

ONVERWACHT : ETHNIC CONTROL

Onverwacht

In May, 1979, the resettlement area of Onverwacht comprised seven desolate farms, 12 km south west of Thaba 'Nchu, and about 65 km south east of Bloemfontein. A year later, Onverwacht housed an estimated 100 000 people. Another 100 000 are likely to be living there in the next few years.

Reasons for Relocation

Those moved, moving and under threat of removal to Onverwacht comprise three major groups of people.

1. Most of the people living in Onverwacht at present are those who, according to the chief commissioner of the Department of Co-operation and Development in the Free State, were 'blacks living illegally ... in Thaba Nchu' (RDM, 01.06.79). The GG removal (the 'GG' is a term used for the agents of relocation by those being removed, and refers to the registration of the trucks and vehicles employed -eds) of such 'illegals' began in late May, 1979. Most of the relocated families were drawn from the 70 000 odd South Sothos who, resident in the Thaba 'Nchu reserve, had refused to take out BophuthaTswanan citizenship. Other 'illegal foreigners' taken from Thaba 'Nchu to Onverwacht included a significant number of Xhosa speakers, and a number of Tswana who had also refused to take out citizenship.

Most of those moved between May and December, 1979, came from a slum settlement, Kromdraai, north of Thaba 'Nchu rail station. The area was officially designated as grazing ground, but by June, 1979, was in fact the home of 45 000 squatters, most of whom were Basotho. Some of these people had come to Kromdraai from Free State farms from the late 1960's, believing that the money they had paid to a Xhosa man, 'Khoza', entitled them to stands in Kromdraai. However, the stands, sold for R70 - R200 by 'Khoza' - who was believed to have been linked to BophuthaTswana officials - were non-existent. Having lost hundreds of thousands of rands, the destitute people simply settled on the grazing ground of Kromdraai anyway.

Others who came to Kromdraai in the 1970's were, according to a press report, 'the rejected' :

those who can no longer work, those who cannot 'fix up their passes' - from the small dorps and farms all over the Free State. The authorities of Thaba Nchu ... do not want them and say that they must go to their own place - QwaQwa. But QwaQwa is far away and overcrowded already' (Voice, 08.04.78).

Most of the rest of the people moved from various Thaba 'Nchu settlements and freehold farms had similar experiences, having moved to Thaba 'Nchu from farms and dorps around the Free State, and the smallholdings around Bloemfontein. Thus resettlement to Onverwacht also occurred from the Bultfontein settlements, such as Ha Ntsieng, Paradys and Dipungwana.

2. People in the same situation as that noted above, who might previously have moved to Thaba 'Nchu, are now flowing into Onverwacht. (This does not mean that the inflow to Thaba 'Nchu has ceased - areas in Thaba 'Nchu from which Basotho have been removed are rapidly filling up again). In this category is included only those 'voluntarily' moving to Onverwacht.

Movements of Free State farm workers to Onverwacht are, for instance, occurring (eg from Marquard), due in some cases to loss of jobs on the farms or the eviction of the family of a deserting youth. Evicted squatters are also moving to Onverwacht, and in general there continues to be an inflow of 'surplus appendages'.

Priority in the allocation of stands in Onverwacht is given to those moved courtesy of the state - i.e., the 'illegals' from Thaba 'Nchu. This means that for at least some in the above category, at least a year's wait for a stand is involved.

3. Two other groups of people are under threat of removal by the state to Onverwacht. The first is referred to cryptically in an RDM report : 'Another 2 000 families - probably well over 12 000 people - still have to be moved there (ie Onverwacht) from white farms in the district' (RDM, 03.09.80).

The second appears to be Bloemfontein's african workers. For, according to an official statement in September, 1978, the purpose of the creation of Onverwacht 'was to provide a greater area to accommodate the 60 000 odd Southern Sotho living in the area (i.e. Thaba 'Nchu). In addition, said Dr. Mulder, the area would provide a base for black workers in Bloemfontein and thus avoid the necessity of increasing the size of the black township outside Bloemfontein' (Survey of Race Relations, 1978 : 279).

The creation of Onverwacht as a resettlement area thus reflects a number of the causes of relocation in South Africa at large. These include enforced ethnic separation and the delegation of some of the functions of political control to ethnically distinct bantustan states; the relocation of population superfluous to production in 'white' South Africa in the bantustans; and the physical incorporation, if possible, of the working class into bantustan politics. There are, however, certain more specific impulses behind this particular resettlement programme.

