"UPROOTING" AND "RESETTLING"

A LA APARTHEID. The Case of Indians in Durban.

by Fatima Meer

Community development, resettlement, urban renewal, slum clearance, are terms constantly used by officialdom. The activities that occur under these designations are at the best of times never innocent of intrigue against the underprivileged and the powerless.

Mechanisation is popularly accepted as the only answer to rapid population growth—a world growth which has scaled from an estimated 500 million in the seventeenth[1] century to 906 million in 1900, and 3 billion in the last 60 years and which is expected to double itself by the year 2000. But mechanisation has also resulted in the concentration of capital and land in the hands of a few, and peasant and proletariat have had to make way for the agricultural and industrial tycoons.

While urban renewals operate primarily in favour of the upper and more powerful classes, Governments in democracies are under some pressure to settle their "electorates" with a minimum of trauma, and to their advantage. Enlightened authorities may be guided by the observations and conclusions of social scientists who emphasize the human, rather than the ecological, or architectural factors in urban renewal. They insist that the process of renewal is in effect incomplete if it does not result in an improved life for the displaced. They advocate consultations with the uprooted on the siting of the new neighbourhood, the designs, rentals or prices of their new homes and on the provision of transport, health, educational, recreational and other community services.

They warn against the isolating, segregating and declassing of the uprooted, stressing that this breeds resentment, hostility and tension and in extreme cases results in rioting. They advise against homogeneous replanting, claiming that this reinforces ethnic and religious differences, increases social distances and in effect produces disgruntled minorities. The new community, they contend, should be composed of a cross-section of the wider society in terms of age, sex and socio-economic levels since this ensures leadership from within, and enriches social life through variety and the greater range of offered choices. Resettlement, they affirm is valid only if the emphasis is on renewal rather than removal, and when in fact resettlement occurs in the same area, and new houses are built around existing social groups,[2] the inference being that the risks of uprooting increase with distance. Above all, they plead that existing groups which have taken generations in maturing and developing their distinctive neighbourhood traditions, and perfecting their networks of associations and influence, should not be broken up. Communities should be resettled as wholes and in a manner which makes it possible for them to recognise their familiar boundaries and take up life with renewed zeal in their new homes and streets.

In ideal situations, resettlement is an interactive process between the "settlers" and authority. The greater the agreement between the two, and the more proximate the power of each in relation to the other, the greater the success.

The inclination of authorities to be guided by such enlightened advice is dependent on the power of the uprooted themselves. Political minorities have invariably suffered and their uprootings have nearly always been motivated by the desire of the more powerful to be rid of them from areas they value, rather than by the desire to settle them. This is the intrinsic character of resettlement in South Africa where the concept operates basically as a process of cleaning the cities of non-white commerce and residence. Resettlement is almost wholly a non-white affair, and since non-whites do not constitute part of the democracy, they do not exert any pressure on the authorities responsible for their resettlement. The result is that houses are assembled and families are moved into them even before the bare essentials of an urban neighbourhood—hardened roads, private supplies of electricity and water, police protection, telephones, health, welfare and educational and recreational services, places of worship and adequate transport, have been provided.

RESETTLEMENT IN DURBAN

Durban, one of 287 world cities whose population exceeded 500 000 in 1960,[3] was catapulted into the twentieth century race for industrial development during the last world war when her population increased by 44 per cent. Beginning as a village of a few hundred inhabitants in 1830,[4] her population rose to 681 000 in 1960 and is estimated at 936 000 today. Her position as the third largest city in South Africa, and the largest city on the East coast of Africa has not only been maintained but has been strengthened by her exceptional industrial expansion since 1960.[5]

But, as is characteristic in all such processes of rapid industrialization, her expansion has been accompanied by an acute housing shortage which has remained chronic since 1936. A 1943-44 one-in-twenty random sample survey[6] revealed that half of the Indian and African houses, a third of the Coloured and one-sixteenth of the white, were overcrowded.[7] By 1940, the European position had improved, but the non-white position had deteriorated.[8] Failing to find more suitable accommodation, workers and their families moved into old deteriorating houses, congested existing dwellings, and piled up tin shanties on the hilly peripheral regions. By 1950, at least 40 000 Africans were

living in shacks under conditions of intolerable degradation. In the meanwhile, industry had continued to attract African labour at the rate of 6 000 a year.[9] In 1952 there were 50 000 Africans in one shack area alone,[10] in Cato Manor. It had been estimated on the basis of the total number of houses enumerated in Durban in the 1936 census that an additional 70 000 houses would have to be built by 1961 to alleviate existing overcrowding and cope with future population increase.[11] It was clear too, in view of the enormous poverty of the non-white people that the largest proportion of these would have to be built and subsidised by the Government.

