

**SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY  
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**Breaking the web: Economic consequences of the destruction of extended families by Group Areas relocations in Cape Town**

**by**

**Don Pinnock**

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As families labelled coloured were being moved out of Harfield Village to make way for white developers, a graffiti slogan appeared across the walls of two Wesley Street houses. In letters a metre high it read: THE GROUP IS KILLING MY PEOPLE.

The terrible truth of this slogan has yet to be systematically tested and the effects of Group Areas removals remains largely impressionistic. The first casualties were the old people. Thousands died as the machinery of the Act tore into the old established neighbourhoods. Among five families who were my immediate neighbours in Harfield Village, two elderly people died after their families received eviction notices and a third had a heart attack within weeks of removal.

But these deaths were only part of the misery that the intra-city relocations were to cause. A less apparent effect was the destruction of social webs and the complex network of household commodity production and services which depended upon them. Because what gave way before the racist geopolitics was the extended family - the social and economic life-raft of the old ghettos. Not only were the fragile economic threads broken by the mass removals, but they were prevented from being re-spun on the hostile sands of the Cape Flats because the extended families could not reconstitute themselves in houses built around the bourgeois ideal of the nuclear family. Families were either hopelessly overcrowded or smashed.

The 'setting free' of relatively unskilled labour in this way is an important factor in the creation of poverty at the lower end of the working class scale in Cape Town.

#### The move to town

Initially working class migration into Cape Town was a circular one undertaken mainly by young job-seekers. But as the transition from an agrarian economy to an industrial one gathered pace it became a one-way flow of whole families. By the 1920s the march of the poor into Cape Town was being described by city administrators as 'formidable'. Between 1904 and 1960 the population in all towns in South Africa had increased by 83.2%. But the population increase in the nine principal urban areas between 1921 and 1968 was no less than 420%. From 1936 to 1970 the percentage of urbanised people in the Cape described as 'coloured' rose from 55% to 72%.

As far back as 1867 District Six was considered as being overcrowded, and for the next 100 years migration into the area continued almost unabated. In 1936 the official census put the population of the District at 22,440 and in 1946 at 28 377. Four years later it was nearly double, at about 40 000. Many families in the area were extremely poor, living for generations by working at odd jobs here and there, scratching out a living by economic enterprise which counted its profits in halfpennies and farthings.

Various types of employment at these levels are shown in court records of the time:

Tom Kalosa came to Cape Town from Queenstown. In 1907 he was working as a carter, with his own horse and cart. He supplemented his income by selling yeast to denti-brewers in the Ndabeni location. He himself lived in Maitland. He made about £2 a week, but had to set aside 2/- for yeast and 3/- for his horse's stable.

Alfred Boois or Boyse, born in Basutoland about 1889, was in East London in 1907. In 1911 he was earning his living as an egg hawker in Cape Town selling eggs at 2/- a dozen to large houses in Sea Point and the Gardens.

Sayid Kahn was an Afghan who came to Cape Town about 1901. He set up as a mattress-maker in Dorp Street, employing six or seven workmen who slept on the premises and were liable to dismissal if they did not return to their rooms by ten at night. He later also acquired a small soda-water factory. He was suspected of receiving stolen property.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the migrations into Cape Town it was always the extended family which was the catch-net of the urban poor. Within it were people whom could be trusted implicitly, those who would give assistance willingly, immediately, and without counting the cost. In major calamities like losing one's job or a death in the family, it was kinfolk who rallied to support first, and those whose support lasted longest. Kin were also people who helped to find employment, accommodation, and who bribed or bailed one out of the clutches of the law. They were, in short, indispensable<sup>2</sup>. In a hostile and uncaring world, extended families were the domain within which the strategies of survival were worked out.

Central to the health of the family, of course, was working class wages. South Africa, like most Third World colonies, paid its workers an extremely low wage, which had to be conserved and stretched. The poor responded to this situation in typical fashion: They created systems of redistribution which helped meagre incomes extend to the limits of their elasticity. These patterns of redistribution percolated through social networks and money finally found its way into the pockets of those who were unable to find wage employment. It was above all a social form of redistribution, operating among friends, neighbours, workmates, acquaintances and friends of friends<sup>3</sup>.

In District Six, informal business arose simply from the obstinate desire of people in the urban area to stay alive. It acted as a buffer against unemployment and kept at bay (for a time at least) the full effects of increasing urbanization, low wages and unemployment. The extended family was the ground floor of these small-scale economic activities. In 1937 a Commission of Inquiry found that

the entire Cape Coloured family in the urban areas very often forms the earning unit, the income of the parents and one or more of the children being pooled to meet household needs<sup>4</sup>.

District Six, particularly, became known for the ingenuity, novelty and enterprise of its residents engaged in this small-scale production and services. By day it hummed with trade, barter and manufacture, and by night it offered the 'various pleasures of conviviality or forgetfulness'.

