

SOUTH AFRICA

"Resettlement" Generates Anger, Despair

[AN] Some 300 persons, part of a group of 1500 squatters expelled from Cape Town and sent to their assigned ethnic 'homeland', the Transkei, in August, returned last week in defiance of government regulations. Including the latest returnees, an estimated 750 of those recently relocated from South Africa's second largest city have by now made the 1600-mile round trip back in search of lost jobs, children and husbands.

And the South Africa Council of Churches devoted the month of August to prayer, reflection, and action on the resettlement issue. Bishop Desmond Tutu, the council's general secretary, called resettlement "institutionalized violence... which deliberately, not accidentally, destroys black family life."

"We don't enjoy moving people," Minister of Cooperation and Development Piet Koornhof countered in the Financial Mail (Johannesburg) last month. But the actions are "development oriented," he argued, and necessary "because people want to be with their own people."

Former Washington Star reporter Kenneth R. Walker, now reporting for ABC News, visited several South African resettlement areas during a trip sponsored by a Ford Foundation grant. The Star, which published his five-part series just before it ceased operations in August, identified Walker as "one of the few black American reporters recently allowed in South Africa." The following article is reprinted from The Washington Star, August 3, 1981, copyright reserved.

QWA QWA A, South Africa — "Here is where we die," said the aging, leathery-faced black woman, who found herself in this relocation camp after a series of evictions forced by South Africa's policy of apartheid. "There is no place else."

It took four changes of address for Mphala — who thinks she must be 65 but is not sure — to reach the camp. It is located in a near-desert wasteland, about three hours by car from Johannesburg, shielded from outsiders by its remote location and marked off by barbed-wire fence.

Descendant of only native South Africans so far as she knows, Mphala is here because the government insists she is a foreigner in the 87% of South African territory that has been designated for whites only.

The resettlement camp, theoretically, is a way station. Ultimately, the government says, blacks, who outnumber whites in this country by more than four to one, will be grouped into ten so-called independent states — tribal reservations by their original legal status — occupying the worst 13% of South Africa's land.

Meanwhile, an estimated twenty families a day — on the average, 140 persons — are sent to resettlement camps, according to the Black Sash, a private relief group of anti-government white women. Some camps, only a few years old, have mushroomed to contain hundreds of thousands of blacks.

Officially, the resettlement areas are off-limits, even to South African journalists. But with the help of a number of South Africans, including clergy, relief workers and relatives of camp dwellers, it was possible to visit Qwa Qwa A and several other camps during a recent two-month trip through South Africa.

In some of them, the principal

dwellings were canvas tents. In others, they were shacks built of tin, cardboard, or discarded crates. Except that there are no soup lines in resettlement camps, many strongly resemble Resurrection City, the squatter camp erected in the Washington, D.C. Mall in 1968 by poor American protesters.

Most of the camps lie in vast, arid and rocky fields, although some adjoin scenic, arable land used to grow food for distant markets. They are reached only by following tortuous, unpaved paths far from normal traffic.

Each site is marked by long lines of water seekers, either at the rare functional tap or in anticipation of the infrequent visits of a water truck.

Very young children, often naked and with bloated stomachs, and nearly always cowering behind the skirts of old women, are the most prominent inhabitants of Qwa Qwa A and most other resettlement camps.

More than a third of the infants in these camps die before their first birthday, according to the South African Council of Churches. At Qwa Qwa A, the infant burial ground is a vast field with small mounds of earth all around and with remnants of dolls, other toys and eating utensils strewn about.

A stranger appearing in a camp is nearly always greeted by old women begging for food. They say virtually all able-bodied persons have simply walked away illegally in search of jobs and sustenance — illegally because blacks in South Africa are barred by law from simply changing residence at will. They also are forbidden to seek employment without a "pass book," the identity document without which an African in South Africa has no legal existence.

For Mphala, a one-room corrugated tin shack in Qwa Qwa A is the latest of her four homes.

She was born in a hut on a white farm in the northern Transvaal, one of the five provinces into which South Africa is divided. Her ancestors had been there ever since members of her ethnic group, the Ndebeles, were divided among the Afrikaner farmers after being defeated in the great 19th century cattle-raiding wars, she said through an interpreter.

Mphala turned her face to the high sun and squinted quizzically when asked to explain the government's population relocation policy. "If you mean why we must move, I don't know," she said. "I know only that we live four places, choose none. Family was eight, now four."

The four included three infant grandchildren. She agreed to talk only after requesting food for them. "The children are hungry," she said, more as an observation than a plea.

The wandering began, Mphala said, when her family was evicted from her ancestral home after the farmer, like so many others since mechanization and terrorism made black tenants expensive and risky, simply locked the gates one day.