The problem was fundamentally one of providing opportunities for an improved social life, and of stimulating social members to participate in it and contribute to it. There is no observable indication that the authorities were to any extent motivated by this factor. While a certain degree of re-location of residential areas from the city centre to its periphery was indicated, by and large the situation required rebuilding and renewing existing shack settlements which, though developing spontaneously, were rationally related to work places, and did not intrude into the areas of logical industrial and commercial expansion. But the choice, exercised by the people, was totally ignored. Housing complexes began to appear ten to twelve miles from the city, thereby increasing transport time, transport costs and the frustrations of mass peak hour travel. With this single and first stroke then, the basis was laid for reducing the vigour and quality of the worker, and draining him of all reserve to contribute to community life.

By 1956, tin shanties, became considerably reduced, though they never quite disappeared. Suburban hills began to be converted into regiments of brick and mortar. Between 1944 and 1968, the Government had built 64 040 houses.[12] In the meanwhile a need for an additional 80–90 000 houses[13] has accumulated, and the shortfall has become considerably aggravated by the Group Areas Proclamations since 1958 which affected 165 500 people in Durban at the time and which has since affected many more. According to the Minister of Community Development, up to 1968, 95 611 South African families had become displaced as a result of the Act, of which 41 807 had been resettled.[14] At the end of 1969, 123 000 Indian and Coloured families had put their names down for municipal housing in Durban.[15]. Judging by the rate at which building projects progress, it seems inevitable that inadequare, overcrowded living conditions must continue to be the lot of hundreds of thousands in Durban.

The implementation of the Group Areas Act has meant that Durban has had to cope, in addition to the problems common to all rapidly growing cities, with those problems peculiar to South African cities, forced into pampering the irrational ideology of apartheid. The removals have in effect led to the destruction of thousands of liveable homes because their standards or architectural styles were not in accord with the tastes of the whites to whom alone they could be transferred.

Today, the Group Areas Act, rather than any other single rational economic or humanitarian factor, determines the process of resettlement in South Africa. In fact the word "resettlement" is a complete misnomer in the South African experiment, since the effect of the Act is to unsettle rather than resettle, to eliminate non-whites from the cities and push them on to its peripheries. To the white executives and their white foremen, Chatsworth and Kwa Mashu are words, out of which their Black workers come by day and to which they safely recede by night.

The effect of the Act is that non-whites know only of uprooting, and little of resettling; they know removal and very little renewal, and they see the process as one of deprival and depletion of community life. Riverside, Prospect Hall, Cato Manor, Malvern, Seaview, Bellair, Hillary, Briardene, to name a few, were vibrant Indian communities, some a hundred and more years old, with schools, homes and churches, temples, mosques, cinemas and halls for marrying children, and feeding guests, and holding meetings so that the communities' attitudes and works could be seen in service to the poor, the blind, the sick, the young and old; so, too, that the communities' anger at indignities and voices raised in protest could be heard fearlessly. There were 3 300 families in Cato Manor, 16 temples, churches and mosques, 11 schools, 15 factories, 115 businesses, built and nurtured by the people.[16] In Riverside, welfare, social and political bodies bound the community, and thousands flocked to be strengthened spiritually at the shrine of an old saint.

