

The Blackest Spots of South African History

Introduction

“Every human life, however humble it has been, has a context meshed of familiar experience – social relations, patterns of activity in relation to environment. Call it ‘home’ if you like. To be transported out of this on a Government truck one morning and put down in an uninhabited place is to be asked to build not only your shelter but your whole life over again, from scratch.”

-Nadine Gordimer¹

This poignant observation was written to describe the inevitable difficulties and changes imposed on the people removed from their abode. This passage, however, also illustrates one of the major attempts of this papers, which is to demonstrate how hard it is to re-establish the distorted lives of the removed, and how drastically these people’s future is affected by losing their place of living. Similarly to Gordimer’s idea, a loss of land also leads to new socio-economic needs and new ideological aspirations.

Driving through the beautiful lands of Kwazulu-Natal, one may notice the abundance of seemingly unused land. South Africa, however, is facing a major dilemma of land ownership because the majority of its citizens are landless. And even when they possess land, it is not of prime quality. This problem is of major gravity, and one of the key reasons is that since 1994, the year of the first democratic elections South Africans witnessed, many farms have been attacked, cattle stolen, and farmers murdered. For example, more than 1,500 white farmers have been murdered over the past decade of peaceful majority rule in South Africa.² Many link these murders to the unequal land ownership in South Africa.

In 1994 when apartheid ended, whites owned 80 per cent of the country’s land. The new government promised that land would belong to all who worked it. Still today, due to

¹ Preface to *The Discarded People*, xvi

² “South Africa Bloody Battle for Land”

the dire legacy of apartheid, 75 per cent of agricultural land is owned by white South Africans, who make up only 10 per cent of the total population.³ This dilemma of unequal land ownership has led to various debates and propositions in regards with how to fairly redistribute the land and how to recompense the people for their losses. While the problem of land redistribution/restitution is both vital and obscure, critics tend to oversimplify its intricacy. Due to its complexity and magnitude, this question requires an understanding of the socio-economic, political, and demographic changes that have been occurring in South Africa and their effects on the landless. The debate on land also requires a careful scrutiny of how people perceive the importance of land and what form of compensation they seek. For many South Africans, participation in the land reforms does not always translate in acquisition of land. Some people, as my case study will demonstrate, people prefer alternative methods of compensation.

‘Black spots’ are a unique case in the history of Kwazulu-Natal’s land because they were pieces of land actually owned by African people. One must keep in mind that the majority of black South Africans could not legally possess land during apartheid. But these African land owners were the rare exceptions. Nonetheless, even their ‘legally owned’ land was later forcefully taken away from them by the apartheid regime. Their plots were either considered too fertile, or they lied in the area considered white’s land.

In order to exemplify the ambiguousness of the land reform in South Africa, I will scrutinize a case study of Kwapitela and Compensation, the former being a ‘black spot’ and the latter being the closer settlement, to where the people were forcefully removed. My case study will include oral data of reflections, deliberations, and the emotions of the removed in these communities and their view of the problem. Via this analysis, I will endeavour to link the situation of the considered case to the current land debates in South Africa. And by doing

³ “South Africa Proposes Quicker Land Reform”

so, I will try to illustrate how people that lost their access to land many years ago perceive the meaning of land in the beginning of the 21st century. But before that, I'll briefly sum up the major historical events that led to the current situation in Kwazulu-Natal.

The structure of this paper consists of three parts. The first section will set the historical background of land issues in Kwazulu-Natal with a focus on 'black spots.' Furthermore, the case of the Kwapitela 'black spot,' located between Sani Pass and Himeville, will demonstrate the details of the implementations of the land seizure and the effects it had on the removed society in Compensation at the time of the removal. This case will also reveal how this forced resettlement further complicated the issue of land in present day South Africa. The final segment will focus on some of the most prevalent arguments that have rigidly infested the land debates in today's South Africa, but that also tend to dangerously simplify the complex reality. By looking at the Kwapitela/Compensation case study, my paper will argue that a successful land reform requires a well informed debate, understanding, and awareness of the real situation on the ground. Kwapitela/Compensation in itself is not a case of major political, economic, or historical magnitude; but by only 1975, about 211, 626 Africans had been removed from 'black spots' and related areas and resettled on land adjoining the homelands. Many of these removals have similar consequences to the considered case in Compensation, where the existing situation complicates the issue of land reform.