The place has more barber shops to the acre than anywhere else in Africa (wrote Brian Barrow in 1966) some of them with great-sounding names like the Rio Grande Hairdressers. There are all sorts of alleys and lanes with names like Rotten Row, Drury Lane and Lavender Hill. There are tailors by the score, herbalists,

butchers, grocers, tattoo artists, cinemas, bars, hotels, a public bath house, rows of quaint little houses with names like "Buzz Off" and "My Murry" and there is a magnificent range of spicy smells from the curry shops. The vitality and variety in the place seem endless and the good-humour of the people inexhaustable.

Go into one of the fruit and vegetable shops and you soon realize how the very poor manage to live. In these shops people can still buy something useful for 1c. They can buy one potato if that is all they can afford at the moment, or one cigarette. You can hear them ask for an "olap patisellie" (a penny's worth of parsley), a "tikkie tamaties" or a "tikkie swart bekkies" (black-eyed beans), a "sixpense soup-greens", an "olap knofelok"(garlic) or an "olap broos", which means a penny's worth of bruised fruit.<sup>5</sup>

But through all this the extended families maintained the vital relationships in the struggle for survival in the District and other similar areas. They provided accommodation, limited capital and labour for small-scale production and services, as well as maps of meaning for migrants from the countryside. But they provided more than this: they reproduced the relationships of social control.

Then in 1961 large areas of the city were declared 'white group areas' and coloureds were given notice to vacate. Working class culture in the declared areas began to crumble. People displaced by the Group Areas Act moved into District Six and overcrowding worsened. In 1965 the Minister of Community Development, P.W. Botha, called the District a 'blighted area' and talked of slum clearance . . . setting the scene for events to follow. Newspapers began reporting an 'alarming' rise in stabbings, assaults, drunkenness and child desertions. The Society for the Protection

INCOME OPPORTUNITIES IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR  
IN DISTRICT SIX, CAPE TOWN IN THE 1990s

FORMAL income opportunities

- (a) Public sector wages
- (b) Private firms (wages, dividends, etc.)
- (c) Transfer payments - pensions, unemployment, benefits, workmen's compensation.

SEMI-FORMAL income opportunities : legitimate

- (a) Domestic labour - wages, payment in kind.

INFORMAL income opportunities : legitimate

- (a) Productive and secondary activities - building contractors and associated activities, self-employed artisans, shoe-makers, tailors, knitters, carvers, artists, sweetmeats, samoosas, lace makers.
- (b) Transporters - taxis, trucks, carts, bicycles.
- (c) Distribution enterprises - robbing, commodity speculation, rentier activities.
- (d) Small-scale distribution - market operatives, petty traders, street hawkers, caterers in food and drink, jumble sellers, legal lending, wood sellers.
- (e) Other services - musicians, launderers, shoeshiners, hairdressers, photographers, vehicle repair and other maintenance workers, tinkers, ritual services, magic and medicine, scrap collectors.
- (f) Small-scale renting
- (g) Private transfer payments - gifts and similar flows of money and goods between persons, borrowing, begging, inheritance, lobola.

INFORMAL semi-legal

- (a) Protection rackets, shebeens, begging, scrap recycling, pawnbroking.

INFORMAL income opportunities : illegal

- (a) Production - liquor
- (b) Services - hustlers and spivs in general, receivers of stolen goods, usury, drug pushing, prostitution, poncing, pilot boy, smuggling, bribery, political corruption, protection rackets, touts for courts, pickpockets.
- (c) Transfers - petty thefts, pickpocketing, bag snatchers, burglary, armed robbery, speculation and embezzlement, confidence tricksters, gambling, fahfee.

of Child Life doubled its number of social workers in the District. In the insecurity the informal economy began to collapse and landlords allowed buildings to go unrepaired. Both the overt and the subtle forms of social control in the ghetto began to fall apart. But before looking at the social effects of the removals which were to follow, we must briefly view the industrial expansion which took place in Cape Town from the early 1940s:

#### The wartime boom

The wartime industrial expansion in the city took place first through the extension of existing factories geared for increased production. Much of this industry was small-scale and labour-intensive. In textile production, for example, more than half the firms had plant and machinery worth less than £100, and 75 percent of all manufacturing in the early 1940s had equipment valued at under £1 000. When the war ended in 1945 the boom conditions were to continue. In the five years which followed, the number of industrial establishments in the Western Cape increased by 33 percent from 1 446 to 1 928, and the labour force by 36 percent.

However this boom was to be temporary - and even at its height it had its negative side. In Cape Town a whole stratum of self-employed workers and crafts-people were being wiped out by factory production, which could do their jobs more cheaply. A good example is the clothing industry.