The extent to which the Act has resulted in blatant and unashamed deprival, is observed in the case of Indians, the only non-white people with substantial property holdings at the time of the passing of the Act. In terms of Proclamations up to 1963, they were dispossessed of 6 638 acres of their original land holdings of 10 323 acres of rateable land in the Durban Municipality[17] and their residential and commercial activity was restricted to 14 of 74 districts and five additional zones of a total of 311 zones into which the 74 districts were divided in the Metropolitan area of Durban[18]. Worse still, the dispossession has taken place on terms dictated by the Government so that sales have been forced, at times, at prices far below municipal valuations. In 1964, an Indian owned property with a municipal valuation of R11 200 sold

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for R5 000, another valued at R960, sold for R50.[19] By contrast the prices of properties in the declared Indian areas have become so inflated that only the very small proportion of the wealthy are able to afford freehold land. Four half-acre lots at Isipingo realised R106 500 in 1968. In 1936, Indians owned a third of the properties they occupied (highest of all race groups).[20] A 1964/65 market research sample survey revealed Indian home ownership to be as high as 60 per cent. Today, this position has changed drastically. The average Indian can only hope to own a council house and never the land on which it is built. It is estimated that by 1990, over 90 per cent of Indians in Durban will be living in council houses.

Writing in 1958, Kuper, Watts & Davis, stated:

> "Displacement under the Group Areas Act will magnify the present acute housing shortage, while the increased difficulties of the journey to work will severely limit the energy and resources of the non-European for development work. These factors, coupled with the poverty of the non-Europeans and their consequent inability to make an effective financial contribution, must inevitably bring about a situation in which the great majority of the non-European settlements will have a low standard, not only of urban amenities, but of the basic necessities."[21]

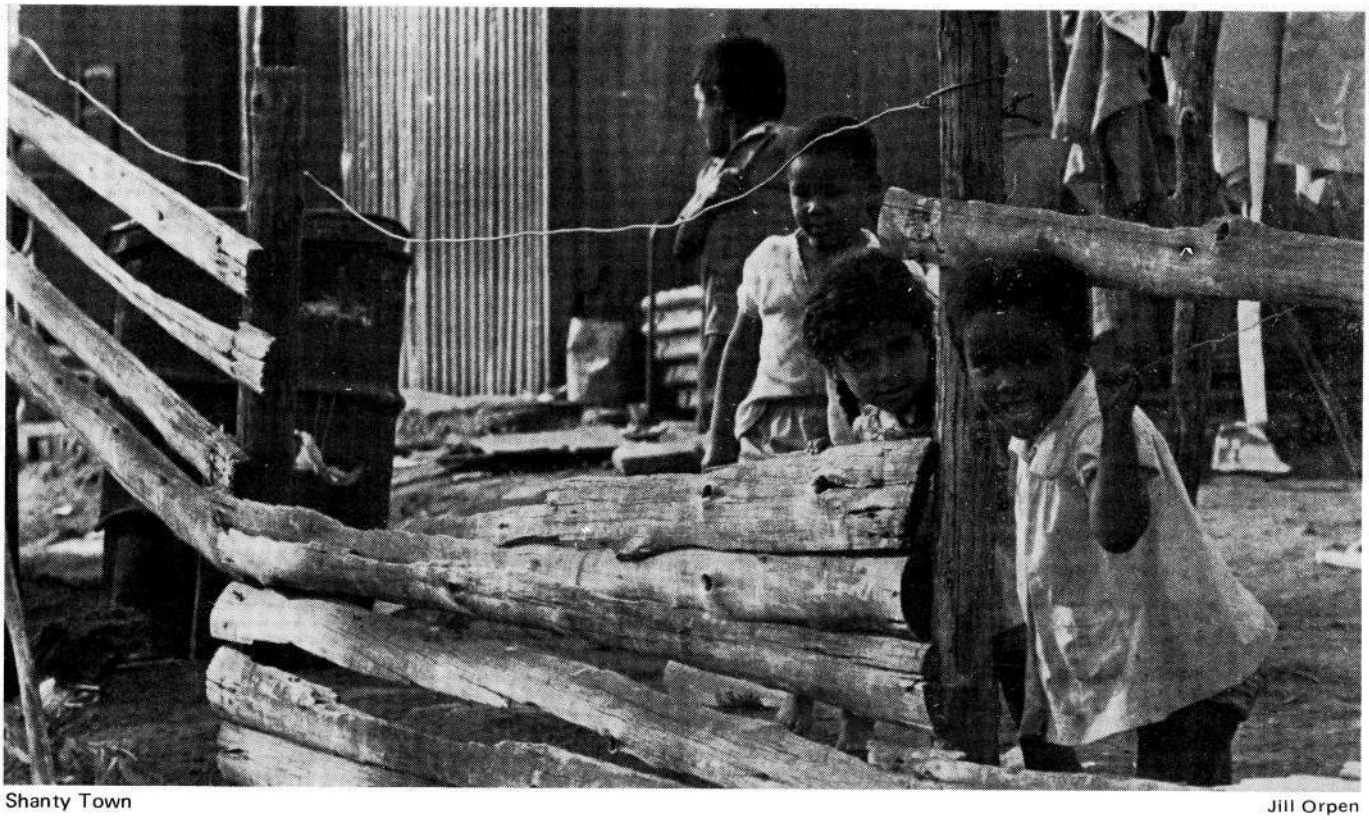
This has in fact occurred, whether the non-white areas have been set aside for private development, as is the case with Reservoir Hills, or massed with Council houses, the authorities have in each case done no more than provide the barest essentials. In Reservoir Hills road were laid out, their surfaces hardened and water, electricity and a refuse removal service provided. But there were no schools, no clinics, no public transport, no sewerage and no community buildings of any description, no parks nor playing fields. Today, twenty years later, two schools have been built yet rates are high, as high as those in white areas. In Chatsworth, apart from the addition of sewerage and building of schools at the outset, the situation is no different. The residents of Reservoir Hills, closer to town and with economic means, are in a position to fill in the gaps in their lives, but the Chatsworth dwellers are caught in their concrete capsules without adequate shopping facilities and no entertainment opportunities. They are unable to afford all but the most essential trips into town at 20 cents a time per person, invariably after having to undertake long walks on tediously undulating roads to bus stops.

