



Evictions in the new South Africa: a narrative report from Durban

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Sleep is for those free at heart - not for the homeless

How can I sleep when life is so short?

How can I sleep when the homeless remain landless and
helpless?

How can I rest when I am so restless at heart?

Because even the house I am living in is not my home?

No peace, no security, no land, no home, no work, no rights
And I remain nobody

Because the body I live in

Has no home.

How can I sleep

Because this shack may burn at any time

How can I rest when pavement dwellers cannot sleep

Because drivers do not respect their existence?

How can we sleep when Johanna Road squatters

Might be evicted this morning?

How can we sleep when Clare Road squatters

Have no water to drink?

Sleep is dangerous for the homeless

We might wake up on another piece of land

Because they build houses not for people

But to accommodate the plans of experts.

Sleep was never a basic human right

It is a luxury and a privilege.

It does not mean that because it is dark I can sleep

Darkness means I must act

Quickly
 Before it is dawn
 Invade I must
 Lest I get nothing

How can I sleep
 When the little I have is at stake?
 When my future is in fat manicured hands
 Not even in reach of my blunted fingertips?

How can I sleep when they try to fob me off with toilets?
 And then tell me they are doing me a favour?
 When my ancient land rights
 Are mocked with tar roads and shithouses?

THE WHOLE WORLD is talking and congratulating itself about how Nelson Mandela and F. W. De Klerk have made progress in democracy. They have made some progress and they are honest in their efforts but while they are trying, homeless people continue to be evicted from their shacks. As the Transitional Executive Council prepares the way for non-racial elections, the suffering of homeless people continues. This paper describes what is currently occurring in Durban, one of South Africa's largest cities.

Durban is situated in the east of the country in Natal Province and is the largest seaport in South Africa. The city was established in 1824 and served as both a colonial port and commercial centre. By 1911, the city had 116,000 citizens, 45 per cent Indian, 37 per cent white and 18 per cent African. After the introduction of the apartheid society in South Africa in 1948, the municipal authorities began to introduce segregated "group areas" for each race living in the city.⁽¹⁾ People began to be moved into these new areas in 1958. The inner city areas and coastal regions (excluding the port area) were reserved for Whites. Black townships (KwaMasha, Umlazi and Klaarwater) were created on the periphery of the city. Over 50 per cent of Indians and nearly 70 per cent of Africans were moved to new residential areas which were far from the major centres of work.⁽²⁾

Cato Manor, a large concentration of African shack housing on the periphery of the city, housed over 120,000 people in 1957. Seven years later all the households had been moved to areas outside the city.⁽³⁾ Influx control legislation was intended to prevent Africans without work permits from living in urban areas. However, in Durban, as in other South African cities, Africans lived illegally in the black townships or settled informally on the periphery. Often they were arrested and sent back to the black homelands, only to return once more to the city in order to find a better livelihood.

Rushdale is a small settlement near Parlock about 20 kilometres from Durban. It used to be home to 60 families who had lived there for about ten years. Recently, all 60 households were evicted to Johanna Road, where another 40 households have joined them. This site is five kilometres from their previous homes. The place where they have been dumped is a very unsafe area. There is no

1. Davies, R. J. (1981), "The spatial formation of the South African city", *GeoJournal*, supplementary issue 2, pages 59-72.

2. Davies, R. J. (1991), "Durban" in Anthony Lemon (editor), *Homes Apart: South Africa's Segregated Cities*, Paul Chapman Publishing and Indiana University Press

3. See reference 2.

water suitable for household use, only a polluted river that floods the area after heavy rains. A few days after the community were moved to this place, one person drowned in the river.

Rushdale is an industrial area with heavy industry, mainly iron and steel factories. The working members of the community are employed in the factories located within the industrial area. Before they were evicted, the families were able to walk to their work. Now they have to pay the additional cost of public transport, about R1.00 (US\$0.20 each day). There are many waste disposal dumps in Rushdale. Many families used to earn their living by collecting scrap from the garbage dumps and selling it to recycling companies. Now these families cannot afford to pay for transport to get to the dumps and they have no other source of income.