"We go first to nearby farm where we have family," said the old woman, hands clasped behind her while tracing her bare but unmarked feet in the parched brown dirt. "Then, boss on that farm say, 'Men can stay to work, women and small ones must go.'"

Her two sons and a son-in-law stayed to work. She walked to the main road and hitched a ride on a truck to a town, in Bophuthatswana, one of the 'homelands' into which

blacks are being impressed. But the Tswana homeland chiefs did not want members of other tribes in their midst, so the family moved again. Eventually they wound up here, by order of the government.

The women occupy themselves either by standing in water lines or weatherproofing their shacks — when they have them — with a mixture of mud and dung. "Or we just sit," Mphala said.

Women in Qwa Qwa A eagerly offered beaded heirlooms, such as fertility dolls, wedding mats and aprons handed down for generations, in exchange for money for food.

The unique Ndebele artifacts had not been available commercially until recently, but with the growth of the resettlement camps, the artifacts have begun to find their way into chic Johannesburg art boutiques.

The herding of blacks into rural reservations goes back nearly to the beginning of the beginning of the current century, but it has been only in the past twenty years that the program has shifted into high gear.

The 1913 laws creating the reservations were mainly intended to segregate the Africans and to ensure a supply of cheap labor, but the political ascendancy of the Afrikaners' National Party in 1948 made the removal of blacks from the white areas a political imperative.

Ultimately, there would be no black South Africans, declared apartheid theorist and then Prime Minister Hendrick Verwoerd, National Party leader from 1958-66.

Faced with an exploding black population and rising complaints from whites seeking protection for their economic privileges, Verwoerd looked to the reservations for his solution. The blacks would be moved to the reservations — renamed "homelands" — and destined to become "independent states." All that remained would be the "repatriation" of all the Africans to their new nations.

Black laborers, of course, would continue "to service the white economy," Verwoerd declared. But they would be only "sojourners" — foreign guest workers of a sort — with no South African political rights whatsoever.

Enforcing Verwoerd's mandate has cost more than two million blacks their homes, according to data compiled by churches, relief groups and the Institute of Race Relations, a private civic action group comparable to the Urban League in the United States.

Although they bear the brunt of it,



Squatter dwellings outside Cape Town. / Africa News/S.A.

Africans are not the only ones affected by population relocations.

About half a million persons classified as Indian or 'colored' (mixed race) have been forced out of their homes under the Group Areas Act, an additional law that mandates the demarcation of land in the 'white area' for racially exclusive settlement.

The removals have contributed greatly to the radicalization of these communities, which generally occupy a position in society between that of whites and Africans. In addition, many hundreds of members of these communities, faced like all non-whites with serious housing shortages, have been forced to reside illegally in the white areas, and to stay inside during daytime hours.

Perhaps none of South Africa's apartheid policies generates more furious and widespread opposition than resettlement.

The policy has meant the splitting of families (in some cases permanently), the stripping of any hope for citizenship in the birthplace of one's ancestors, the loss of jobs or prospects of getting one, and slow, hungry and thirsty deaths.

In moral indignation, leading clergy and academics have vowed to halt resettlement. Affected urban communities have threatened violent resistance.

"A policy of unprogrammed malnutrition," one U.S. diplomat called the population resettlements.

"Genocide" is the description used by all of the more outspoken South African lay and church relief workers. "It's a deliberate and premeditated effort to remove and reduce the African population," said Marianne Roux, a professor at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, a city in the eastern Cape.

"I don't think it's deliberate genocide, but it comes to mind," said Ina Peerlman, a relief worker with the Institute of Race Relations. "When I think of people spending winter out there, I get absolutely ill. It is obvious that the government's policy is to sweep those people under one vast rural carpet, and hope that the whites don't notice. And they don't."

"The government has a moral responsibility for the deaths it is causing," declared Nancy Charton, another Rhodes University professor and a resettlement specialist whose recent book on the policy was banned by the government. "The whole of white South Africa has a moral responsibility to do something about this."

—Kenneth Walker from the Washington Star

Relocations Leave South Africa "Under Urbanized"

Although official figures on resettlement are not available, various experts have estimated that two to three million South Africans have been uprooted during the past three decades.

The underlying reason for virtually all removals is found in the government's policy of dividing the country into politically separate, racially-defined areas. As stated in a 1967 internal government memo: "It is accepted government policy that the Bantu [blacks] are only temporarily resident in the European [white] areas of the republic, for so long as they offer their labor there."

The memo was quoted by Gary Thatcher in a five-part series on resettlement. "South (Continued on Page 20)

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