- (1) The first of these relates to the fact that those moved from Thaba 'Nchu were all people who had refused to take out Tswana citizenship, and who were, very largely, Sothos. This had a number of implications for the resettlement process.
  - (a) QwaQwa authorities repeatedly demanded the implementation of their 'right' of jurisdiction over Sothos in BophuthaTswana (and elsewhere), and attempted to mobilise their ethnic

constituency into making the same demand. BophuthaTswana authorities simultaneously attempted to gain the political support of their Tswana constituency through practising ethnic discrimination. The 'illegal foreigners' in Thaba 'Nchu - all those who had refused to take out citizenship - were thus subject to continual harassment from Tswana authorities, which intensified markedly after 'independence' in December, 1977. They were refused work opportunities, residential rights, pensions, entrance to schools, and the right to trade. Many were arrested on permit, trespass and related charges, and were subject to repeated night raids by the police. Moreover, the (very largely) ethnic discrimination existed at a grassroots level as well. Kromdraai squatters alleged that '(t)he Tswana community also contributed to their suffering' - eg through harassment by landlords and evictions from farms - although they noted that 'the BophuthaTswana officials (were) the guilty party' (Post, 21.05.79).

- (b) South African state support for the relocation demanded by both these bantustan adjuncts must be seen in the context of the bantustan policy, and as a move to forestall disruptive conflict/resistance to bantustan states. As regards both these objectives, the South African state appears to have had a fair measure of success.

Thus those rejecting the bantustan concept in one of its forms - through rejecting the legitimacy of the Tswana state, epitomised in the rejection of Tswana citizenship - have now been persuaded to accept it in another form. This is evidenced not only in the taking out of QwaQwa citizenship - a compulsory requirement for the allocation of a stand in Onverwacht - but also in the according of considerable political legitimacy to QwaQwa authorities for giving 'a suffering people a home' (Post, 07.10.79). Relocated Kromdraai people, for instance, voted solidly for Mopeli's party in the March, 1980, QwaQwa elections.

Furthermore, the relocation has relieved Mangope of an important source of disaffection in Thaba 'Nchu, where Sothos were probably in the numerical majority. This would appear to account for the Tswana authorities' willingness to cede land to QwaQwa to accommodate these Sothos. Relocation was also perhaps influenced by the escalating confrontations between those supporting the Tswana and QwaQwa authorities respectively. Severe fighting, for example, broke out in May, 1977, between two such factions, resulting in 13 deaths (Survey, 1977 : 335). South African police were also on several occasions required to break up violence between Tswana and Sotho police, and had to encourage Tswana police to be more moderate in their violent, lucrative raids on Sothos in Thaba 'Nchu.

In effecting relocation of Sothos from Thaba 'Nchu, the South African state has had to perform a delicate balancing act between its two state adjuncts of QwaQwa and Bophutha-Tswana. Negotiations over the provision of land for these

Sothos have been in process since 1977. In February, 1977, in a tripartite agreement, BophuthaTswana was to exchange land in the Cape or the Transvaal for Free State land, to be made available in part to QwaQwa to accommodate the Thaba 'Nchu 'illegals'. In September, 1978, however, a land swop was announced between South Africa and BophuthaTswana alone, in which the latter ceded 25 000 ha of land in the Cape for 25 000 ha in the Free State. Mopeli reacted strongly to this, calling the deal a 'stab in the back'. And the situation at present is that the Onverwacht land remains the property of the South African state, and the people, despite their QwaQwa citizenship, are still directly controlled by the Department of Co-operation and Development.

South African intentions in mid-1979 appeared to be to use Onverwacht land both to enlarge Thaba 'Nchu and to create a South Sotho city, with the Batswana being allocated 15 000 ha and the Sotho 10 000 ha (Post, 07.06.79). Press leaks in 1979 have, however, indicated that the Van der Walt Commission recommended the exclusion of Thaba 'Nchu from a consolidated BophuthaTswana. If so, and if this is accepted, Mopeli may well be granted his demand for the whole of Onverwacht, and a new trek - this time of the Tswana - will be set in motion from Thaba 'Nchu.

- (c) A third aspect relating to the fact that it was 'illegal foreigners' who were moved from Thaba 'Nchu to Onverwacht, is that these 'illegals' far from resisting the move, welcomed it. The intense discrimination to which they had been subject in Thaba 'Nchu made them very susceptible to the posing of the QwaQwa authorities as their saviours who would lead them to the land of milk and honey. There seems to have been little, if any, opposition to the move to Onverwacht from those who had refused to take out Tswana citizenship, and who were now required to take out QwaQwa citizenship. This indicates, perhaps, that their original refusal was dictated more by an ethnic factor than a political consciousness.

