

'It was no different to a prison camp': Oral accounts of adaptations, transitions and surviving an 'emergency camp'; from Sophiatown to Ammunition Depot 91, 1955–1960s

**Author:**Lesiba T. Leta¹ **Affiliation:**¹Department of History, Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, Johannesburg, South Africa**Corresponding author:**Lesiba Leta,
tumzatoleta@gmail.com**Dates:**

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The demolition of Sophiatown, Cato Manor, District Six and other areas under the apartheid regime hugely impacted the socio-economic lives of various South Africans (particularly those people classified as non-whites). The classification of South African cosmopolitan townships as slums according to the *Slums Act* of 1934, and the ambitions of achieving social segregation, resulted in the geographical separation of races facilitated by the *Group Areas Act* of 1950. The act legally justified the forced removal of Indian families from Sophiatown. Then, they were temporarily placed in a military base next to Lenasia. Through the use of oral interviews, this article interrogates the unknown history of the Indian families in their transitional period from Sophiatown to Ammunition Depot 91 (also referred to as the 'military camp/military base' in Lenasia). Furthermore, the article sheds light on their untold experiences; particularly on the arrival of Indian families in the military camp, their living conditions, health-related matters, the utilisation of coping mechanisms such as religion and recreational activities, perceptions about their stay, effects on transportation and their general experiences in the transition camp. The article accentuates the rapid nature of these removals particularly in Sophiatown which resulted in the lack of adequate alternative accommodation for the Indian residents.

Contribution: The article offers fresh perspectives for deeper interrogation of the consequences of forced removals in apartheid South Africa, by reflecting on the memories and lived experiences of interviewees in a case study that has hitherto not been addressed by social historians.

Keywords: Sophiatown; forced removals; Indians; oral history; Lenasia; relocations; military base.

Introduction

Established in 1897, Sophiatown was a multicultural suburb, which was unique in its era, because it contradicted the purpose of the apartheid laws which vehemently advocated for separate development. The cosmopolitan Sophiatown was comprised of black, Chinese, Indian, coloured and, to a lesser extent, white people (Horrel 2006:55). Sophiatown was unjustifiably declared a slum area because the apartheid government wanted to separate the races, and thus its inhabitants were forcefully removed from the suburb from 1955 until the early 1960s (Goodhew 2004:35). In doing so, the apartheid government allocated the black former residents of Sophiatown housing in Meadowlands, Soweto, but failed to do the same for the Indian, Coloured and Chinese people of Sophiatown. Consequently, the Indian families were temporarily and forcefully moved to a military base in Lenasia (91 Ammunition Depot), where they lived on the same premises with army personnel. Coloured and Chinese people, whose histories in this regard are yet to be adequately explored by academics, were relocated to what is known today as Westbury, a township neighbouring Westdene.

The histories of black people in Sophiatown, as well as their lives in the township of Meadowlands, have been explored extensively. In contrast, the history of the Indian families of Sophiatown remains untold or marginalised by academia, as is evident by the lack of research addressing Indian people and their temporary lodging in both the military base and in Sophiatown. To address this oversight, this article investigates and presents the life histories and experiences of Indian families who previously resided in these areas.

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Methodological approach

Whilst the information pertaining to the history of this particular military base has been difficult to find, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Archive in Pretoria has provided limited yet important details regarding the environment of the military base. The information found at the SANDF Archive, the University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, and the National Archives of South Africa, however, does not answer some of the key questions related to the living conditions, building allocation and physical environment of the camp.

Fundamentally, the collection of the SANDF Archive provides information alluding to the temporary presence of Indian people on their premises. The article uses the limited communication between government officials and the representatives of the SANDF regarding the safety of Indian people on their premises as evidence that Indian people found themselves in peculiar circumstances. A plethora of secondary sources (Molopi 2015:95) on the history of Lenasia mention the military base as a point of departure but provide minimal information on the camp itself (Adam 2000:57). For example, Desai's study on migrant access to housing in Lenasia correctly asserts that the establishment and population growth of Lenasia can be attributed to the forced removals of Pageview. However, this is without acknowledging the populace of the military base, particularly those former residents of Sophiatown (Desai 2008:74). The existence of lacunas within the narrative of the military base thus justifies the article's overwhelming reliance on the oral accounts provided by the former residents of the military camp.