South Africa's blue print for resettlement, follows a standard formula laid down by the National Housing Board. It consists of an enclosed space of 180 sq. ft. per couple or 530 sq. ft. [22] if there are ten or more persons in the family. Such units duplicated thousands of times, are placed on roads, which in the better projects are hardened. Electricity, sewerage and water may be laid on and schools may be built, and resettlement is considered complete. The maps will show sites for recreation, worship and even central metropolises, but since these depend on voluntary development, they will only occur when the residents can find the finances.

On the basis of this formula, Durban has assembled three gigantic housing complexes, since 1956 with populations exceeding 110 000 in each, and reaching 165 000 in one (Chatsworth). Extensions to two of the complexes, Chatsworth and Umlazi, will increase the population in each to 250 000 and 220 000 respectively.[23] These are the proportions of cities rather than residential suburbs. There were in 1965, 896 [24] cities in the world of these dimensions. But the similarity ends here. These housing complexes have not been designed as cities and they will never develop as cities. They are essentially the dormitories of urban workers and their families, and as such they have no economic viability of their own. In contrast to the vibrant heterogeneity and compelling variety of the city, they are characterised by a dulling uniformity and pervaded by an air of intellectual sterility. There is nothing to suggest that they now or will in the foreseeable future, constitute self contained societies, fulfilling for their members the interests, goals and designs for a complete and self sufficient society. They are the ghettos of the rejected, pushed away and out of the range of concern, sympathy and action of the more privileged members of Durban's Society. The tragedy is the tragedy of segregation, of discrimination. Twelve miles out of the city is a long way out and there, in their bleak environments, the non-whites, out of sight, out of mind, are left to their own poverty-stricken devices. If development is to take place at all, it must, as things stand, come from outside. In this respect Indians have an advantage, in that they possess a small affluent group and this group is religiously motivated to do good, but the proportion of this group in view of the changing economic structure of the Indian community, appears certain to decline.

But people do not like to have things done for them. They wish to be free and solvent so that they can do things for themselves, plan, build and develop their own activities and interests, for it is in this sense alone that they can grow into a community, that an assembly of households can fuse into society. But the process requires freedom and spontaneity.