Factory production of clothing began in Cape Town in 1907, although rubber waterproofs had been produced since 1889. Before that all clothing was made by private tailors and seamstresses. Most of them were Malay, with skills handed down from parent to child since the early days of slavery. They formed an important source of income for areas such as District Six and the Malay Quarter. In the early 20th century these producers began experiencing competition from recent immigrants from Central Europe. Because these new arrivals were white, they tended to have better access to capital and were able to expand out

of family business into factory production. By 1930 there were 135 clothing factories in the city and by 1952 clothing was the third largest industry in South Africa. By 1965 there were about 30 000 employees in the industry comprising a third of Cape Town's labour force. Small tailors were being ruined by off-the-peg clothing and were increasingly incorporated into the factories as cutters - a department which today remains a male enclave in a female-dominated industry.

One survival tactic in the face of large but standardised opposition was the production of uniforms for the Coon Carnival, <sup>with</sup> uniforms so gaudy, varied and cheap that no factory would consider their production. The origins of the Carnival are obscure. One tradition has it that it began as a celebration of slave emancipation, another that it was started by American negroes from a sailing ship which docked at Cape Town. The occasion still has an American Deep South flavour about it. The word 'coon' probably comes from 'raccoon' and troupe members still paint their faces to look like the animal.

The annual reproduction of the carnival owed more to the tradition of the city's working class than to anything else. Troupe members got nothing out of it but fun and a sense that it was 'their thing'. But it is significant that the rise in popularity of the carnival coincided with the growth of clothing factories in Cape Town. The Carnival was, and still is, run by several 'boards' which, importantly, were very often tailor-dominated. These advanced money to various 'captains', who more often than not were shebeen owners or gang leaders. Throughout the year troupe members would lodge an amount of money with a tailor who would undertake to make their uniform for the big occasion on New Year's day. In about October the practices would begin, the captain having a ready troupe of shebeen regulars or gang members. After Christmas the uniforms would arrive in the troupe's colours. Often these were made of Japanese satin in purples,

yellows, greens and gold: frock coats, pin-striped trousers with top hats, white gloves and bow-ties. In 1940 the required five yards of satin could be bought for 1/11d. The tailor would sell the uniform for 5/6d. Today a uniform costs R13 and is sold for R25.

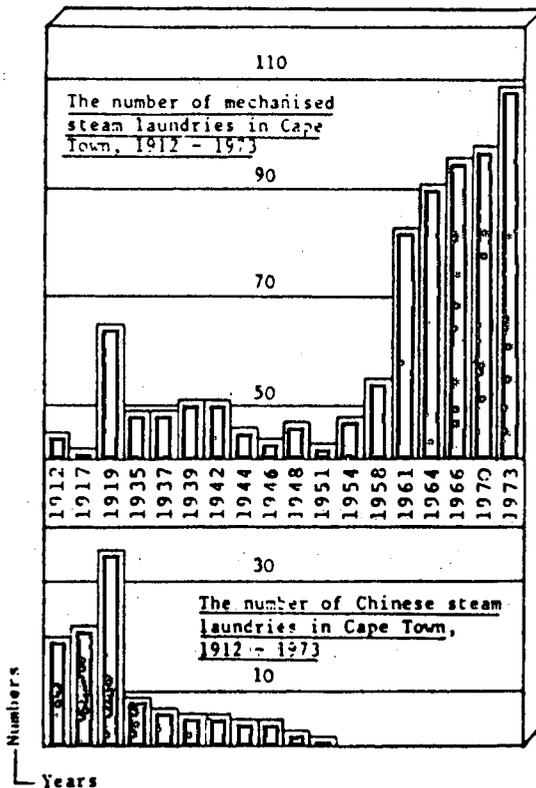
The first three days of each new year would afford the sight of thousands of hardened toughs in top hats and tails, faces painted black with large white lips, high stepping through the streets behind a banjo, bass and drum singing 'moppies' to admiring crowds. The celebration would end with huge drink and dagga parties which would start everyone off on the new year with a terrible headache.

The Carnival reached its height in the mid-1960s (a time when there were more than 200 clothing factories in the city). But by the 1970s it was on the decline. Because of the latent violence of the gang troupes and their illicit activities (and not without pressure from the City Council) the Carnival was driven off the streets and into stadiums. There it lost much of its spontaneity and popular support. The family tailors, who were responsible for re-generating the event each year, were also being moved out of the reach of their customers by urban relocations. Their businesses collapsed and they were unable to exist on the Carnival alone or raise the money to forward to the captains. Fierce competition between the boards also split the Carnival into smaller fractions and decreased profits. The result was the elimination of a whole stratum of small-scale family enterprise and its absorption into the factory system or its eviction into unemployment.

In many ways the history of women clothing workers parallels that of the men, but there are important differences. Since slave days Malay women had been skilled seamstresses. Until about 1900 they were the major manufacturers of women's clothing in the city. The growth of factories drove these women out of home

production and into wage employment alongside the tailors. But another avenue for working class women was to take in laundry. This tradition went back to the early days of the colony, with washing done first on the slopes of Table Mountain and later in public wash-houses.

This was clearly a profitable line of work and bigger entrepreneurs, taking the situation as they found it, were soon muscling in on the market. By 1912 there were 45 steam laundries in the city, most of them run by Chinese. A boom for laundries came during the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918 when white customers feared contamination of their washing in the ghetto wash houses.