Interviews were conducted with the interviewees in their homes in Lenasia. Although some of the interviewees were elderly, recollections of the past were generally detailed and reliable, particularly when family portraits were used to assist in the narration of their histories. Site visitations of the military base were conducted with some of the interviewees, in an attempt to help them remember the place and its associated memories. This method proved effective to enhance the quality of recollection. This latter objective, although emotional and often nostalgic, was achieved and even though we were denied access to the military base, the fence permitted reasonable views of the physical environments that the Indian people inhabited during their staying in the base. Oral interviews enabled the intertwining of histories of people and space, whereas before the investigation took place little was known about the experiences and deeper connections Indian residents had with the military camp. To comprehensively articulate their experiences, oral accounts of the former residents of the military base were utilised. Conversations with them have yielded substantial insights concerning the infrastructure, living conditions, lived experiences and challenges that the Indian people had faced to survive their 'temporary' lodging in the camp.

Infrastructural conditions of the military camp

The researches on the infrastructural conditions and the history of the military camp are vastly neglected amongst academics. To comprehend the environment inhabited by the Indian people, academics should remain mindful of the nature and function of the military base, with the military archive in Pretoria providing insight in this regard. In 1956, the military camp was referred to as 91 Ammunition Sub-depot, Lenz and is situated adjacent to the former group area of Lenasia in the south of Johannesburg (Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, Pretoria). The property of the depot was characterised by three areas, including the Factory Area, the Camp Area, and the Magazine Area. The Factory Area was established as an explosive filling factory and in 1956, the same time when some Indian families were being moved to the camp, 'ten buildings were used for the storage of detonators, gunpowder, and demolition explosives' (Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, Pretoria).

The factory area was further used for 'the storage of medical stores, inspection, varnishing, etc. of empty ammunition components', whilst 'the two rows of magazines to the North West of the factory area were built to accommodate the bulk of explosives required by the factory' (Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, Pretoria). The camp area accommodated the following people: (a) European males, (b) European females, (c) Native males (Native Military Corps) and (d) Cape Coloured males (Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, Pretoria). Indian families were accommodated in the old Cape Corps barracks area where the Cape Coloured males lived (Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, Pretoria).

A primary objective of this research is to fathom the changes that Indian people brought to the landscape of the military base, and this would have been determined by their population size accommodated by the military base. It is difficult to estimate the number of Indian people who lived in the military base as there are no detailed statistics available. As a result, this article relies primarily on the memories expressed by the interviewees who lived in the military camp. In estimating the population size of the military base, Rasheed Subjee stated that there must have been more than 100 people who lived in the military base at any given time during their stay. Furthermore, people of diverse religious and economic backgrounds (voluntarily or otherwise) moved into the military camp with families of different sizes.

Indian families moved to the military base for a variety of reasons. According to the interviewees, the primary reason for living in the camp was mainly the lack of alternative measures (about where to go) resulting from their 'sudden' removals from Sophiatown, in addition to the government's

failure to build them houses elsewhere. Mrs Sunker, a former resident of Sophiatown stated the following:

We had no warning at all. At least if they came the day before and told us that they are going to break down our houses and that we had to move our furniture we would have been informed. They just came with their trucks there ... these trucks took us and just brought us here to the camp.

Mrs Sunker's experiences reveal an uncertainty and lack of knowledge that they faced about what was to come next. However, the government's efforts to demolish Sophiatown did not happen overnight. From as early as the 1930s (Hart & Pirie 1984:39) and more fervently in the 1950s, Sophiatown was earmarked for removal primarily because of its proximity to white areas and for its reputation of hosting political agitations conspired by the African National Congress (ANC) (Lodge 1981:126). Unsurprisingly, the political resistance against the forced removals (mobilised by the ANC and the Ratepayers Association, amongst others), possibly gave the residents a hope that the removals would either be prolonged or abandoned by the government. This may have encouraged the residents to ignore notices issued by the government, although the eventual demolition of their homes nonetheless came as a shock. According to Mrs Sunker, Indian residents were not notified about the military camp in Lenasia in time to organise alternative accommodation. An article in the *Rand Daily Mail*, entitled 'No accommodation for 4000 Indians, coloured families, Group Areas to blame', indicated that the Non-European Affairs Department had no land allocated for the Indian residents (*Rand Daily Mail* 1955).