Thus there were apparently no moves by the Sotho in Thaba 'Nchu to enforce their 1977 pleas that they did 'not wish to leave the area and wished the land to be transferred to QwaQwa' (Survey, 1977:335). The whole relocation exercise appears to have proceeded smoothly, with women in Kromdraai 'ululating for joy on being given site permits' (Post, 07.06.79), and with the underlying issues behind the relocation effectively disguised. Kromdraai representatives declared that 'all of us to a man are happy with the removal. We leave behind us sad memories of our stay as BophuthaTswana subjects' (Post, 21.05.79). Perhaps the most telling indication of popular support for these sentiments is the name given to Onverwacht by the people living there : Botshabelo, or Place of Refuge.

- (2) A second specific factor behind the Onverwacht relocation is that the site was created through the purchase of seven white-owned farms outside the existing bantustans. This must be related to the absolute inadequacy of QwaQwa as a resettlement area on the scale required.

QwaQwa is the official bantustan of those africans identified as Southern Sothos, the predominant population group in the Free State. The smallest reserve (48 000 ha in the north eastern Free State district of Witzieshoek), QwaQwa had a de facto population of 24 000 in 1970 - less than 2% of its de jure population of South Sotho. Relocation to QwaQwa occurred, however, on a massive scale in the 1970's; moreover, the overcrowding and popular discontent must have been exacerbated by the completion of the 'planning' of QwaQwa in 1974 (that is, the whole reserve was divided into arable land, grazing land, and residential areas). So by 1980, the estimated de facto population of QwaQwa was 300 000 people - a 115% increase in ten years. This gives an average population density of 622 people per square km, compared to the 54 people per square km in 1970. Little wonder that its inhabitants describe it as one big location.

This was recognised in 1978 by the BENS0 Economic Review. This argued that because of QwaQwa's lack of natural resources and severe overcrowding, the only way of preventing economic stagnation was to considerably increase its land area or to develop it into a city state. Noting that the former option was 'politically excluded', the Review advised the development of QwaQwa into a city state serving as an administrative service centre for South Sotho in the rest of South Africa. And if neither option was taken, BENS0 concluded that the only alternative was to stop all further resettlement of South Sotho in QwaQwa, and to stop considering QwaQwa as the homeland of all South Sotho.

Presumably it was this and similar assessments of the inadequacy of QwaQwa as a resettlement area - certainly on the scale envisaged for Onverwacht - that lay in part behind the South African state's provision of additional land for this resettlement. This is not to deny the attempts made in the 1970's to dump people in QwaQwa: in 1974, for example, some 2 000 Southern Sotho families were moved to QwaQwa from Thaba 'Nchu itself, as well as from Free State farms (Survey, 1974 : 204). However, in the context of other requirements - particularly the need for land near Bloemfontein on which to relocate all or part of Bloemfontein's african working class - the inadequacy of QwaQwa was instrumental in the state's decision to enlarge South Africa's dumping grounds.

### Living Conditions at Onverwacht

The creation of Onverwacht has now been discussed in terms of some of the dynamics behind its establishment. It is also necessary to examine the conditions, both physical and social, under which people are living at Onverwacht.

Insofar as Onverwacht is at the moment little more than a dumping ground for surplus people, and insofar as no pressure has been exerted on the state to improve the living conditions, these are uniformly appalling. A reporter from the RDM notes that the press has been barred from investigating these conditions by Ministerial directive, and that a government inter-departmental liaison committee has been most anxious that reports of Onverwacht conditions

do not reach the press (RDM, 03.09.80). Security at Onverwacht is in fact extremely tight: local men guard all entrances, non-residents need a permit to enter for each trip, and all cars are stopped and searched on entry. So given the consequent paucity of information on present Onverwacht conditions, the available information will be given in some detail below.

People qualify for stands in Onverwacht by producing a QwaQwa citizenship card (for which Sotho identity is not essential), a valid reference book, a marriage certificate, and R1,00. These requirements can, in themselves, cause endless problems: males have, for instance, been forced to leave their jobs in other parts of South Africa in order to produce their passes to register their families for a stand.