The number of washerwomen was inversely proportional to the number of laundries which averaged at around 45 until 1961. A change which did occur during this period was the eclipse of Chinese laundries by larger enterprises spearheaded by Nannucci.<sup>7</sup> In 1961 population removals moved the washerwomen away from both the wash-houses and their customers in the white suburbs, and the number of steam laundries increased dramatically. Thousands of women lost their jobs, and while some maintained their independence by becoming day-chars, many others turned to the factories for employment.

The early post-war period in District Six is described by a textile worker, Elizabeth Weeder:

My daddy came from Malmesbury during the war. He was in the Cape Corps so we came to live in District Six. Everything was going there! Hundreds of shops up Hanover Street and flower sellers, tailors, coal merchants, wood sellers and so many hawkers. And barber shops. Where can you get a good barber shop today? Or a shoemaker?

I went to work in a factory after I got married. We needed money. Lots of women worked in factories all along Sir Lowry Road - there was Bucannans sweets and Fairweather clothing and Baumanns Biscuits and the fez factory. First I worked at Cork and Crown as a machine operator, doing man's work on the oak shive, making fishing net cork floats. Then I did beer-bottle tops. There was more money in factories than in service, though lots of women did washing at the Wash House in Hanover Street. Then I went to Fairweather. I was sewing shoulder pads on men's suits. Everything by hand. There were thousands of girls in that place, with supervisors to help or see we didn't talk.

It was hard work - especially with that production business. You see if you made five garments an hour normally, and then you made 10, they would pay you more. Towards Christmas you would work, work to get more money - the whole day Saturday and half of

Sunday too. It was tiring - but every penny counts. There were big families and they could look after the children. Today these are no more and women must give up work for the children. Or they just leave the children.

The cutters were always men. They had been tailors usually. There were plenty of tailors before, but then they became less. You would buy your own cloth and they would make a suit. Also with the Coon Carnival... every week you would give a bit of money to the tailor and when you need your suit for the Carnival its paid for. The Carnival is how the tailors could live. Most of the women who worked in the District were in factories. It cost me 8c to take a bus from Fairweather to home. Now think how much it costs from Mitchells Plain! (Interview: December 1981)

In the post-war boom working class women in the city were able to take up factory work because of the supportive structure of extended families which allowed child care to continue despite the absence of mothers. Clothing factory owners exploited this fact to secure cheap female labour. In the poorer communities women came to be relied upon as a source of income and the whole orientation of the culture began to swing around this fact. Often women became the key breadwinners. But with the urban relocations of the 1960s extended families were broken up and working mothers were faced with the choice of giving up work or abandoning their children to neighbours, older children or the streets. In 1973 a report on the causes of absenteeism among coloured industrial workers concluded that:

when the coloured people lived in their old residential communities, a considerable degree of co-operation existed between them in minding children when women were at work. In the clothing industry alone there are about 40 000 actively employed females.

The rings closest to the centre are represented by the man's immediate and extended family and his closest friends. The next would represent his acquaintances, his church, his school and the clubs he frequents. Other rings represent his employer, his transport and communications, the shops he frequents, the municipal and other officials he meets, his doctor, the police, the postman, the tax official. The anchors of the web represent the customs, habits and moral concepts of the community in which he lives.

Each individual has his own personal web which varies in size and complexity according to the impact he makes on those around him and the influence he wields in the community. His usefulness to and within the community is determined entirely by the freedom with which he is able to move in and about his web, his knowledge of its structure and the facility with which he is able to make contact with the correct position of the web at the correct time. <sup>10</sup>

Above all, as we have seen, what was unsettled by group areas inroads into the culture of the older districts was the position and role of the working-class family. With it was ploughed up relationships, networks of knowledge, experiences and urban objects: the supports of the culture. The effects of group areas removals (to continue Wollheim's analogy) were:

Like a man with a stick breaking spiderwebs in a forest. The spider may survive the fall, but he can't survive without his web. When he comes to build it again he finds the anchors are gone, the people are all over and the fabric of generations is lost. Before, there was always something that kept the community ticking over and operating correctly . . . there was the extended family, the granny and grandpa were at home, doing the household chores and looking after the kids. Now, the family is taken out of this environment where everything is safe and known. It is put in a matchbox in a strange place. All social norms have suddenly been abolished. Before, the children who got up to mischief in the streets were reprimanded by neighbours. Now there's nobody and they join gangs because that's the only way to find friends."

The communities were broken-up when the coloureds were resettled. They found themselves among strangers. The same degree of co-operation in looking after children has not yet developed. This has no doubt increased absenteeism and unpunctuality.