The temporary solution for housing the Indians was in a military base in Lenasia, 35 km southwest of Johannesburg. The 'Government Notice 193 of 1949 which proclaimed Sophiatown, Newclare, and Martindale as areas predominantly occupied by natives was vague in its application to Indians' (University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers). According to the notice, the Council's resolution on the Western Areas Scheme said nothing about Indians and where they would stay. In accordance to the *Group Areas Act* and the *Population Registration Act* of 1950, which assigned South Africans according to 'national categories' (Ross 1999:124), Indians were consequently placed in single race communities. The difficulty that was experienced by the City Council was finding appropriate land for relocation. The City Council annual report of 30 June 1963 mentioned that a portion of the old army barracks remained under the control of the government and that approximately 50 families were housed under austere conditions (Collection of Non-European Affairs A2628). Based on the responses made by the interviewees, the populace of the barracks could have potentially exceeded 100. It was only in 1961 that the Group Areas Development Board took over the camp and the result of their endeavours was the establishment of Lenasia only in the early 1960s. Therefore, when Indians resided in the camp they were the responsibility of the Group Areas Board and the City Council. The fact that the military base was referred to as

an 'emergency camp' by the City Council points to the rapidity with which government and the concerned parties had to find accommodation for the Indian people. The relocation process and the identification of temporary locations resulted from the inadequate planning of the City Council which in turn had adverse consequences on the lives of the Indian people.

Negotiating space and environment

Regardless of the political contestations between the authorities and the community, the Indian people had to adapt to their new environments and living conditions until alternative accommodation was issued. Central to the history of these living conditions are the buildings that the Indian families inhabited in the transit camp. According to the respondents, the military base was divided into two: an area for Indian people and a separate fenced-off building where soldiers lived and trained. The surrounding environment was characterised by vacant land with overgrown grass.

The military base had electricity, which made daily requirements such as bathing and cooking possible. Whilst on the base, the residents had no control over the usage of electricity. According to Mr Subjee, there was a specific time when lights were switched on and off. The authorities achieved this by ensuring that there were no switches on the walls that the residents could access.

In addition, Mrs Sunker and Mr Subjee's recollections of lights (electricity) being controlled by the military base employees (being switched on and off at specific times of the day) further highlight the feeling of imprisonment that they experienced. In prisons, inmates' lights are intermittently switched on and off and they have no control over this action, as was the case in the military camp. In order to get their minds off the misery of regulated electricity, the residents would entertain themselves by listening to battery operated radios and, when lights were switched off, candles were lit. Consequently, they had no control over certain fundamental social aspects of their lives. Such circumstances made them feel belittled, suppressed, and marginalised. On the other hand, financial instability contributed immensely to the decision-making processes of seeking accommodation, particularly for people that who not forcefully removed from various areas in Gauteng. As a result of the lack of alternative accommodation, the majority of the Indian families lived in the military base because they could not afford to build nor purchase property for themselves elsewhere. These experiences shaped their perceptions of the military camp.

Perceptions of the military camp

To a large extent, perceptions and memories of the military camp are moulded by the manner in which the Indian people arrived at the camp. Because of their financial constraints and the haste in which they were forcibly removed from Sophiatown, they had little influence as to where they would live. This influenced the way in which they viewed their

environment, this particularly shows the lack of agency in the decision-making processes. In describing his perception of the military camp, Mr Subjee, a former Sophiatown resident, had the following to say:

They [*the government*] took us out of Sophiatown and they put us here, we did not demand to be placed here. They put us into this jungle where the conditions were worse; we were placed into a concentration camp.