The next hurdle for those moved to Onverwacht courtesy of the state, has been how to protect their possessions. The procedure has been for one member of the household to travel with household goods on a lorry, while the others are moved by bus. In many cases, possessions such as stoves, furniture, corrugated iron and tools, have been badly damaged or stolen in the move. People have generally been too scared to complain for fear of losing their stand.

On arrival at Onverwacht, people may find that their stands, each provided only with a numbered toilet stand, and each subject to a R1,00 monthly rent, are hardly fit for occupation. The plots - 30m x 15m - are allocated according to lines on a map, resulting in some people being allocated sites with massive boulders/entirely on rock (and so having no possibility of a garden/without runoff so that they are submerged after rain/filled with the graves of farm workers. In some cases, sites have been allocated to people who, after a month, have been forced to move, presumably because the plot was required for a different purpose.

New arrivals rapidly discover that they are not, as a 'squatter spokesman' at Kromdraai promised, to 'occupy houses being built by the Government' (Post, 17.05.79). Each family is given one or two tents, and pressurised to return the tents in one or two weeks. The tents - 3m x 2,5 m - are bitterly cold in winter (when the removals began) and extremely hot in summer; most leak, many have gone up in flames, and some have blown away. So people are prepared to pay exorbitant prices to live in something better. Second hand corrugated iron - the material used for most of the shacks - is, however, in very short supply, and exorbitantly expensive. In the light of official refusal to allow people to build their houses with unbaked bricks, some households have been forced to build their shacks from plastic sheeting. Most are grossly overcrowded, and a substantial number have been unable to put up a shack.

People are also rapidly discovering the fraudulence of the promise by Mopeli of land for cultivation and grazing. Stock and farming equipment brought with them thus dies, is stolen, has to be sold - sometimes by forced auction - or lies about rusting. Compensation for land abandoned before the move to Onverwacht remains a continuing bone of contention - for those who previously owned land on a large enough scale to be entitled to compensation.

Water was originally obtained from boreholes, then from tankers, and now from taps as well. Pipes and taps - for every fifth stand - had been laid out in three of the four sections occupied in Onverwacht by July, 1980: section A, B, 'Singles', and D. (Toilets had by then been erected in section E, and dumping began there in July, 1980). The water supply, however, remains erratic, and long queues for water have been a feature of Onverwacht since its inception. The drainage system is also very unsatisfactory, with frequent waterlogging of the gravel roads encircling Onverwacht and of certain sites. The bucket toilet system operates on a twice weekly removal system; it has been noted that a cast-iron stomach is necessary to use the toilets on a hot day.

Food prices remain exorbitant, although slightly less than their 1979 levels - eg 750 ml of paraffin costs 53c and 80 kg of maize R17,50. The owners of the few legal shops - two of which were built by the QwaQwa Development Fund - require permits, and the mini-buses selling essential goods at strategic points all appear to be owned by the same family. Illegal shops do exist, but there seems to be every effort to protect the privileged few who reap middleman profits from the destitute residents. Hawkers are prohibited, and vehicles entering the area are searched and turned away if the guards suspect they are bringing in groceries for sale.

Schools are extremely overcrowded; four schools with about 100 classrooms for 9 000 pupils existed in March, 1980, although a Star report noted the existence of eight schools in July, 1980 (11.07.80). (The rapid escalation may indicate the state's awareness of the political volatility of students; a school was, in fact, the only proper building standing in Onverwacht when the dumping began.) Double sessions are held for most if not all the classes, which go up to Form 1. 2 000 children were originally turned away due to the shortage of teachers, and those accepted for Forms II and III were ejected after two days due to the lack of staff.

The Department of Health was not informed of the move to Onverwacht, so no health services were present for the first month. There are now two 'relatively well staffed' clinics; these have negligible impact on the disease and death rate of the poverty stricken Onverwacht residents living in the unsanitary conditions noted above. A typhoid outbreak occurred in early 1980, and by July, 1980, there existed 258 adult and 269 children's graves in Onverwacht.

Unemployment is very high. The local opportunities are restricted to a few jobs offered by the state, and in fact most of these are given to migrants from Lebowa and KwaZulu. Few employers visit the Onverwacht Labour Bureau, which offers work in Bloemfontein and on the mines; those who do rarely offer anything other than 'pik en foshel' work, and frequently go back on the terms and (minimal) wages offered. Men trudge despairingly everyday to this labour bureau several kilometres away; many others commute daily to Bloemfontein. (A return fare is R2. At peak hours 50 buses carrying at least 70 people each travel each way; this is still insufficient bus transport.)

