Aspects of Family Life in the South African Indian Community, University of Durban-Westville, Institute for Social & Economic Research, Occasional Paper #20, 1987.

grandfather's homestead.[87] Unsurprisingly, (and of course, as in other parts of the world), the impact of removal could be devastating on the elderly. The centrality of the family issue is brought out in a quote by a well-known anti-apartheid activist from the Witwatersrand, writing about the equivalent process in a Johannesburg neighbourhood:

> "These removals were done in the name of separate development- they were supposed to create conditions in which different groups could preserve their own culture and their own identity. But the great irony is that they have in fact broken down traditional ways of life. They have forced families into a single mould, the mould of the typical family you would find in any other urban industrial community in the world.
>
> ...It was a patriarchal family and the father was a single authority...they are forced to go to Lenasia but some of the city values have rubbed off on them and they don't go to the cheaper housing areas...The father finds he has high monthly instalments to pay off on his house, high maintenance costs. And his wife now rents modern furniture, refrigerator, television...Suddenly the girls are encouraged to go on to one of the commercial colleges which have opened and they become clerks and typists. They become independent of the family and the father's unquestioned authority falls away. The traditional patriarchal Indian family is being affected profoundly by these resettlements and I can see it will eventually emerge as a modern family like any other modern industrial family with all the

---

87. Interview, P. S., 30 November 1989.

> strained relations of three generations living together."[88]

Worries of a patriarch...The reconstruction of Indian social interaction within the context of the new, "modern" economy of urban South Africa is the subject of the final chapter of this study.

---

88. Cassim Saloojee, Transvaal Indian Congress activist, in Manfred Hermer, The Passing of Pageview, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978.