According to Mr Subjee, the experiences of the military base can be described as akin to a concentration camp. Firstly, there was a feeling of imprisonment that was symbolised by the large fence encircling the camp which restricted people's movements. Secondly, the allocation of infrastructure was also used by Mr Subjee to further illustrate the lack of agency in the choice of residence. The government gave the people no choice over their homes. Thirdly, the fact that Indians were systematically placed in one camp without the presence of any other race characterised the military camp, in the words of Mr Subjee, as a 'concentration camp' that had a racial component:

The black people had houses in Meadowlands, they had far better facilities... we had to live in a concentration camp, it was horrible.

The politically motivated preferential treatment that the Blacks enjoyed through the allocation of houses and better facilities, as Rasheed Subjee reiterated, placed Indian people in an inferior position, and not as equal citizens in South Africa. However, the principles of apartheid did not advocate for equal development and democracy (Tiryakian 1960:687). Indian and coloured communities were arguably placed on a higher economic and political level than the Blacks. The interviewee's reiterations were influenced by a nostalgia of a cosmopolitan Sophiatown and the yearning to live in a multicultural and multiracial society. Fundamentally, the interviewee expressed a criticism of government's inability to assure them of housing (as they had done for their former neighbours). Furthermore, he sees their situation as similar to that of the Jews in the Nazi concentration camps, except their treatment was not as severe as that experienced by the Jews. Lastly, Mr Subjee felt as if he was living in a 'jungle'. By this he meant the nature of the environment to which he was exposed to on the military base. He recalls that whenever he looked around, there were no buildings, towns or shops; they were essentially put in an open veldt that lacked the characteristics of his former township, Sophiatown. Mr Subjee viewed the area as a jungle because of the open veldt, trees, wildlife, and the general barren environment that they occupied. In addition, Mr Sunker described the military camp as the following:

It was a prison camp. It was fenced all over and as you came in you had to tell them where you were going and to whom you were going, it was no different to a prison camp.

Mr Sunker's description of the military camp, similar to that of Mr Subjee's, stemmed from the presence and symbolic meaning of the fence. Although the fence provided a feeling

of safety for Mrs Sunker and others, the same thing, combined with the presence of soldiers, also symbolised a situation of imprisonment. On the other hand, the question of safety needs to be raised. As mentioned earlier, the military camp was chiefly established as an Ammunition Depot and the safety of the civilians became an issue between the City Council and the officials of the Depot. The letters labelled 'encroachment' from the military authorities stated that the occupation of the military camp by civilians, particularly near the fence, reduced the explosive limits of the buildings (Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, Pretoria). Therefore, the presence of non-European [Indians] civilians in the camp, according to the official letters, was 'undesirable according from a security point of view' (Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, Pretoria). Further,

[O]ccupation of these camps by civilians without the evacuation of the depot will probably be illegal and may expose the department to claims should any civilians be killed or injured as a result of an explosion in the depot. (Documentation Centre, Department of Defence Archives, Pretoria)

Fundamentally, the robust engagements between stakeholders accentuated the hazardous nature of the military premises, especially the environments used for the storage of explosives and other dangerous equipment. Fortunately, there is no report of any explosions or major accidents that took place during the period of the civilian's stay. The majority of the interviewees were not fully aware of the function of the military base, nor did they realise the risk of living in close proximity to the explosives. At the time of their stay, they had no access to the buildings and the authorities kept much of the information clandestine. Knowledge of this information would have reshaped their experiences allowing for fear and doubt about their safety.

Living conditions in the military base

Indian people were allocated living spaces which were shared by a number of families. Mrs Ramdien recalls how they arranged their living spaces in such a way that tranquillity, symbiosis and peace were established with other families with whom they shared space: '...we made full big rooms that we partitioned with three-ply wood'. Taking into consideration that they had to share their space, the partition had to take the shape in such a way that it accommodated the communal space shared with other residence.

In contrast, the Sunkers had to adapt to the challenges that came with organising their living arrangements, having arrived with furniture and goods from their previous home in Sophiatown. Mrs Sunker said the following about her living space:

We used our furniture to organise our living space, we took the furniture and made rooms with them. There was a portion for the kitchen; there was a small dining room and a room for our

children. We did not use curtains to divide our rooms. There were no doors, nothing. We put our bed behind the kitchen dresser so that we could have a bit of privacy, it was difficult.