In 1928, hundreds of families, many of whom had[25] formerly lived in slums, moved into the London housing estate of Wattling, overwhelmed by the strange and new and dejected by the sacrifices in time, money, energy, comfort and old friendships that the uprooting had cost. But within months the situation changed. Six enterprising persons called up a residents' meeting, 250 attended. They founded a local paper which took up local issues and reflected the needs and aspirations of the people. The association and its paper, began agitating for schools, transport, postal facilities, playing fields, a central park, discussed rents, represented the community's needs to the Local Relieving Officer, and pressed for proper representation on local Government. While pressing for the last, the Association negotiated successfully with various Government departments for improved and increased amenities, and established numerous committees, thereby creating institutions to cope with the specialised hobbies and worries of the residents. Hence, within a year, a district nursing association, a free legal advice service, a children's league, a dramatic society, a play reading circle, a loan club, a horticultural society, a women's guild an old comrades' association and branches of two political parties had become established. "Wattling" families were, as a result, quickly integrated into a community as was evidenced in the enthusiasm they displayed in all group activities and in voicing their feelings in the local paper.



Shanty Town

Jill Orpen

One may compare this example of dynamic growth with the experience in Chatsworth. In the absence of any substantial data, the interpretation is based on very general observations. Apparently, few voluntary associations have emerged and of these none appear to have the type of vital membership that could invigorate feelings of community and solidarity. The only group activities observably present, are those related to sport, religion and social welfare, but even with these, there is considerable dependence on outside help. Yet the Indian people have always had a strong tradition for voluntary associations and have in fact progressed their welfare, health, hospital and education services primarily on the basis of this tradition. The families in each of their original pre-Group Areas suburbs were bound and rebound through large numbers of varied associations. The explanation for the absence of associations in Chatsworth cannot thus be explained in terms of Indian apathy. The explanation, has to be sought elsewhere, and may well be found in both the physical and social environment of Chatsworth.

The Wattling study revealed that community life reached its peak when it was composed of 2 468 families, then declined progressively as the number of families inclined. This is best observed in the circulation of the local paper, which fell from 80 per cent to 24 per cent when the families had almost doubled.[26] It may be suggested, that the very largeness of Chatsworth vitiates against its easy development into a community.

But the problems that Chatsworth residents face are more complex than that of size. Voluntary associations, the life breath of community life, are stimulated by a sense of power, a feeling that through them things can be gained. The people in Chatsworth are hemmed in by too many restrictions and too many fears and the two combine to suggest to them that their security lies not in voicing their opinions, but concealing them. Associations, other than religious or sporting are considered dangerous, and associations that may be formed to promote their most urgent needs could easily fall into the category of the political and subversive. There is, hence, a fear of associations.

But probably the largest factor inhibiting the growth of associations in Chatsworth is the factor of poverty and time. Associations require leadership and leadership in all societies is usually provided by the upper and middle classes. In Chatsworth, the poor have been forced together into a homogeneous socio-economic mass and thereby sealed off from social experiences that invigorate and stimulate, through their variety and complexity.

It seems that all three of Durban's mass resettlement schemes or housing projects have developed in total contradiction to the recommendations of experts. Where they advocate or economic homogeneity for fear of breeding social minor- or economic heterogeneity for fear of breeding social minorities and exposing the wider society to tension and overt violence, the authorities have deliberately designed settlements for specific races, and specific socio-economic groups. Kuper et'al warned in 1958,[27] that the implementations of the Group Areas Act might well result in the creation of pariah communities, with high crime rates and other indications of social disorganization, and this is what has happened. In Chatsworth the respectable housewife points with disgust to the shebeens in her area, and tells you that you can also buy dagga there. These are new things in her life experience, and in order to be "saved" from these, she must shut her door against the street and keep her husband and children in the house. There are complaints that alcoholism is increasing and dens of prostitution are becoming a feature and in the absense of shops, there is an outcrop of other forms of illegal trade.

Chatsworth has already burst its seams. As many as 25 persons have been reported to be living in some two-roomed houses. 5 000 new homes are needed immediately to accommodate the families of married sons. But the two adjacent units of Bul Bul and Welbedacht, almost a tenth of the present Indian land allocation in Durban, have been declared unsuitable for development.