History of 'Black Spots' and Their Removal in Kwazulu-Natal

While the problem of the unjust land distribution exists throughout South Africa, my analysis will limit its brief history of land to the area that is today called Kwazulu-Natal. There are a number of features of Kwazulu-Natal which distinguish it from the rest of South Africa and have ensured that the process of removals has been somewhat different here from what it has been in the other provinces. In spite of the existence of important local

differences within KwaZulu-Natal, this region forms a readily discernible and unique entity within Southern Africa as a whole – geographically, culturally, economically, and politically.⁴

‘Black spot’ is an official term that was used to describe African freehold land which was acquired before the 1913 Natives Land Act and which lied out-side the planned or released areas. It was one of the categories of land threatened with removal and later removed because it was located within the domain of the White area.⁵ The term ‘black spot,’ although widely used, was an ideologically altered controversial piece of propaganda bred out of self-assumed white supremacy. It was used very loosely by government officials to describe, attack, and condemn any black occupied area that they wanted to weed out.⁶

While discussing the history of ‘black spots’ and their eradication, it is essential to keep in mind the bigger picture of the land history of Kwazulu-Natal because the removals during the twentieth century did not come from nowhere; but they were a consequence of a well prepared legal developments that had begun since the first arrival of white settlers. These historical events still largely shape today’s land debates and thus must be understood.

After crossing the Drakensberg and seeing the land of Natal for the first time on October 1837, Piet Retief, the Voortrekker leader, described what he saw: “From the heights of these mountains I saw this beautiful land, the most beautiful I’ve ever seen in Africa”.⁷ The Voortrekkers were first white settlers in the Drakensberg region of Natal, and they immediately took control of the upland country beyond the Tugela, where cattle diseases were less prevalent than in the coastlands. The Voortrekkers spread themselves sparsely because on a veld that deteriorated rapidly over the winter months, large tracts of land were essential to carry their livestock. Consequently, many of the Boer farms were massive in

⁴ Surplus People Project, Vol. 4, p.1

⁵ Platzky, xi

⁶ “Black Spots”

⁷ Bulpin, 94

size, but most contained great stretches of bare rock and stony veld fit only for goats.⁸

Hungry to acquire more land, the Voortrekkers had to push away indigenous Zulu people who occupied that territory. Thus, from those early times of the Voortrekkers' presence, the possession of land became a sensitive issue that has remained so until today.

Soon after their first arrival, the Voortrekkers created the *Volksraad* (People's assembly) of the new Boer republic established in 1838. One of its objectives was to convert into law the quotidian for the Voortrekkers distinction between people – White men - and creatures or chattels – non-Whites. Whites could easily acquire the rights of citizens and landowners in the Republic. Non-Whites, on the other hand, “had no right to be in the settled parts of the republic at all, except as servants of white people, and then were not permitted to own land, firearms or horses, to participate in the political process, or to be at large without passes signed by white employers”.⁹ The mix of the Voortrekkers' fascination with the land and their racism towards Africans was an inception of the much more direct political and economic discrimination. The Afrikaner colonizers established their republic, taking over vast areas of land and suppressing African resistance by the destruction of the Africans' cattle and crops. The Afrikaners were indirectly buttressed by the English settlers and the colonial powers in Natal that together contained and finally demolished the main concentration of African resistance.¹⁰

European vigorous ‘land’ incursion into Zululand came after the end of the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879 and the following civil war between the Zulus. These events led to devastation and major reformation of Zulu traditional settlement patterns. Although highly interested in the land, British colonial interest was also focused on labour resources needed in the newly discovered gold and diamond regions during the 1850s.¹¹ Sandwiched between the

⁸ Laband, 2

⁹ Wilson, 367

¹⁰ Desmond, 23

¹¹ Skelcher, 768; MacKinnon, 5

Voortrekkers and the British, the native people were too vulnerable to fight against the legal and military incursions of the two white groups.