Adapting to different living arrangements involved a lengthy and challenging process for the interviewees. The Sunkers had previously lived comfortably in a large house in Sophiatown and when the removals occurred they found themselves having to live communally in a much smaller space. The new living arrangements also had a profound impact on housewifery for Mrs Sunker, as she had to adapt to new ways of taking care of her children in a new environment. Mrs Sunker no longer had her own kitchen or bathroom where she could conduct her daily duties, because in the military camp she was forced to share her space. Adapting to new ways of taking care of her household was challenging, but she had to be content with the provisions of the military camp.

On the other hand, the Subjees had lived communally before the forced removals. Therefore, having to share living spaces with other families was not a novel experience for them. They had also lived in a total of four houses during their stay in Sophiatown before being moved to Lenasia, which further contrasted their experience with those of the Sunkers. Furthermore, their stay with different groups of people in all those houses equipped them with the etiquettes and expectations of communal living.

Therefore, the new form of living on the military base had a profound impact on the family unit as a whole, with Mrs Sunker describing her living experiences within the camp as 'difficult'. Indeed, difficulty was caused by being unfamiliar with new living styles. Thus, adapting was not easy as she was nostalgic about her home in Sophiatown, which had been razed by the government trucks. Unsurprisingly, the new 'forced' ways of living that were a repercussion of forced removals brought disruption to the familial lives of Indian people.

Health and sanitation

In their study of affected communities, Maasdorp and Pillay (1977:79) unpack the socio-economic changes experienced by communities in transition and in temporary dwellings, particularly in Tintown. In doing so, they focus on sanitation changes and the impact thereof on communities in transit camps. The question of sanitation is important to the understanding of the contrasting living experiences in Sophiatown and the military camp. Rasheed mentioned that there was little change in the sanitation conditions of the military camp when compared with Sophiatown, as the toilets in the camp were located outside the actual building they inhabited.

Furthermore, the only difference was that men and women had separate toilets, which had not been the case in Sophiatown, and this allowed for privacy. Mrs Ramdien recalls that they had six toilets for ladies and six toilets for

men and they had two cleaners who cleaned the toilets twice a day 'it was the ideal place for me', noted Mrs Ramdien. In essence, Mrs Ramdien gives an idea about the positive results of clean toilets on communal living and the importance of good relations for the sustainability of societal cohesion. In comparison to Sophiatown, the toilets in the military base were of much better quality. The doors of the toilets were able to close and did not expose the user to the outside world, unlike the Sophiatown toilets, as described by Mr Subjee.

Although they were temporarily placed in the military base, there was also fundamental improvement in the sanitation conditions of the Indian families and this was evident in the development of bathing facilities. In comparison to Sophiatown, the military camp's bathing facilities allowed the residents to shower, although outside, in warm water and in structures that ensured privacy. However, this was not the case in Sophiatown where some families generally used bathing bowls, had curtains to ensure demarcated space during bathing, and had to boil water to avoid bathing with cold water, especially in winter. Generally, there were adequate improvements in the sanitation conditions of the military camp in comparison to those of Sophiatown.

Although there had been profound changes in the lives of Indian people during their stay in the military base, they still experienced certain health-related challenges. This stemmed from their difficulty in accessing healthcare and associated services. During their stay in Sophiatown, they were in close proximity to healthcare centres, one in particular being Coronation Hospital. But this situation changed when they moved to the military base. During her stay in the military camp, Mrs Sunker recalls the following:

We had a midwife that came to us to check on our babies and there was also a general doctor who came regularly to check on everyone, the midwife came from Protea and the other midwife that checked on us regularly came from town.

Without having access to in-house medical care, Mr Subjee complained of how the government failed to provide for their needs and the increased distance to Coronation Hospital made matters worse because they now experienced prohibitive transportation costs. The cause of these challenges was the distance of Lenasia from Johannesburg, coupled with transportation limitations. The residents had to treat themselves with homeopathic medication that they obtained from the shops to care for minor injuries such as cuts, sores or flu. The isolated nature of the military camp was highlighted by the lack of sufficient medical care particularly for medical emergencies. Patients had to either organise their own transport or take the morning train, which was itself an inconvenience, considering the fixed time of departure and of arrival.