### The breaking of the web

If Group Areas removals and the development of the factory system were to disrupt economic relationships, they were to have disastrous effects on social relationships. As the familiar social landmarks in the closely-grained working-class communities of the old city were ripped up, a whole culture began to disintegrate. This culture included maps of meaning which made life intelligible to its members. These 'maps' were not simply carried around in people's heads, they were inscribed in the patterns of social organisation and relationships through which people became social individuals. These patterns tended to involve three elements: The extended kinship network, the ecological setting of the neighbourhood, and the structure of the local economy (which provided income for as large number of people, although at a low level of income)<sup>9</sup>.

In Cape Town, although working-class neighbourhoods were geographically bounded by outside forces and penetrated by them (in the form of schools, police etc.) they were places in which different levels of the working class had won space for their own forms of life. These spaces were both physical (the networks of streets, houses, corner shops and shebeens) and social (the networks of kin, friendships, neighbourhood and work). They were a mixture of rights and obligations, intimacies and distances giving a sense of solidarity, local loyalties and traditions. The former warden of the Cape Flats Distress Association, Dr. Oscar Wollheim, has described this as a 'web of interlocking mutual interest':

The collapse of social control over youths was one of the major problems facing the working class as their culture began to buckle in both rural and inner city areas. This informal control was described to John Western during his work on the suburb of Mowbray:

When I was 15 or 16 if we did anything rude, offhanded in the street - like going to bars or smoking or taking a dame out - you'd get a pak (Slap) at night at home, they (parents) knew about it right away . . . It was the old men who used to stand at the corners chatting or sit on the stoeps; they'd pretend to be reading the Koran or a comic or playing kerrem or whatever, but out of the corner of their eye they were really watching you.<sup>12</sup>

It was this almost intangible but very real cement which held together the class culture, and one of the greatest complaints of group areas removals was that individual people were moved to the Cape flats and not whole neighbourhoods.

#### The social pressures of removal

The stresses resulting from the above changes brought with them psychological difficulties and skewed 'coping' behaviour. Marital relations were upset and the divorce and desertion rate rose; parent/child relationships were made difficult - often because the father's sense of inadequacy in his new environment.

Between 1961 and 1965, years which saw both rising industrial prosperity and mass relocations of people, there was a coloured baby boom. One can only speculate about its causes, but the relationship between crisis and a high level of childbirth is well known.

By 1980 the effects of the boom could be felt in the 15-19 age group - the core age of the emerging street gangs. Another indicator of social disruption was the 'coloured' illegitimacy rate, which nearly doubled between 1956 and 1981. (It is interesting that this rate declined during the 1950s, began rising in 1961 when the first group areas were declared in the city, went up sharply in 1976 after 'coloureds' were told to vacate District Six, and then climbed alarmingly between then and 1976, the period of the greatest evictions).

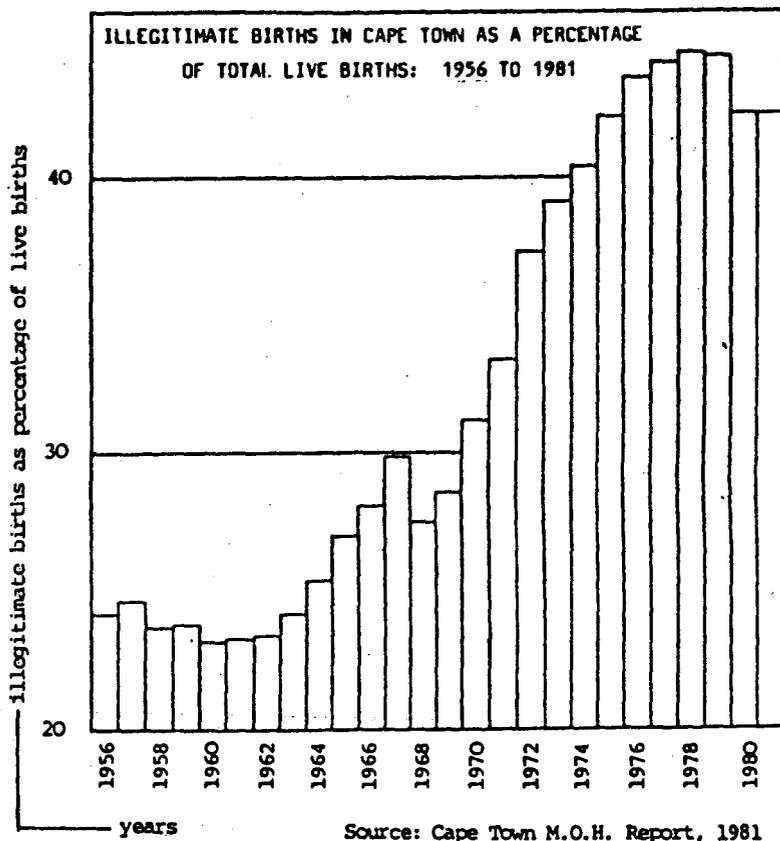
In 1974 the Theron Commission found that more than 82% of all births to coloured women under the age of 20 were illegitimate. The findings of the Commission bear stark testimony to the breakdown of extended families which followed. It found a sharp decrease in what it called 'non-members' of nuclear families between 1960 and 1970 and a marked increase in single-parent families in the urban area. It was pointed out to the Commission that:

it was very difficult indeed for parents with children of different sexes living in a house with only two or three rooms in a neighbourhood with few, if any, community amenities, to give their children a decent upbringing.