The future Indian housing development is planned in the Phoenix-Newlands complex for a population of 210 000. The drawing board presents a gallant effort not to repeat the monotony and friendlessness of Chatsworth. The houses, single, semi-detached, duplex, terraced and flats are grouped into clusters and neighbourhoods to accommodate populations of 4 000 and 8 000 respectively. Nursery schools, shopping and community centres, and children's "run abouts" are indicated to suggest the gathering together of peoples and founding of communities. But it is the sheer scale, the congestion and the poverty that are destroying Chatsworth, and nothing has changed in Government policy, to save Phoenix-Newlands.

Indian land values are highest of all in Durban. The Government, city council and Department of Community Development have sold residential plots of 5 000 and 10 000 sq. ft. for R5 000 and more. The cheapest sites, on undeveloped rural land, 18 miles from the city are offered to selected victims of Group Areas removals at R1 200–R1 500. Private township dwellers offer plots from R3 000–R12 000 in relatively undeveloped areas and for as much as R25 000 in the "choice" Indian areas more proximate to the city.

Indian townships are the most congested. Chatsworth, 4 700 acres in extent is planned for a population of 165 000: the African townships of Umlazi and Kwa Mashu, 10 000 and 3 700 acres respectively, for respective populations of 120 000 and 110 000. 2 014 dwellings per acre have been planned for Chatsworth and a density of 153.2 persons; 12.3 dwellings have been planned for Kwa Mashu, 10.00 for Umlazi and the density 73.9 and 16 persons respectively.

The ruling plot size in Kwa Mashu is 40 x 70 ft, in Umlazi 50 x 70 ft; in Chatsworth 25 x 90. The standard area per sub economic unit in Kwa Mashu is 523 sq. ft, in Umlazi 582 sq. ft. in Chatsworth 520. The average family size in Umlazi and Kwa Mashu is 6, in Chatsworth it is 7.5.

Chatsworth has been developed on Indian fruit farming land: it was expropriated from Indian farmers at an average price of R250 per acre. Economic houses have been sold to Indians at R4 000 per unit. The buyers in fact paying R8 000 by the time they redeem their capital. The authorities are bound to make enormous profits out of the whole scheme.

The buyers on the other hand must spend large sums of money to keep roof and walls together. The houses built by the Department of Community Development have been known to be poor, since the Department is exempt from all housing regulations.

Both the Department of Community Development and the City Council are hard landlords. Residents are expected to keep the homes in good repair at their own expense and may be summarily ejected for such breeches of the tenancy agreement as illicit dealing in liquor and default in payment of rentals. Evictions range from 10–60 per month.[29] But in the absence of freehold land, the exorbitant cost of building and rental in private housing, and the constant flow of removals in terms of Group Areas proclamations and urban expansion, the pressure on council housing and land is enormous.

Indian home ownership which was as high as 50 per cent prior to the Group Areas Act, has dwindled to an all time low today. In 1966 75 per cent of Durban's Indians lived on freehold land; by 1990, it is estimated that 90 per cent of Indians will be living in council houses.

The larger proportion of land in Indian Group Areas in the Durban region is in fact in white hands–in the hands of the Durban City Council and the Department of Community Development–and the proportion in such hands is bound to increase under separate development.

Consequently, any talk of Indian independence, Indian autonomy or Indian freedom in Indian Group Areas is a farce and Indians are deeply conscious of this. Accordingly local ratepayers' bodies have openly boycotted elections to the Local Affairs committees and the people have remained cold. Of a potential 2 00 000 voters in the two Durban zones in 1973, only 23 000 voted.

The Durban City Councils' studied neglect of its Black communities was recently highlighted by members of the Local Affairs Committee. Of a projected expenditure of R557 million for 1973–74, only 5,3 million rands was budgeted for Indian areas, whose population today far exceeds the whites. The budget for coloured areas is R749 410. The expenditure on white luxuries alone is higher than the total Black expenditure: R2,4 million for white Parks, R2 million for white sport, R0,5 million for white entertainment, R2,1 million for white beaches, R0,2 million for white libraries.

No allowance is made for Black entertainment, or beaches, and the niggardly sums of R0,09; R0,02 and R0,24 million rands are allotted to Black libraries, sporting and park facilities respectively.

The term resettlement is an obvious misnomer.□

For References see page 20.