Rent and transportation

The military base was established as an 'emergency camp' to house displaced Indians. Although it was an emergency camp, living on the military base came at a financial cost,

with Indian people having to pay a rental fee for the accommodation. The Sunker and the Subjee families cannot remember the actual amount they had to pay for rent, but they recall that some amount had to be paid. In addition, a few interviewees mentioned that the rent was affordable, but I cannot assume that the rent was inexpensive solely based on the view of a few respondents. The rental may have contributed to the financial capacity of the city council to maintain their temporary stay and to construct Lenasia in the 1960s. However, archival records to substantiate these arguments have not been found.

In addition to electricity, transportation played a pivotal role in the lives of those included in this study. For the interviewees, transportation was a major cause of and influence in their decision-making processes with regard to where to live and work. *The Investigation into the Feasibility of Establishing Pageview as a Residential Area* expresses the importance of accessibility of transportation when establishing new communities (Gallagher 1980:33). The study showed that the Indians who were relocated from Pageview opposed living in Lenasia and preferred to stay in Pageview, where there was established public transportation in addition to being much closer to town (Johannesburg) than Lenasia was. Similarly, they were worried about accessibility to their places of employment after the declaration that they would be temporarily placed in Lenasia.

In effect, they could no longer walk to work, nor could they use the tram and bus services that were at their disposal in Sophiatown. The Indians were strictly limited to the train known as the 'Vereeniging train' simply because it came from Vereeniging on its way to Park Station, Johannesburg. The train passed through Lenasia in the morning and again in the evening. In effect, there was only one train passing through Lenasia (at limited times). The lack of transportation alternatives made them to wake up much earlier than they had previously done in Sophiatown. The Vereeniging train arrived at Lenasia station at 05:00 in the mornings and passed Lenasia around 18:00 in the evenings going back to Vereeniging. During the day, there was no alternative transportation except organised lifts, which cost more than the train. This had a major financial impact on the Indian families as a whole.

In addition to the alternative transportation, the inconvenience also impacted on housewives and their household duties. Mrs Ramdien, for example, had to buy groceries from the town and she had no option other than to wake up very early for the train. In addition, the disadvantage of the train system was that the Indians got to town far earlier than the shops opened and they had to wait a whilst for the resumption of business.

In realising the transportation difficulties experienced by the Indian housewives on the military base, Mrs Ramdien and other members of the community in the military camp took the initiative in implementing improvements to transportation in Lenasia:

They [housewives] could only come back late in the evening. In realising this, I, together with the housewives wrote a petition [exposing the transportation difficulties] that was signed by people in the camp. I submitted the application to the stationmaster; I cannot remember what his name was.

As a result of transport inadequacies, children had to be left in the care of neighbours so that mothers could carry out their shopping in town. In addition, if a resident failed to board the train at Park Station at the departure time it meant that they either slept in town, which was illegal, or alternatively asked for lifts from cars going in the direction of Lenasia. Both options were a risk, but most opted for the latter.

The positive aspects of the train were its accessibility and its cost. Having travelled to the actual military base with Mr Subjee, I took a walk from the fence of the military base to the railway station. Indeed, it took us less than 5 min to access the railway station. This meant that the introduction of the bus transportation system (after the 1960s) in Lenasia did not necessarily persuade the Indians to stop using the train. Most Indians continued to use the train as a mode of transport because at that time there were more trains which were more affordable than buses. The advantages of the improvements in transportation included easier and quicker access to town and, most importantly, access to transportation during the day. Train users had memorable experiences of the trains. They brought along convenience and safety during their stay in the military base. They grouped themselves together during their train rides to and from Park Station, which allowed for social interaction and thus enhanced community relations whilst at the same time reducing their vulnerability to petty crimes.