The Commission concluded that:

no other statutory measure had evoked so much bitterness, mistrust and hostility on the part of the coloured people as the Group Areas Act.<sup>13</sup>

This statement merely echoed that of Wollheim, who in 1960 had warned that 'we can look forward to a period of increasing social dislocation which will have its roots in no other causes but in the application of the



(Group Areas) Act<sup>14</sup>. The actual scale of removals became apparent in interviews done in 1981.

Of the 550 people interviewed on the Cape Flats, 43% had been moved by group areas legislation<sup>15</sup>. To assess the effect of these removals on family life, I made a comparison between life and culture in an existing 'inner city' area (Lower Claremont or Harfield Village) and the Cape Flats to which people had been relocated.

At the time of the survey Harfield was a suburb 'in transition' to a white group area, and only about 100 coloured families remained. The average

period of residence there was 19 years, although more than 10% had been there 50 years or longer. The average number of people in each house was 5.1. What was significant about the area was the high number of people available for what might be described as 'crisis support'. Eighty per cent of the people interviewed had relations in Harfield and 82% had close friends in the area - this was despite the fact that 65% had seen related families moved from the village by Group Areas. There was no creche in Harfield. Of those interviewed 68% looked after their own children and 27% relied on relations to do this. In total 95% of children under 16 were taken care of within extended families, the remaining 5% being minded by friends. In comparison with the Cape Flats this shows an extremely high level of family-based child care, as can be seen here:

A COMPARISON OF CHILD CARE IN  
HARFIELD VILLAGE AND ON THE CAPE FLATS

	HARFIELD	CAPE FLATS
Children looked after by mother	68	46.5
Children looked after by relations	20	9.0
Children looked after by older child	7	4.9
Children looked after by friends	5	4.9
Children looked after by creche	0	15.6
Children looked after by nobody	0	18.5
	100%	100%
Children looked after by mother/relation	95%	60.4%

These surveys can only hint at the very complex and diverse nature of the first effect of the move into the Cape Flats high-rise schemes was as follows:

It can be seen that on the Cape Flats a high percentage of children under 16 received no parental care during the day, while about 16% were placed in creches. Harfield had all the benchmarks of a stable supportive community. This was also the case in Mowbray, where John Western found an average residency of 33 years and where 70% of his interviewees were related to at least one other physically separate household.

The Cape Flats survey was specifically of mothers living in 35 different housing estates. The types of accommodation in which they lived were:

- house 56%
- flat 19%
- shanty 14%
- rented room 11%

The average number in each dwelling was 7.3 and the average length of residency was 14 years.

Of the sample, 44% of the Cape Flats mothers were working, and 25% were raising a family without a husband. To draw out changes in living patterns, they were asked about their own childhoods, and then about their own children. The figures showed a marked historical fall-off in access to family networks of child care:

	INTERVIEWEES AS CHILD	INTERVIEWEES' OWN CHILDREN
Relations living in same house	32%	14%
Easy walking access to relations	70%	50%
Looked after by mother or relations	97%	60%

When asked about any problems they were having, the largest number of mothers said it was fear of gangs and lack of police protection.

These surveys can only hint at the misery caused by group areas. The first effect of the move into the Cape Flats high-rise schemes was to destroy the function of the street, the corner shop and the shebeens as 'safe' communal space. The new areas contained only the privatized space of family units, stacked on top of each other in total isolation, juxtaposed with the totally public space which surrounded them, a space which lacked any of the informal social controls generated by the neighbourhood.

The destruction of the neighbourhood street also blew out the candle of household production, craft industries and services. The result was a gradual polarization of the labour force into those with more specialized, skilled and better paid jobs, and those with the dead-end, low paid jobs and unemployment. As the distribution pattern of new housing dispersed the kinship network, the isolated family could no longer call on the resources of the extended family or the neighbourhood.

The family itself became the sole focus of solidarity. But this meant that any problems were bottled up within the immediate interpersonal context which produced them; and at the same time the family relationships gathered a new intensity to compensate for the diversity of relationships previously generated through neighbours and kinship networks. Pressures built up which the newly nucleated families were unable to deal with. The working-class family was thus not only isolated from the outside, but also from within.

The main - and understandable - product of this isolation was fear - fear of neighbours, fear of unknown people, fear of gangs and fear of the strange noises in the new place.

These pressures on the Cape Flats weighed heavily on the housebound mother. The street was no longer a safe place to play and there were no longer neighbours or kin to supervise children. The only playspace

that felt safe was 'the home', usually a tiny flat. As the strange new forces began to build up within the nuclear family, what had once been a base for support and security now tended to become a battleground, a major focus of all the anxieties created by the disintegration of community structures.

