Chatsworth
Between Continuity and Change

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Chatsworth, south of the Durban city centre, was hastily laid out in the early 1960s. It was designed for people of 'Indian' origin and was created to satisfy apartheid South Africa's desire for racially 'pure' areas, a process that Paul Gilroy refers to as apartheid's 'special brutality…so chronically absurd and so total in its infiltration of everyday life that it has parcelled up the earth itself along racial lines' (2001: 37).   Relying on the premises of the Group Areas Act, people of Indian origin were forced out of places such as the Magazine Barracks, Clairwood, and Cato Manor, where they had lived for generations, and bundled into the spreading units of Chatsworth.

As the township grew, middle class families built houses in areas like Mobeni Heights, Arena Park, and Umhlatuzana, while the working classes had flats set aside for them on slopes and gullies accessed by roads paved in red brick. Over time, Chatsworth thickened out on either side of the Higginson Highway, which the City Council made the working class residents of Chatsworth pay for, and became home to some 350,000 people. In time, a row of flats became a neighbourhood, small businesses sprang up next to places of worship, and sports clubs, often with names carried over from times past, were re-established. Eventually a railway line hugged the Highway to get people to work on time and a state-of-the-art crematorium was built to take care of 'Chatsworthian' bodies when their days of toil were finally over.

Aerial photos of the late 1960s show a bushy landscape recede in front of houses and roads. Bigger, chunkier structures also began to appear; the iconic Hare Krishna Temple, the Chatsworth (Sports) Stadium, and the R.K. Khan's Hospital. By the early 1970s aerial photographs reveal Chatsworth laid out in self-contained units, with only a few access roads in and out of the township. Dominating every unit was a primary and high school, a key site for advancing a new generation of young Indians into the University of Durban-Westville and the M.L. Sultan Technical College. Economic mobility and residential segregation were two significant features of the Indian experience after 1960. Family income was augmented by large numbers of women entering wage employment from the 1960s (see Freund 1991). As much as there was movement into skilled jobs in

the late 1970s, the biographies of these young professionals mostly started in a particular unit of Chatsworth and this is where they mostly returned.

The new aspirant middle class built on top of, and often behind, the houses of their working class mothers and fathers and circulated their expanding earning capacity downwards into extended families and outward into new shows of consumption. Carports and TV rooms ate up every available square metre of the tiny plots in the more affluent areas of Chatsworth in the late 1970s and into the early 1980's. Given the restrictions on residential mobility and chronic shortage of housing, *in situ* upgrading was the only option.As the working-class was squeezed into two-bedroom flats, so it expelled extended families.And, if inclined, rented rooms for the surplus with cash from wages earned jobs in the textile, clothing and leather industries in Mobeni, Jacobs, Pinetown and central Durban. But as the 1980s unfolded, these sectors found themselves shedding jobs as factories relocated to areas such as Hammarsdale and Isithebe where labour was cheaper.

Beneath these broad economic developments, Chatsworth turned from space into place and its own character bubbled up. A new generation of boys asserted themselves. Unlike their fathers, they were more aggressive in their consumption patterns, and keener to 'dress-up' and coalesce around street corners of their neighbourhoods. The clothes were what was termed "American style" - Flosheim or Crockett and Jones shoes and "straight twenty" trousers with an eight piece cap. More casual wear consisted of Lee or Levis jeans worn with Jack Purcell takkies. The emphasis of Chatsworth's new subculture was on pose and cockiness.

As the units fostered a generation of "Chatsworthians", so it imprisoned them in an Indianness that had very local inflections and impulses. Older traditions of Hinduism, for example, vied with the growing power of Pentecostalism, adherents of both faiths often populating individual households as a younger generation bought into the outward exhibitionism of faith and a Westernisation that the "new" Christian religions symbolized (see articles by Ojong and Khan). As one respondent in the flats reflected, 'crosses replaced thalis and Kartigasan became Keegan,' the latter also a reflection of the ubiquitous influence of English soccer on the psyche of the young Indian male. Kevin Keegan, the Liverpool striker, was worshipped by many young Indians in the 1980s and 1990s.