In addition, Mr Subjee, in the process of seeking employment, was fascinated by his experiences of using the train from Vereeniging to Johannesburg. Next to the station there was only one White-owned house, which was occupied by an employee of the railway station and at times only he used the first-class carriages. The White people had their own stairway which was never used by more than two people during rush hour, whilst at the same time the Indians scrambled up the overpopulated stairway reserved for them.

According to Mr Subjee, Indians were only allowed to use the second- and third-class options. He recalls a time when he entered the first-class section reserved for white people. However, when the train arrived at New Canada, he was forcefully removed from the train. For Mr Subjee, that was a moment in his life that he will never forget, because for him it symbolised the political divisions between races in apartheid South Africa.

Education

In opposing the forced removals of people in Sophiatown, the Transvaal Indian Congress, in alliance with the African National Congress, made it clear that the impact of forced

removals on education for children would be disastrous (University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers). The Transvaal Indian Congress had earlier on called for separate schools for Indian and coloured students. On this basis, the forced removals and the enactment of a group area for Indian people would ensure that their demands were met. Separate schools for Indian students ensured that their history would be preserved and that English would be a medium of instruction (University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers).

When Indian families were removed to the military camp from 1955 onwards their children attended a school in Lenasia called Group 2. The Group 2 School, according to Mr Rasheed Subjee, was approximately 3 km from the military base and the school children walked to school, as some had done in Sophiatown. However, fear intensified when his siblings had to walk long distances to and from the school, through fields surrounding the camp. The open fields were not adequately maintained, and as a result the grass was very high and infested with snakes. They also faced the risk of having to cross the railroad on their way to school. Mr Subjee stated the following:

Parents feared their children would be run over by the train and they always prayed that children would travel safely to school and not be victim of any danger.

Mr and Mrs Sunker expressed similar sentiments:

They [*children*] had to walk to school which was quite a distance from the camp, they also had to cross the railway lines and we had to catch our train there and go to work. We [*housewives*] had to walk our children until the railway line and first watch and see that there was no train coming and make sure they cross the railway lines safely.

Over and above longer and less safe routes to school, the Indian children found it difficult to adapt to a new medium of instruction implemented in Lenasia. Firstly, their school did not have the diversity they had experienced in Sophiatown. In Lenasia, they no longer interacted with coloured children in the classrooms nor did they interact with black, white or other races on their commute to school. They experienced difficulty in coping with the changes in the medium of teaching and it contributed immensely to the decisions taken by many students to leave the school early to find employment. The changes in teaching methods and the new curriculum at the Group 2 School were major obstacles for Indian students to overcome and as a result it took much longer for them to adapt and learn effectively. According to Mr Subjee:

Our parents had to learn English as well. At times we were discouraged to go to school because of the difficulty of being taught in another language uncommon to us. So, our mothers had to be our teachers in the barracks [*military base*]. They also found it difficult to educate us because they were used to speaking in Afrikaans. I could not go in front (of the class) and say a speech; I would always settle for a zero, but when it came to Afrikaans I would always get an 'A'.

The effect of English as a medium of instruction was profound on Indian students, who had been previously taught in Afrikaans. For the most part, the introduction of English as a medium of instruction increased familial involvement in the education of Indian children. In practice, as Rasheed mentioned, parents and particularly housewives who awaited their children at the railway lines in the afternoon assisted their children with their homework. The new teaching methods at schools helped to strengthen family ties at home.

In comparison, the military base offered better facilities for schoolwork to be completed at home because of access to electricity. Although lights were switched off at a specific time, children did their homework under proper light, unlike in Sophiatown where they depended on candle light. It was easier for the Indian children to study together on the military base because they lived in much closer proximity to one another and thus it was safer and convenient for collaborative learning.

In addition to education, for the most part of their lives in the camp children socialised and played with each other. Parents had little to worry about in terms of children's safety because the camp was fenced off and there were soldiers who guarded the area. This perception deconstructs and problematises the myriad perceptions of the fence. Earlier the fence was likened to an instrument of control and imprisonment, yet it also represented an element of safety. The military base had a main entrance used by all, and this controlled the inflow and outflow of people and goods. According to Mrs Ramdien, 'for me living with soldiers was very safe because if anything went wrong they were there to protect us'. In addition, Mrs Sunker and her family felt reassured of their safety because the presence of soldiers symbolised safety and protection for her family.