Women are even worse off than men with regards to finding work. 'Informal' employment - such as beerbrewing and hawking - is forbidden in Onverwacht, which for many leaves only domestic work in Bloemfontein. A domestic servant in Bloemfontein frequently earns R25 - R30 per month for a six day week. From this an Onverwacht woman commuting daily to Bloemfontein will have to pay R12 for a monthly bus ticket, and may well have to support a house

Thus pensions, even at R50 every two months, become a vital source of income for many households. One of the consequences of relocation is, however, almost insurmountable problems in transferring pension payments from other offices to the relocation area. This is simply one of the innumerable bureaucratic checks involved in South Africa's control over her black populace. Onverwacht residents have also, for instance, to circumvent - frequently in order to survive - bureaucratic controls limiting access to a 'soekwerk' stamp (allowing them to seek work), to jobs, to a reference book, to local services, and to residential sites.

### Organisation and Resistance

Church observers feel that the Onverwacht 'community' is an extremely disunited one. People relocated from different areas apparently gang up against one another in cliquish groupings, and considerable antagonism exists between them. The disunity is also manifested in the competitive nature of access to limited resources and in the apparently marked absence of co-operation. Fights, for instance, regularly break out over places in the queues for water; it is not unusual for a parent to be unable to obtain assistance in burying a child, and the crime rate (rape, theft, muggings) is high.

There is no mention in reports on Onverwacht of any organisations, apart from the existence of the Makgotla system, and of a five-man liaison committee of fervent QwaQwa government supporters 'helping the Government make the removal smooth and organised' (Post, 07.06.79). This contrasts with a press report on Kromdraai referring to a Kromdraai squatters' committee, which committee members felt was being deliberately sabotaged by QwaQwa officials. (Two committee members noted their 'unhappiness at actions of officials of the QwaQwa government ... the two have complained that certain QwaQwa government officials now want to wedge a rift within the community. Officials from QwaQwa have defied Mr. K. Mopeli's instructions that the community be left alone ... The squatters' committee now claims QwaQwa officials have a habit of going direct to the residents instead of through the committee' (Post, 21.05.79)).

Outside organisational support also appears to be minimal, and confined to a local church group. This has been involved in some relief work, has initiated discussions on the establishment of a creche, and made an attempt, which failed, to establish a buying co-operative. The group has approached both the SACC and the Urban Foundation concerning the possibility of giving support.

Numerous focal points for sparking popular resistance clearly exist. Such resistance has exploded into violence on at least two occasions. The first was the storming of the police station on 11 July, 1980, by 600 students. The students, boycotting the schools, set fire to a vehicle and a shop, and plundered two other shops. (Possibly this attack on shops was related to the ownership patterns and commercial profits associated with them.) They then moved to the police outpost, stabbed a policeman, and removed his gun. A woman was shot in the resulting fracas, the gun retrieved, and 20 youths were arrested. A ban was subsequently placed on open-air political gatherings (the report on the attack is from the Star, 11.07.80).



The second incident occurred on the 14th September, 1980, when Mopeli was addressing a crowd of 2 000 at Onverwacht. Two men, armed with a petrol bomb and a revolver, and apparently disguised as women, were apparently arrested by the BophuthaTswana (?) Security Police amid strict security precautions due to rumours of an assassination attempt. Mopeli continued with his speech and subsequently said that 'he would continue to move among his people without fear' (Star, 18.09.80).

\*\*\*\*\*

Certain questions arose while collating this information on Onverwacht. These included:

1. Reference has been made in a report on Onverwacht to another 100 000 people likely to be moved there in the next few years. Does this refer to the Bloemfontein workers? Is the Bloemfontein move still on?
2. What is the precise relation of QwaQwa and BophuthaTswana authorities on Onverwacht residents? Has the support for the QwaQwa authorities begun to evaporate? To what extent do the Onverwacht residents accord legitimacy to their respective bantustan states?
3. To what extent does grassroots ethnic antagonism exist amongst Onverwacht residents, and what is the basis of the antagonism said to exist between them? What is the role of the central state and its adjuncts in fostering these antagonisms? (eg note the policy of giving local jobs in Onverwacht to migrants from Lebowa and KwaZulu, which has fostered intense feuding between the residents and the migrants. Is this a normal policy?)
4. Do local organisations exist at Onverwacht? If not, why not? If so, what are their functions and how much and what kind of support do they draw? What are their relations to the state?