Furthermore, the idea that the white race was superior to that of black people was a very principal foundation on which both the Voortrekkers and British assembled their land policies. For instance, Frederick Robert Moor, the man who headed the Native Affairs Department for eight of the first ten years of the responsible government period in Natal, asserted to the South African Native Affairs Commission (1903 to 1905): “We are the dominant race and we must remain so.” Moor’s belief in the supremacy of the white race in Natal was certainly shared by most of the whites in Colonial Natal.¹²

For the majority of indigenous Africans in South Africa, the history of land has been the history of land that they could not own. Yet, there were some Africans in Colonial Natal that did own land according to the Western understanding of property ownership. These were the Africans to whom the issue of ‘black spots’ is directly linked. The origins of freehold land date back to the mid 19th century when a small but vigorous and predominantly Christian peasantry was emerging within African society in Natal.¹³ Nearly all of the Africans who won exemption from Native Law before the 1880s were Christians. Some of these men listed on their applications property holdings that would have been envied by most white settlers in Natal. For example, in 1881 the Methodist minister Daniel Msimang reported real estate consisting of the two houses on 89 acres at Edendale, along with a large block of shares in the co-operatively owned farms in Driefontein and Kleinfontein. His moveable property included two ploughs, two wagons, thirty-six oxen, 260 goats and twenty cows. An even wealthier Christian, William Africa, owned 1,000 acres outright and shares in several farms.¹⁴

¹² Mesthrie, 41

¹³ “Black Spots”

¹⁴ Duminy, 288

Shortages of land on coastal mission reserves held the African planters back in these first ventures, as it did in most parts of the Colony. Freehold tenure, which was essential to commercial success, was banned on government locations and was available only under special conditions on mission reserves. Plenty of land was available for rent from absentee landowners, but tenants hesitated to invest much money in farms which they did not own. Wherever they could, African farmers purchased land, creating through their purchases areas which later would be known as ‘black spots.’ These witnesses to thrift and enterprise began to appear in the 1850s. First at Edendale, then at Indaleni, the upper Mzimkhulu river valley and the hinterland of Ladysmith, Methodist men established farms by pooling resources. The land was then sub-divided [and distributed] among [their] followers. During the same period, a group of *kholwa*, [the Christianized African], from the overcrowded Lutheran mission at New Germany bought a nearby farm and hired a white school teacher to continue the education of their children.¹⁵

The pioneers were followed by a group of men from the Ndaleni Mission, near Richmond, who, in 1861, bought some land in the upper Umzinkhulu river valley. There were at that stage no legal bars to African purchases of land – although there were definite financial and social hindrances – and the next three decades saw a rapid increase in the amount of land [owned by Africans]. Most purchases were inland where land was cheaper than on the coast, concentrated along the Drakensberg foothills and in the northern districts around Ladysmith and Newcastle, where very little land had been set aside as reserves. By 1870, Africans owned 12,357 acres [of land] in Natal. By 1880 this had increased five-fold to 62,012 acres and by 1890 it had increased still further to 206,719 acres – still a miniscule percent of the total freehold land then allocated to the colony but the beginning of a radically

¹⁵ “Black Spots;” Duminy, 288

different form of land tenure within African society and the base on which a tiny class of landowners was forming.¹⁶

Land buying continued in the 1870s with two more offshoots of Edendale appearing near Ladysmith, one of the Mlazi River and a fourth on the upper Mzimkhulu. Men from the Church of England mission at Ladysmith raised \$2,100 towards the purchase of two farms. According to the Methodist missionary Joseph Allsopp, there were many counterparts to these ventures. He told the Natal Native Commission of 1881 that *kholwa* were ‘forming companies and taking land throughout the colony; it being commonplace for them to be seen bidding ‘publicly at sales of Crown Lands the same as white people’.¹⁷

This land was freehold; most ‘black spots’ had title deeds that predated the establishment of Union in 1910. Their deeds proclaimed, in the Gothic script of an earlier age, that the land is to be held “in perpetuity” by the buyer and his heirs. In addition to these privately owned farms, ‘black spot’ may also have been used to describe certain mission-owned properties which were purchased, also a long time ago, by various churches on behalf of their African congregations, often paid for by their African congregations –and then leased to them.¹⁸

However, although the amount of land in African hands continued to augment (to 397,754 acres in 1910), the speed of purchases began to slow down and then decreased in the 1890s. This relative decline coincided with fortunes of the African peasantry, of which it was a part. The opening of the gold and diamond mines in the last quarter of the 19th century gave an enormous boost to white commercial agriculture and gave an avid demand for cheap labour by both the mines and the farms of white South Africa. In the midst of these rapid economic explosions, the whites viewed African owned land as being economically misused.