Still, while often fraying at the edges, the overarching, elastic Indianness of living in Chatsworth was never really lost.

In the 1980s, many townships in South Africa were in a veritable state of insurrection against apartheid. Political mobilisations across the rest of the country that spoke about non-racialism hardly made a dent in the consciousness of the people

in Chatsworth. If one looked hard enough, there was certainly a politics in Chatsworth that responded to the growing discontent with apartheid elsewhere. Some residents did become highly radicalised, through such organizations as Helping Hands and the Chatsworth Housing Action Committee (CHAC), prepared to take on the system, while retreating into clandestine liberation movement cells. And there was also an open extra-parliamentary, anti-apartheid ideology, articulated mainly by the Natal Indian Congress (NIC). However, it mainly spoke in a language imbued with appeals to ethnicity: 'We Indians must not sell-out' and its protest focused on racially exclusive issues such as housing and the formation of political bodies to accommodate Indians viz. the South African Indian Council and Tricameral Dispensation of 1983 which made provision for Indians and Coloureds in Parliament, albeit in separate chambers. The NIC did join the United Democratic Front (UDF), which was launched on 20 August 1983 to protest against the tri-cameral dispensation.

As the great event of the early 1990s unfolded, it seemed as if this inward focus was prescient. This fear or uncertainty, call it what you will, among Indians, particularly the working classes, was reflected in the 1994 and 1999 general elections when support for the African National Congress (ANC) fell short of expectations despite the healthy Indian representation in Parliament serving the ruling ANC. In the new national imagination taking place, Indians, it appeared, were mainly an exotic exemplar, courted for their symbolic rather than demographic value, by the true contenders over the spoils of democracy, Blacks and whites, the ANC and the National Party (Nats), and later the Democratic Alliance (DA). There was also the Minority Front (MF), led by that old survivor from the ethnic and racial political dispensations of the 1970s, to mop up this in-betweeness into the crevices of an ethnic political party (Desai and Maharaj, 1996).

Despite a prevailing discourse of non-racialism emanating from the ANC, old apartheid racial categories sanctioned by the new state to deal with redress and transformation helped shore up these identities.

The questioning of the place of Indians in South African society, and stereotyping continued into the post-apartheid period. Shortly before the 1999 elections, Amos Maphumulo, editor of the Zulu-language newspaper *Ilanga*, wrote that during the black-on-black violence of the 1980s and early 1990s, Indians were 'clandestinely inciting the clash by distributing weapons to African youth so that they could fight each other so that the Black nation could be exterminated.' Maphumulo hoped that 'one day an African woman would give birth to another Idi Amin' (*Mail and Guardian*, 28 May 1995). This was followed by Mbongeni Ngema's 2002 song in Zulu, 'AmaNdiya' ("Indian"), which criticized Indians for their alleged unwillingness to accept Africans as equals, for resisting change, being interested only in making money, and being

exploitative. He protested the presence of post-1994 migrants from India and Pakistan and urged the "strong men" of the Zulu nation to stand up to Indians.

But as some of the articles in this Special Issue attest (see articles by Walsh, Ngwane et al, Vahed) alongside fear and suspicion, there are instances in Chatsworth where Africans and Indians are coming together to confront poverty and inequality.

What has happened to Chatsworth almost two decades after the official demise of the Group Areas Act and the general demise of racial legislation? The genesis of this Special Issue, which attempts to deal with various aspects of this question, lay in a three-year grant (2011-2013) that we secured from the South Africa Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD Project 10/02) for the project titled 'Identity, Belonging and *Place* in post-apartheid South Africa: A Case Study of Chatsworth,' which set out to investigate the continuities and discontinuities of apartheid racial categories - African, Coloured, Indian and White – through a case study of Indian South Africans living in township of Chatsworth. We wanted to focus on the ways in the residents of this township understandand construct their relationship with and against the state. The demise of apartheid has brought into play new institutions of democracy and changed the political and economic environment significantly. Large numbers of people, especially those employed in the c lothing and textile sectors, have lost their jobs as the ANC government signed on to the lowering of tariff barriers at an even quicker pace than demanded by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).Further, as a result of affirmative action policies, working class Indians find that jobs that were once their preserve, in the municipality, as police officers, as civil servants, and bank clerks are fast closed off to them. In this context of economic deprivation, violence, gangsterism, substance abuse, and other social problems are on the rise.