These families were told by the authorities that they were living in Rushdale illegally. The area is an industrial estate and is considered unsafe for residence, therefore they were evicted from the land on which they were living. However, it is not considered unsafe for the thousands of factory workers who work at the site every day.

There is no guarantee that the families at Johanna Road will be allowed to remain in the area where they have been resettled. They have been given no legal right to the land they now occupy. A current joke in the community is that when the families return from the polling booths to vote for a democratic government on April 27th, they will find their shacks bulldozed to the ground.

Another community that has suffered from eviction is Cato Crest. This is the largest of three illegal settlements which together form Cato Manor. The settlement has existed for over 50 years and is now home to 2,500 families. It is located on the edge of a wealthy white residential area called Manor Gardens, about five kilometres from Durban city centre. Most people living in Cato Crest are not employed in the formal sector. Some make a living from selling fruit and vegetables, beer and other refreshments. Others work in small shops and factories providing services such as shoe repairs; or receive a small fee for carrying water from public taps and tanks.

There is a long history of evictions and the most recent occurred in November 1993. The Natal Provincial Administration and the Durban City Council sent in police officers to break down a long row of "shacks". The term is used to refer to houses on land to which the owner has no legal title; such houses are built of planks, corrugated iron, plastic and mud. The "shacks" in Cato Crest are between one and three rooms in size.

The shacks destroyed were those which were closest to the white residential area. The authorities are planning to introduce services in this area. They argue that these shacks have been built in the first area to be serviced and that the demolitions are necessary in order to install the services. However, the people are sceptical about this explanation. In the area adjacent to Manor Gardens, there is a lot of open land already identified for development, and the authorities could have started on this land. If the authorities wished to upgrade this particular area, it might have been possible to complete the work with the people remaining on the site. The people ask why the authorities could not have

discussed with them how to best organize the improvement services in the area and how to minimize disruption to those living in the shacks. However, the people suspect they know the real reason for the evictions. They are a "knee-jerk" response to the complaints of white residents of Manor Gardens who did not want black squatters as their neighbours.

Those evicted had few alternative sources of accommodation. Some moved in with their neighbours in Cato Crest, others moved to a site provided by the City Council which is further away from the centre of Durban.

Cato Crest is in a part of Durban that was originally inhabited by Blacks. The people living in the shacks have been returning to the places from which they were removed by apartheid urban planning procedures. They have a history and common bond with the land. During the 1950s, families were forced to move away from this area to KwaMashu and Chesterville. KwaMashu is far from Durban and is an African township set up to receive the populations expelled from African settlements in the city. Chesterville is a rental housing township established near to the centre of Durban in the 1940s in order to provide housing for African households. African households began moving back to Cato Crest in 1984.

Further evictions are expected in this area but the community is now working with the South African Homeless People's Federation and developing their resistance tactics. Those who have been evicted are being supported directly by the community and the Federation. The People's Dialogue is an NGO closely aligned with the South African Homeless People's Federation which works to support the people suffering eviction. It is helping to make residents more aware of evictions which are taking place through settlement surveys and helping with resistance tactics through a training programme to increase community organization. Other settlements in the Federation resist eviction through negotiating with landowners and refusing to respond to eviction threats.

Evictions are also taking place in other areas in Durban such as Hillcrest and in the surrounding rural areas. In Dukuduku, northern Zululand a game reserve has recently been established. A settlement existed in the bush next to the reserve and 600 families living there have been forcibly removed to reduce the threat to wildlife. To date, there has been no reaction from non-governmental organizations, the liberation organizations or the politicians. It is ironic that these groups often talk about land rights and land restitution for the people who were forcibly removed (from land on which they were legally settled) during the years of apartheid. However, on this practical issue, they have failed to support the people.