¹⁶ “Black Spots;” Duminy, 288

¹⁷ Duminy, 288

¹⁸ “Black Spots”

Hence, in response to the new opportunities, various white governments began laying the foundations of the migrant labour laws designed to force blacks into wage labor.¹⁹

In Natal, as soon as the white settlers achieved responsible government in 1893, they immediately began to use their political power to impede Africans from purchasing more land. In the 1890s the Mission reserves were prohibited to allow individual tenure in their settlements; in 1903 the Natal lands department was instructed to refuse all African bids at the sale of crown lands. The process of proletarianisation of the African population was further speeded up by a series of natural disasters including cattle disease, from which many African producers and small farmers were unable to recover on their own.²⁰

By the time Natal joined the Union in 1910, African acquisition of freehold land had already been slowed down and the economic base of the peasantry cracked. Nevertheless, a small but significant amount of land remained in African hands and continued to foster a suffering but relatively powerful stratum of African society into the era of Bantustans and homeland governments. They formed something of an elite within the wider African society, linked to each other by a dense network of marriage alliances and a common, staunchly mission-Christian culture. In addition to the landowners there were their tenants; by 1916 about two-thirds of the total population of 39,250 living on these farms. Deprived of capital, bypassed by roads and railways and technical assistance by the state, many landowners were coming to rely on income from rent to supplement their farming.²¹ Already by that time, land was becoming an insufficient source of income. The example of Kwapitela/Compensation in the next section will closer analyse an even further departure from people's reliance on agriculture.

At the same time, the growing landlessness in the reserves, coupled with unsatisfactory conditions on white farms, was forcing many rural blacks to seek alternative

¹⁹ "Black Spots"

²⁰ "Black Spots"

²¹ "Black Spots"

sources of livelihood and accommodation. They went mostly to the towns, if they could, but some settled on the freehold farms – one of the few areas where people could get land that was not controlled by government officials or their appointees.²² The ‘black spots’ were becoming more packed with people and the life on the freehold plots was becoming less and less attractive.

The passage of the segregationist Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 put an end to any further African purchases of land outside the proclaimed reserves, and the removals of the ‘black spots’ had their origins in the 1913 and 1936 Lands Acts.²³ In Native Life in South Africa, a moving elegy to the evictions of individual African sharecroppers and labour tenants from white-owned community farms, Sol Plaatje captured the 1913 Land Act’s symbolic meaning in a phrase that continues to haunt South African historical memory: “Awaking on Friday morning, June 20th, 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth”.²⁴

To solve the refugee problem without getting involved in heavy administrative cost, the Natal government demarcated a series of small reserves for exclusive African occupation throughout the colony. The boundaries of these reserves were determined less by traditional claims than by priorities of the white settlers. Wherever land was considered too hilly or agriculturally not very good, a reserve was likely to be proclaimed.²⁵

Many black farms were incorporated into the reserves, but some were not. They became isolated and controlled enclaves in the middle of the white hinterland. A cycle of underdevelopment, reminiscent of what was already visible in the reserves, was slowly gathering force. Although trapped and shackled on a fixed amount of land, increasingly dependent on migrant labor, these people still remained coherent societies, with strong

²² “Black Spots”

²³ Baldwin, 221

²⁴ P. 21

²⁵ Platzky, 78

traditions and the precious assets of their own land. With the modification of apartheid policy after 1948, these communities became even more vulnerable. Thus land, bought in good faith, occupied for generations, became classified, as ‘black spots’ – blotches on the theory and practice of apartheid which would have to be eradicated.²⁶

The removal of ‘black spots’ - so called the ‘bleaching out’ of South Africa - was at its height in 1969 when M.C. Botha was Minister of Bantu Administration and Development (BAD).²⁷ Botha explained that no force was required, “We get their co-operation in all cases voluntarily... Sometimes it is necessary to do quite a lot of persuasion, but we do get them anyway”.²⁸ In reality “get them” through intimidation and selective use of violence. In 1968, G. F. Van L. Froneman, deputy chairman of the Bantu Affairs Commission, said, “When all these ‘Black spots are gone,’ the chess board pattern of Bantu Areas and White Areas in South Africa will also to a great extent be eliminated”.²⁹ The BAD reported that Natal had the largest number of people removed. Between 1957 and 1959, Natal Administration removed 40,000 Africans and another 400,000 in the 1970s to the newly established Bantustans.³⁰

The following section of this paper will scrutinize a history of a ‘black spot’ in KwaZulu-Natal, and a brief reproduction of its history of ‘black spots’ will direct to a better understanding of how the current land reform debate has become so complex and multifaceted.