In an illuminating reading of Marx's notion superfluity, Dubbeld writes that in South Africa

> While those rendered superfluous might have found other jobs in the past, the post-1973 moment globally has meant that the reintegration of people in the labor market has become increasingly unlikely. Hence, superfluity here comes to stand for the contradictory condition of contemporary capitalism, that of being at once structurally compelled to find work to ensure daily reproduction, and being structurally unable to find work (unpublished paper, 2011).

This reading is symptomatic of the biographies of an increasing number of people in the flat-lands of Chatsworth (see Desai; Vahed; Walsh in this issue). The unavailability of work in the factories that their fathers laboured in has important consequences for masculinity. This does not derive anymore from manual labour and the ability to be able to provide for the family. As Paul Willis hauntingly puts it

…the disappearance of work, and particularly of manual work, and the wage produce a very particular crisis for traditional working-class masculine senses of identity and meaning. Their bases are removed or broken. There are no chances even to make the sacrifices, no dignity from that. One possibility is simply depression, disorientation, personal decline and pathology…One form of the resolution of the "gender crisis" among young men may be an aggressive assertion of masculinity and masculine style for its own sake (Willis 2000: 93).

Whereas in the 1970s many young men lived with their parents after they got married in order to accumulate capital, this is no longer more an option because they cannot find jobs in the first place. As a result, 'many young men are trapped in the overcrowded homes of their parents by their inability to move, through lack of a wage, an assertive and aggressive style' leading to 'heightened family tensions and difficulties' (Willis 2000: 94).

South Africa's neo-liberal transition has facilitated the emergence of a Black middle class but exacerbated class inequalities within (officially designated racial) communities. Without policies being implemented to increase access to education and employment among the poor, affirmative action policies have largely empowered elite groups of Blacks and women, thus deepening class and gender inequalities in South Africa. Schools, the incubators of class mobility, have come under pressure. The composition of the schools has changed dramatically with an increasing number of poor African students (bussed in from Claremont, Lamontville and Umlazi) who cannot afford fees, taking up places in classrooms, as Chatsworth schools are still defined as 'privileged'. Geography and not the socio-economic status of learners is taken into account when the state hands out its annual subsidies. This definition is crucial because it cuts off Chatsworth schools from state funds while at the same time preventing those schools from denying access to non-paying learners. These schools are left to compete with others in more affluent areas which receive the same level of state funding, but whose parents can supplement that with premium school fees and after-hours tuition. School principals are in a bind. If they try methods like withholding fees they will have the education department on their backs. If they try to insist on fees they will face local conflict. It is a crisis.

The children of affluent parents attend private schools where the annual fee per child (anything up to R100, 000) is far in excess of what a working class Indian family can expect in the same period. A Model C school (government school formerly for whites only) such as Westville Boys High charges an annual school fee in the region of R20,000 in addition to receiving government subsidies. Contrast this with the experience of Lazarus Soobramoney, principal of Lotus Primary School in Westcliff. The school is in the heart of the working class area of Westcliff in the township of Chatsworth.

There are 350 pupils in the school, including children from neighbouring Lamotville. Soobramoney cannot charge fees because most of the parents are unemployed, underemployed or in debt. Yet, in terms of the ranking system used by the Department of Education, his school receives the same subsidy per child as Westville, because it is defined to be located in a developed area. He has challenged this in court but awaits the outcome. Through hard work and fundraising Soobramony provides stationery to the pupils, jerseys to around 200 learners in winter, and breakfast and lunch to the 200 pupils whose parents cannot afford to provide food. To provide better education for learners, Soobramoney has also invested in stimulating projects such as art and other visual mediums. The hallways, corridors, and buildings are painted with messages that show respect and social and environmental awareness. Despite vast economic differences, a poverty stricken resident of Chatsworth and the children of multi-millionaires are categorised under the all-inclusive label 'Indian' and must compete as equals for limited places in schools, universities and on the job market.