For young children, the military camp represented an extraordinary change from the social environment previously experienced in Sophiatown. Changes were noted on their playing fields, as well as in their schooling environment, primarily because they could no longer interact with children and adults of other races. However, there were no significant changes with regard to the lack of recreational facilities such as parks, which they lacked in both Sophiatown and the military camp. In Sophiatown, children made their own playing tools from old bicycle wheels, carts, cars made from metal wire and roll-on deodorant balls used as tennis balls. Similarly, in the military base, children adapted their previous playing techniques and formed their friendship with other Indian children through such games.

However, the children still longed for Sophiatown's vibrant and populated streets. For instance, they missed the Odin and Balansky cinemas in which they would watch gangster movies and series (Dovey & Impey 2010:60). In addition, they also missed the Chinese and Indian shop owners who would give them breadcrumbs and extra sweets. They also had

negative memories of gang violence which manifested into organised conflicts on the streets of Sophiatown (Mattera 1987:74). The military camp had both advantages and disadvantages to which children had to comprehend. Their adaptation and understanding of the military base was influenced by the processes inherent in the removal process and the changes that took place in their social environments.

Adaptation mechanisms

The interviewees comprising this study are of different religious affiliations and backgrounds. Thus religion, placing its fluidity as a concept aside, played a pivotal role in understanding the interviewees' everyday challenges. The military camp allowed easier mobilisation for prayers amongst Indian families because of convenient accessibility to one another. In addition, Mr Subjee recalls how members of the Islamic faith prayed together as families. Religion was, therefore, a powerful tool that not only united believers (followers), but also helped to spiritually and psychologically allow the interviewees to cope with their circumstances and be optimistic about their future. Although they did not have mosques, churches or any other physical structures constructed for the purpose of worship, they used their homes as places of religious practice.

According to the respondents, they achieved a much stronger bond through religious tolerance and affiliation to the same race, as well as sharing spaces and experiences. Therefore, Indians may have been of different religious affiliations but they were united by the common difficult experiences which encompassed forced removals, loss of familial networks, and hostile living conditions. Thus, religion as a potential concept of division amongst people did not actually divide the Indians. Instead, it helped to form communal relations and, in turn, made their daily experiences less burdensome. Religious occasions such as Christmas and Diwali brought the small community together through the sharing of food and participation in the festivities regardless of religious or cultural affiliation. In addition, their isolated nature combined with living in a small community helped form their close ties, which was evident in the description of a 'close community' by Mrs Sunker.

Conclusion

In articulating the Indian experiences of relocations and temporary lodging following the forced removals of Sophiatown, this article has highlighted the complexities imbedded in comprehending the perceptions of the military base dwellers. Fundamentally, the obliteration of previous communities by the apartheid government and the harsh methods implemented to relocate them contributed immensely towards the preconceptions and perceptions of the military base. Coupled with financial and accommodation confines resulting from the 'untimely' removals, the military base became the only alternative. This presented immense diversion from the cosmopolitan nature of Sophiatown, which had offered important and affordable benefits, such as

proximity to the city of Johannesburg, rent, transport, schools, and shopping centres. The usage of terms such as 'jungle', 'prison', and 'concentration camp' when describing their experiences of the military base clearly suggest a strong dislike for the camp. On the other hand, the article has also noted the diverse experiences and further found that some of the inhabitants were pleased with the living conditions offered by the military base, thus presenting a complex and multi-layered narrative. Even amidst all the negative experiences, some of the interviewees expressed nostalgia by agreeing that life in the camp was generally peaceful and that they were a strong and united community. In essence, the apartheid government succeeded in implementing their vision of separate development by establishing Lenasia as a group area for Indians in the 1960s. Emphasising feelings of nostalgia, some of the residents expressed that Lenasia 'could never be compared to Sophiatown'.

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Author's contributions

L.T.L is the sole author of this article.

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This article followed all ethical standards, the interviewees granted authority to the researcher to use the provided information for publication purposes.

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