Kwapitela/Compensation Case Study

Kwapitela was a black-owned farm in a ‘white’ district - a ‘black spot’ – in the foothills of the Drakensberg, some 8 kilometres from Himeville. It was a little over 323 hectares in area. The land was well-watered, with plenty of water resources due to the Umkomanzi

²⁶ “Black Spots’

²⁷ Platzky, 128

²⁸ Unterhalter, 110-111

²⁹ Desmond, 20

³⁰ Unterhalter, 1987; “Black Spots 2”

River running through one end of the property, well grassed, and almost free of erosion. It looked a peaceful, rural community. It was purchased by Pitela Hlope, grandfather of the owner during whose time the removal took place, in 1900 at a public auction in Pietermaritzburg.³¹

Over the years, a small rural community developed on this farm. By 1980, there were 76 households living there, among whom were a few Hlophe landowners and their tenants. The labour tenancy method of capitalist labour exploitation involved farm workers and their families serving the land-owning white (or black) farmers for a period of time, ranging from three to nine months. In exchange the families were granted access to land for crops, grazing and habitation and sometimes also a small wage in goods and cash.³² The land in this particular situation was imperative for the survival of the families that work on it. The tenants annually paid between R19 and R12, 25 in rent in return for a couple hectares of residential and arable land per household and unlimited access to grazing for their stock. Most of the tenants had been living at Kwapitela for more than 20 years. They therefore had developed strong ties to the land.³³

It was an isolated community and a poor one, but at a subsistence level people lived fairly well. Their housing was in good conditions and repair – a mixture of cement-block and wattle-and-daub buildings spread across the farm in clusters, with gardens and grazing land in between. Water and firewood were in plentiful supply. There was a small stone church that also served as a primary school during the week. But above all, there was plenty of prime land.

Nobody can describe KwaPitela as idyllic – incomes are low, jobs hard to find, the infrastructure of transport, supermarkets, schools etc. that urban people can take for granted is lacking in this as in other rural areas. But it is a settled rural community. It

³¹ “KwaPitela”

³² Mare, 8-15

³³ Platzky, 232

established a way of life that has been built up over many years. Because Kwapitela is black freehold land residents, have greater independence and control over their own lives than they would in a township or 'closer settlement' situation. Most important of all, they have an assured access to agricultural land and have built a lifestyle that centres around that.³⁴

This report emphasizes the significance of possessing arable land. Dispossessing this land from the people is taking away their pivotal method of providing food and imposes a need to restructure the socio-economic modes of engagement of the whole society.

But this was not central to the apartheid officials for whom Kwapitela was illegally laying in the area that exclusively belonged to whites. Consequently, as early as 1969 KwaPitela was destined to be removed: "Owing to this situation, the above-mentioned property is a 'black spot' which in terms of departmental policy will have to be eliminated in due course".³⁵

Until ten years later, nothing further occurred. In September 1979, however, the local commissioner and a few other government officials unexpectedly arrived on the farm. They informed the people that the farm was to be expropriated by the government and all the tenants, as a result, would be moved shortly. In addition, they advised them not to plant any crops that season because it would be at their own risk since they would not be compensated for them when they were moved.³⁶

Soon after, workmen arrived and painted numbers on all the houses. Then there was a lull. No officials came near the place for nearly two years. Neither rationalization nor explanation was given of why they had not come back and no indication of when the people would be moved. Most people had taken what the commissioner had suggested about the

³⁴ "Unpublished Report"

³⁵ "Letter from the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner for Natal to lawyers acting on behalf of one of the landowners"

³⁶ "KwaPitela Removed"

crop very seriously. They hadn't planted, and now they were without that extra food yet too insecure to ignore his instructions. They became increasingly aggravated and fidgety.