Starker class divisions among Indians are reflected in middle class Indians migrating from their old neighbourhood of Chatsworth for the old white areas bordering Chatsworth, such as Hillary, Yellowood Park, Queensburgh, and Malvern. Others have taken advantage of their educational qualifications and the lifting of restrictions on inter-provincial travel and racial job quotas to migrate to Johannesburg or Cape Town, and even further to Dubai and London. They have been replaced in Chatsworth by growing numbers of Africans and a significant smattering of new Asian immigrants from the Indian sub-continent. Shack settlements in places like Bottlebrush and Crossmoor have mushroomed. There has been the slower but steady movement of working class Africans into City Council flats, as well as middle class African families moving intoplaces like Mobeni Heights and Shallcross as Indian homeowners, concerned about shack settlements and security began to put their houses on the market. But this sense of movement and fluidity is limited. For the majority of those born in the flats, their places of abode remains within a R3 taxi trip of where their mothers and fathers first set up home in the early 1960s.

Welbedacht may be the face of the "new" Chatsworth. It was one of the first areas where Indians and Africans lived in close proximity. It is now home to approximately 35,000 residents. It is a very poor area, characterized by high levels of unemployment, poor nutrition, inadequate medical facilities, domestic violence, and child abuse. In 1994, when the new South Africa dawned, Welbedacht was described as 'an unusual community of Indians and Africans living side by side in wood-and-iron homes and shacks….Though it has been a forgotten, tucked away in the rolling green hills between Durban's Chatsworth and Umlazi townships, the plight of Welbedacht has at last touched the hearts of politicians, donors and development

agencies.' R60 million of RDP funding was used to build 11,500 homes(*Post*, 9 November 1994).Reporter Carvin Goldstone came across several white families in Welbedacht during a 2007 visit. They had been re-accommodated in the area when Durban's The Ark Church Ministries shelter at the Point was shut down at the beginning of 2004. Many of the residents in Welbedacht survive on unemployment and other welfare benefits, and casual work on construction sites. Goldstone wrote:

> White children playing in front of a tiny RDP house in a largely black township, as a Bon Jovi tune plays in the background, is a rare sight in South Africa. But in the township of Welbedacht near Durban - where at least six white families have been living for more than three years - it's a little more common. Today Welbedacht is becoming an increasingly non-racial area where poverty, and a willingness to share what little they have, binds the community together. Esme Zietsman, a mother of two, has been living in Welbedacht for the past three years. Her two children, Urshula, nine-years-old, and Jonathan, six-years-old, are blind to skin colour and play with all the other children in the neighbourhood. Zietsman says when they moved into their one-room home there were a lot of difficulties they had to overcome after. "A lot of us didn't have electricity and some of us, including myself, still do not have power. I came here in the night and there were 100 houses for Ark people and, by the time I had unpacked, it was 11pm. The next morning I woke up and all I wanted to know was where I was and people told me I'm in Chatsworth near Umlazi." One regular comment by white families in Welbedacht is that they feel safe. Sue Hon, who also lives with her partner and daughter in Welbedacht, says they arrived in 2004 in the middle of the night on a bus. "When we were put down, we were told to find any house." Hon, who lives down the road from Zietsman, said she felt really safe and that residents lived in harmony with one another. Hon, a nurse who works as an unpaid volunteer in the area, says she feels part of the community. (Goldstone 2007).

There are other changes wrought by 'white capital' coming to the area. The ubiquitous small traders have been hit by the chain-stores located in the Chatsworth Shopping Mall. The Bangladesh Market, opened in the late 1960s to provide an outlet for market gardeners, still sells "live" chickens and trotters and tripe, but only operates once a week and the lack of parking and ablution facilities and the limited space for vendors' hems in this once vibrant local entrepreneurial pulse.