One route out of the claustrophobia of family life was through the use of alcohol and drugs. Many men took this path. Children were shaken loose in different ways. One way was through early sexual relationships and perhaps marriage. Another was into the fierce youth subcultures on the streets - often in opposition to the parent culture. An attempted resolution of the problem of the working class family became ritualized in the violent youth gang culture on the streets, a consequence which simply reinforced the climate of fear. The situation was to be compounded by rising unemployment at the younger end of the potential labour force.

#### WORKLESSNESS IN A DIVIDED CITY

The breakdown of family control and the collapse of a specific ghetto culture tended to force the control of youth out of the hands of working-class culture and into the state institutions. But a parallel phenomenon was taking place over employment.

With the elimination of a wide range of jobs in the domestic sphere, more and more people were compelled to rely on employment in the form of wage labour. For many workers this forced a dependency on white employers. In the boom years this was not unduly problematical as factories sprang up in the city alongside their support industries and services. Between 1961 and 1974 production in South Africa grew at an average rate of 5.5% a year.

But these conditions, as we have seen, were not to last. Although the country's exports increased 4 times over this period, its imports increased 6 times.

This trade imbalance was compensated by foreign loans, and their interest alone increased from R28 million in 1966 to R759 million in 1979. Its dependent industrialization, linking it into the world system forced South Africa to catch the disease of recession in the early 1970s, causing industry to alter its optimistic estimates. By 1975 the country's growth rate fell to 2%. By 1977 it was lower, and by 1978 there was an absolute drop in production of some 25%.

South Africa's dependent status in the world economy occurred mainly because its industrial revolution took place in the 1940s, a time when the world system was already at an advanced stage of development. The international market was by then largely under the domination of monopoly capital. This position prevented the development in South Africa of a fully autonomous 'national economy'. To accumulate wealth, therefore, South African industrialists and commodity producers had the choice of producing for an extremely small white or extremely poor black local market, or submitting themselves to terms laid down in a competitive world market over which they had little influence. On the world market furthermore, effective competition increasingly required economies of scale - huge concentrations of investment using advanced machinery and techniques to produce cheaply for mass markets. Only the giant monopolies were able to afford this level of investment.

However, South Africa maintained a favoured access to world markets through its natural resources - mainly gold and diamonds. On the basis of this wealth the state was able to enter areas vital to the growth of industry,

such as electricity, iron, steel, fuel, and transport, areas involving enormous outlays that no individual industrialist could afford. The state in 1982 was the largest single investor and employer, and 57% of all plant and machinery was under its control.

But these developments resulted in an even closer integration of the national economy with the world economy, subjecting it more directly to upswings and downswings in world capitalism. In world terms, manufacturing was a poor relation to mining. It had to rely on local markets; even its natural markets to the north were largely closed off for political reasons. But here a paradox arose. To keep the costs of products relatively low, industry had to rely on the availability of cheap labour. Yet cheap labour meant low wages. And as the greatest market for commodities was the working class, this meant low purchasing power. The only way out of this problem was an almost endless extension of credit by way of hire-purchase agreements. But eventually the bill had to become due, and the poor remained a poor market.

In the recession of the 1970s manufacturers had two choices to maintain viability - to lower real wages or to mechanise, prune products and fire workers. Both these alternatives they set about doing. Between 1978 and 1980 alone real wages declined 20% through inflation. A rand in 1970 was worth 36c in 1981<sup>17</sup>. Between 1977 and 1979 unemployment rose by an estimated half a million to around two million. In Cape Town in the 1970s these developments were to compound older employment problems for the city's workers, problems related to labour preference policies and the destruction of the domestic economy.

Official figures on unemployment - and particularly on under-employment - have built-in problems which limit their usefulness. Among economically active people in South Africa, Charles Simkins found the 1979 unemployment figure to be around two million<sup>18</sup>. But government figures for the same year put unemployment at a little under half a million. Usually differences arise over definitions of non-employment, leading to

what is called 'hidden unemployment' (hidden, that is, to statisticians but very visible to the poor). An attempt to obtain a clearer picture in a single Cape Flats housing estate, Bishop Lavis, was made in 1982 by James Thomas and Andrea Blau<sup>19</sup>. They found official stats. to be unhelpful because of their very narrow definition of unemployment. The definition used in the monthly Current Population Survey, holds that a person is unemployed if he or she is potentially economically active and:

- (1) wants to work;
- (2) does not work (has worked less than five hours in the past seven days);
- (3) has tried to find work during the previous month;
- (4) is able to accept a position within one week;
- (5) is between the ages of 15 and 64 if male, and 15 and 59 if female.

On this basis the unemployment rate for Bishop Lavis in 1981 was 9.5% of the economically active population.<sup>20</sup>

Thomas and Blau expanded their definition of unemployment to include:

any member of the economically active population who was not working and wanted to work, regardless of whether they were looking for work or not.<sup>21</sup>

The only people excluded from the category of economically active were full-time students, those permanently medically unfit to work, those voluntarily retired and housewives not desiring work<sup>22</sup>.