In August 1980, a different official visited them. It was during the week and most of the adult men were away. He told the people who were present – mainly women – that later that month they would be taken to see the area to which they would be moved. As expected, a group of people visited Compensation. According to one of KwaPitela's landowners, most of them were not impressed by what they had seen. He himself commented: "But I do not like that place because there is no ploughing and no place for the cattle. I think it would be better if they can move them to the place where they can do ploughing and where their cattle can live".³⁷

The man was trying desperately to find support for his stand from church and other community organizations in Pietermaritzburg. But the tenants themselves were passive. In addition to the external pressure put by the government, there was an internal problem in the community between landowners themselves over rents. Pitela Hlophe's heirs disagreed among themselves about who was and who was not entitled to collect rent from the tenants; there were allegations that some of them were demanding rent from their relatives' tenants. At least part of the reason why the landowners referred to above was so active was that he did not want to lose the income his tenants provided.³⁸

In addition, officials and the local security police warned the community against having dealings with outside groups who, as one member of the community reported it, 'are likely to deceive you'.³⁹

A further problem was their isolation. There were no telephones. Very few people had cars and the main form of transport was to travel by bus or to walk. Kwapitela was completely cut off from the mainstream of political activity in urban and industrial South

³⁷ Letter in AFRA files

³⁸ "KwaPitela Removed"

³⁹ "KwaPitela Removed"

Africa. It had no real links with other threatened rural communities either. Few of the people could imagine challenging the government which they knew to be all powerful and out of reach. At meetings the women whose husbands were away at work felt it would be improper for them to speak in their absence. So they accepted the removal: “We did not like to go away because we were born here; it was only that we heard that government wanted it and we submitted to that”.⁴⁰

The people of Kwapitela were finally removed in July 1981, over two and a half years they had first been told that their removal was about to happen. It was mid-winter – the days were sunny and dry, but the nights were bitterly cold. The removal was spread over two days, the government employing a fleet of about 80 GG (Government Garage) trucks and a huge crew of workers to shift the people and their goods. The workers were not local people. They were black, but they did not speak Zulu (the language of the area), so there was no connection between them and the people whose houses they were dismantling.

The outward appearance of those being moved was impassive. There were no signs of anger or of grief. The mood was rather of blank resignation:

They submitted stoically to the demolition of their houses, loading what they could salvage from the rubble and the dust onto the waiting trucks – windows, sheets, of tin roofing, doors and poles and fencing.⁴¹

At Compensation each family was allocated a site with one room tin hut and a latrine standing on it. Some of the huts were not fully assembled before their occupants arrived; none of them had floors or roofs. The very largely households were given tents as well. Most households were supplied with rations: mealie meal, soup powder, powdered milk and salt, in quantities large enough to last them for two weeks. A few that arrived at the very end found that the supplies had already run out. Fuel was also laid on, but instead of it being free

⁴⁰ “KwaPitela Removed”

⁴¹ “KwaPitela Removed”

– which most people had expected – it was for sale only. It was the community’s first experience of paying for a basic necessity that formerly had cost them nothing except their labour, their first taste of their new life in a place where ‘a person has to pay for everything.’

A total of R 35606 was paid out in compensation for the improvements the Kwapitela tenants left behind - an average of R 429.84 per household. The highest amount paid to any household was R 1457, the lowest R 50.⁴²

In addition, the tenants were informed beforehand about the amount they were to receive and had an opportunity to object if not satisfied. The removed, however, told a different story. In a household survey undertaken by AFRA in August 1981, a month after the removal, 42 people said that they had not received any official notice about compensation before they were removed. One woman said that she did not know if her husband had been notified or not. One person’s reply was not clear, and only 6 people claimed to have been prepared for what to expect in advance.

One person described the payout procedure, which took place at the time of the removal, as follows: “There was not much said. They would shout one’s name as per folio number and summon him to the temporary office. On arrival, you were just given a certain amount of money and there was no further discussion”.⁴³

People were paid in cash. Afterwards there were some allegations that the clerks in charge of the payout were not properly supervised and there were some irregularities – people being made to sign or make their thumbprint mark before they were given their money and then finding that they had been short-changed. Some of the removed were scared that by complaining they might lose the money they had got. The dominant attitude

⁴² Hansard

⁴³ “KwaPitela Removed”

among those who were compensated seemed to be one of gratitude that they had been paid anything at all.⁴⁴

After their first weeks at Compensation, most of the people interviewed by AFRA revealed much the same spirit of resignation about their new situation as they had about the removal itself. About two-thirds of them said that they were not glad to be at Compensation, 8 people said that they were, and 11 people were non-committal: “We have no way to like it or not. Because there is no alternative, we have accepted this place”.⁴⁵