Continuity does not mean that Chatsworth is fossilized and cut-off from broader impulses. Hansen, for example, has argued:

> Although denied by most inhabitants of Chatsworth, it seems that there is an increasing convergence of patterns of life and cultural enjoyment between Indian and African townships…The reproduction of a local sense of "Indianness" is now challenged by a proliferating range of global and translocal identifications, as well as a new and

unmistakably Africanized way of inhabiting the city through the senses. In view of this wider South African context, the taxi, its colors, and its deafening *kwaito* signifies much more than a demotic celebration of postapartheid freedom. It also signifies a new inhabitation of urban space and a new morally ambiguous cultural genre — Afro-Indian — that cannot recognize itself as an identity. Not yet (Hansen 1996: 204-6).

Local impulses vie with more global ones. English soccer is one of them. The funky, fast-moving younger generation of Bollywood stars have made an impact, helped no doubt by the sale of low-cost pirated DVD's (see Singh in this issue). And so too have pan-Indian religious movements. The devotees of Sai Baba, for example, make their annual pilgrimage to India while the adherents of Hare Krishna see themselves as part of ISKON, a global family. Pentecostalism has made huge inroads in the township (see Ojong in this issue). The once ubiquitous extended or male-headed households have beenconfronted by an increasing number of female-headed households (see Vahed and Desai in this issue). Dress codes have changed. Young men with earrings, flashy gold chains, baggy pants and number one haircuts are all the rage. To service this "style", many have become drug runners and seek an identity through local gangs. This gives the young male "street cred" that they cannot get from wage employment (see Desai in this issue).

Alongside this,the old exclusively male street corner society has been challenged by younger women on the streets wearing clothes that openly express their sexuality. This though does not denote the decline of chauvinism. Violent abuse inside of the household is on the increase as men try and assert control. Freedom comes at a price. A happier story is that women runners making their mark in the Comrades Marathon (see Naidoo in this issue). Slowly and hesitantly,young gay and lesbian people have come out in the open. Brandon "Brandy" Ramsunder made headlines when he entered the 2010 Miss Bollywood contest and was denied entry because he was a boy. Ramsunder, a high school student,was open about beinggay. He was subsequently invited to participate in a pageant hosted by the Gay and Lesbian Network. Ramsunder commented: 'It is wonderful that these organisations have created platforms for people like me to participate in. I am very comfortable with who I am and I don't think I have to have a sex change to participate in women's events.'

Drugs have always been part of Chatsworth's history. But the old dagga pipe and mandrax has been replaced by sugars;a cheap, highly addictive drug. There is in townships a growing stratum of young men who are alienated, see no hope in the future and seek solace in gangs and drugs (see Jagganath and Shanta Singh). Gambling has also changed.The old call card games are almost extinct. Casinos and totes that take betting from soccer games to horse racing across the world dominate. In this sea

of poverty and gloom there are some very uplifting stories. It is philanthropic organizations such as the Aryan Benevolent Home that are playing a crucial role in helping keep large numbers of struggling people just above the poverty line (see Sookhraj and Chetty).

There have been responses to these changes (see Desai and Vahed). For a short time, from 1999 to 2002, Chatsworth became the epicenter of a new politics that had the potential to grow and extract major concessions from the state at a policy level.Its spark came from an organization called the Concerned Citizens Group (CCF) which was led by longtime ANC activist Fatima Meer. Its mission was to garner votes for the ANC. But Meer soon abandoned thisonceshe saw the deteriorating living conditions and desperation of households, especially those with single women at the helm. As the CCG grew into the Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF) it helped sponsor local flat residents' organizations. In its wake came protests, occupations and desperate non-racial battles with authorities to stop evictions and cut-offs. These actions were followed by a campaign of illegal reconnections, court cases, and solidarity actions with other organizations in Tafelsig and Soweto. This brought forth the reception into academia of the term"community movements" who were to be the defence and offense against the ANC's commodification of bare life. These local militant resistances undoubtedly had positive results for many people living in Westcliff and Bayview. Homes were saved and water was reconnected.Yet it is hard not to think that the greater potential of these movements did not materialize.By potential we mean moving beyond Chatsworth to link up with other communities facing persistent threats to bare life.