With this definition the unemployment rate was found to be 13.9%. More than 63% of a sample of 2086 people in Bishop Lavis were found to have an income of R9 a week or less. Just over 60% of those questioned had not worked during the previous 12 months.

METHOD	MEN PERCENTAGE	WOMEN PERCENTAGE
Odd Jobs	8.5	5.6
Family help	78.4	8.6
Friends help	2.6	3.9
Pension	1.3	-
Savings	3.3	1.7
Unemployment Benefit	0.7	1.1
Other	2.0	1.7

Using a broad definition, Thomas and Blau found the number of economically active people who were under-employed to be as high as 68%. This gives a combined figure for the under-use of labour of just under 82%.

It is precisely here that exponents of 'informal sector' development seek to intervene. It is ironic that in the interests of urban stability, (and under a guise of old-fashioned liberalism) they are seeking to restore to ghetto entrepreneurs what a century of Commissions and Acts had sought to remove from them: Skills, abilities and a social network conducive to their survival. But of course the older ghetto culture had more than this. It had a measure of cohesion conducive to political organisation as well, and in the rapidly industrializing post-war state this could not be tolerated. In a draconian exercise of social engineering, Cape Town's proletariat were removed from the city in a cruel series of wrenches which destroyed social and political networks, increased unemployment enormously and confined people to areas characterised by poverty, social dislocation and violence.

In conclusion: This paper is not intended as a nostalgic pointer to the 'good old days' of urban poverty. One cannot deny the patriarchal relationships of exploitation within the old extended families, the harshness of existence in the cold, wet, hungry Cape winters, the crime and the graft that accompanied the business of staying alive. What has been attempted here is to document part of the trajectory by which the indigenous people of the Western Cape were transformed into an urban proletariat and a reserve army of unemployed labour. And, narrowing it still further, this has been done by focussing on the transformations which have taken place within the working class family. In this, it is really no more than a beginning.

## NOTES

1. In R. Hallett: Violence and social life in Cape Town in the 1900s (unpublished paper 1979).
2. See D Webster: The social organisation of poverty, a seminar paper presented to the African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980 for similar examples on the Reef.
3. D. Webster, Ibid pl6.
4. Cape Coloured Commission UG54 1937.
5. Brian Barrow: Behind the dark doors of District Six, undated article in Wollheim Collection, UCT (probably 1966).
6. Adopted from T. Matsetela, M. Matshoba, D. Webster, P. Wilkinson, J. Yawitch and H. Zarenda: Unemployment and 'informal' income-earning in Soweto, African Studies Institute seminar paper, July 1980. The original typology was developed by Keith Hart, 'Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana, Journal of Modern African Studies II, 1973 and adapted for South Africa by K.S.O. Beavon and A. Mabin: 'Hawkers in Johannesburg' S.A.G.S. Workshop 1978 (unpublished).
7. These figures come from available Cape Peninsula directories from 1912 to 1973.
8. The Efficacy of Coloured labour. In: Long term development of Western Cape, N.D.M.F. Cape Western Region seminar, Cape Town May 16 and 17 1973 p 36. Divisional Council Data Bank. The high levels of absenteeism and resignations - almost half the total clothing industry every six months or 200 a month - was one of the major reasons given by the industry for mechanisation.
9. P. Cohen: Subcultural conflict and working class community, working papers in cultural studies No. 2 (Spring). Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham. Quoted in Clarke et al p. 30. A shortened version of Cohen's paper can be found in: Culture, Media, Language : Working Papers in cultural studies, 1972-79, Hutchinson 1980
10. O.D. Wollheim: Peninsula's tragedy of the poor, Cape Times, 26.1.59.
11. Interview with Wollheim 24.3,81.
12. J. Western: Outcast Capetown, Human & Roussouw, 1981 p312.
- 13 Theron Commission pp 27 & 261.

14. Wollheim: Article for Africa South (undated), Wollheim Collection, UCT.
15. Survey of Cape Flats Mothers (sample of 243) // 1.  
Survey of gang members (sample of 100). // 2  
Survey of effects of media violence (sample of 200 : Hans Stiebert: Violence on Cinema, Television and the Streets, Institute of Criminology, U.C.T. 1981).
16. Western, op cit p312.
17. Cape Times 2.4.81.
18. C. Simkins: The Demographic demand for labour and institutional context of African unemployment in South Africa, 1960-1980. South African Labour and Development, Research Unit 39, U.C.T. 1981
19. J. Thomas & A. Blau: Coloured unemployment in Bishop Lavis: the story behind the statistics. S.A.L.D.R.U. 1982 (forthcoming).
20. Statistical news releases, Department of Statistics - a sample of 3000 dwellings a month over 12 months is used.
21. Thomas & Blau, op cit, p14.
22. Ibid p14

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SALDRU  
School of Economics  
Robert Leslie Building  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7700