A myriad of reasons can be afforded for this. One may have had to do with the ability of the local state to draw movements into negotiations designed to 'deliver' on the most basic of demands, such as the painting of flats. These petty concessions began to consume movement leadership. Alongside these kinds of concessions is the investment of the poor themselves in a party political electoral system on the one hand, and a constitutional guarantee of their human rights on the other. There is still much to learn from the ways people struggled then, what the disconnections were between the way in which these struggles were written up and their actual content, and where the road map might lead in the future.

For me (Ashwin Desai), Chatsworth is a place in which I schooled as a youth in the first decade of the 1970s . But I would become one of those who escaped the gravity of race and place. What kept me away for so long afterwards was a certain contempt for the way Indianness in Chatsworth was deployed both to challenge those aspects of apartheid that were oppressive but also to maintain an ethnic separateness that essentially stemmed from apartheid itself. After 1994, it appeared that Indians were not only possessed of a Chatsworthian consciousness themselves but that many

of their fellow countrymen were quite content to encourage them to remain Indian when it came to, for example, claims to development, jobs or leadership in government.

Then, a little later, Chatsworth became my "school" again. It showed just how perceptive and indomitable groups of ordinary people can be when faced with local conditions that somehow, briefly, expose the world for what it really is. Flying in the face of prevailing orthodoxies, (such as, in 1999, the feeling that one must 'give the ANC time', 'don't protest, its economic policies will deliver for all', 'it's an essentially decent organization filled with caring, community-centred activists'), the poor in Chatsworth formed some of the very first militant community organizations in South Africa not only critiquing but protesting against the effects of a conservative macro-economic programme,the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), that at a local level turned citizens into consumers. The price of water and electricity spiraled upwards, accompanied by water and electricity meters that cut households off if the residents did not have cash to pay for services. Despite the optimism that accompanied the end of apartheid, the promise of a 'better life for all' has not materialised. GEAR was intended to deal with mass unemployment and poverty through economic growth and job creation. Policy imperatives have been partially achieved in the creation of a Black elite but the notion of trickle down has not been realised.

But Chatsworth was a "school" in another way too. Romanticising these moments of perspicuity and these movements of protest is no way to serve them. Nor is the sheer number of footnotes or website visits or masters theses written about movements a measure of their abiding relevance. Deep in the heart of even seemingly progressive protest movements there are co-optations going on and insularities developing. The Tricameral Parliament may have been one way of funneling radicalism away in the 1980s; now thirty years later, the mediating and moderating influence of civil society seems to be another.

As we now see, the community activist movements in Chatsworth have, by and large, made way for Body Corporates, political parties, and small businesses benefiting from the cosmetic upgrading of what are essentially slums. The same cycle of rise and fall affects many other movements that have arisen after 1999. Or perhaps it is just that, unlike the days of my youth, horizons for change in Chatsworth are still wide open, and it is my eyesight that has dimmed. 'Older people' Paul Theroux tells us 'are perceived as cynics and misanthropes – but no, they are simply people who have at last heard the still, sad music of humanity played by an inferior rock band howling for fame' but still he reminds us '(w)e all live with fantasies of transformation' (2008: 3-4).

In many senses I returned to Chatsworth in the late 1990s as an aspirant activist. As my own "outsiderness" met the energies and came up against the machinations and

intrigues of local leadership, I have become more of a researcher, and a story-teller. It was a special vantage point from the time of my youth to the present, a time when the temples and the ideological constructs that animated the anti-apartheid years, are much greyer. As the street names take on the halo of the new liberation icons, Isee the continuities from the time I was in school in the mid 1970s into the era of democracy.

On the streets, inside the household, and in the schools, Chatsworth is changing. The sari is for special occasions, the music hip-hop blared directly from the streets of Los Angeles, the extended family limited to battered photo albums. But the symbols and traditions honed through the decades are there too - kavady, Ramadan, Diwali, trotters and tripe, and crab curry.To come to grips with the past half century Chatsworth is to get a handle of the past in the present, of breaks and continuities. This is the theme taken up by the articles in this Special Issue.

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