Only 2 of those interviewed reported that they had no problems, while a further 10 were unwilling to commit themselves. The remaining 42 people reported a wide range of general problems. The four major complaints were about fuel (mentioned 23 times), the lack of land for ploughing (20 times) and for stock (10 times), and the high cost of living (13 times). Yet despite their complaints and the fact that most people did not like Compensation, over half of those interviewed said it was as they expected. Explained one woman: “I expected the place not to be good, for I have seen and heard of other removals. I had no hope”.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the removal to Compensation has forced major changes in the lifestyle of the former KwaPitela tenants. A year after their removal, most households have managed to start building new houses, but to date most of them have only to build single structures and several are still living in the fletcraft huts. Rebuilding has been slower and more expensive than anticipated and it seems doubtful that most people will be able to reproduce the size and the quality of the housing they had before. Most of the workers in the community appear to have retained their previous jobs but those who used to work in the Himeville/Underberg area appear to have been turned into migrant workers, returning home a week or once a month instead of daily. People complain heavily about the high cost of living and their landlessness

⁴⁴ “KwaPitela Removed”

⁴⁵ “KwaPitela Removed”

⁴⁶ Platzky 236,237,238

which are regarded as major disadvantages in their new situation. However many expressed relief at being independent of their former landlords: their attitude towards Compensation appears to have been softened by that.

In several trips back to the community between 1981 and 1982, an AFRA fieldworker has picked up a growing concern within the community about the increased level of drinking since the removal. It appears that a number of people have resorted to opening shebeens as a means of making extra money and that the incidence of drunkenness in the community has risen alarmingly.⁴⁷ This suggests that the adjustment to the removal and the closer settlement way of life has been more traumatic than the stoical exterior of the people seems to indicate.⁴⁸

Our research team travelled to Compensation in September of 2005, twenty four years after the people were removed from Kwapitela, to discuss the issue of land with its residents and with a hope to find out how the residents view their removal and their current position in the context of today's sensitive land reform.⁴⁹

Finding Compensation was not easy. We had to stop by a police station after a two-hour-drive from Durban to clarify the directions. As soon as we finally found and entered Compensation, we saw two older women selling bricks. When we accosted them, the very first question we asked was whether this was the place where people from KwaPitela were settled in 1981. It was surprising for the women to have some strangers interested in their place. While refusing to share her name and any other personal information, except her age, one of the ladies immediately acknowledged that this was the place, and that she herself was removed from Kwapitela in 1981.

⁴⁷ Shebeens – now legal drinking establishment - are common in South Africa, where they are run predominantly by women in order to earn extra money

⁴⁸ Surplus people Project, Volume 4, p. 495

⁴⁹ I was accompanied by Dr. Vukhile Khumalo from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban

We were sent to the house of Compensation's city councillor, who would hopefully elaborate on the removal and also inform us about the post-removal socio-economic *status quo* in Compensation. When we came to his house, we were told that the councillor had left to participate in a social event. We, then, were warmly escorted by a group of children to the place where the gathering was taking place.

There, besides the settlement leader, we had a chance to meet and talk with other removed people. Everyone was very excited to meet us and was willing to share their experiences and views on their history and their current situation. Although the social get-together included men and women, only the men engaged in the discussion. When one younger resident approached us and expressed that the people in Compensation suffered in abysmal poverty, the older residents tried to convince us that the youngster was drunk and we should not listen to him.

First we inquired from the people about the major advantages and disadvantages in KwaPitela. The prevalent answer was that they had enough land to plough, plenty firewood, and livestock. But when asked about major disadvantages, the interviewed referred to the lack of roads and connection to the world.

During our field research trip, we found out a few surprising pieces of information that was quite different from what we had expected to hear. First of all, we learned that the current owner of KwaPitela is the same person, who owned the land during the removal. The interviewees maintained that when the owner had been told to move, he refused, saying that the only way for them to force him out was to kill him. The government officials eventually left him alone and gave up on the case. The land owner, as the result, was left alone. After that he hired a new group of tenants to work and live on his farm.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Steve Mhlophe was the spokesperson of Compensation during our oral interviews

The one question that all the interviewees unanimously agreed on was that they would not want to return to Kwapitela to work its land.

We also witnessed that people had built new houses of pretty solid quality. These houses were a major pride for the residents, and by no means would they agree to lose them in return for agricultural land. “I have some good memories from my living in KwaPitela, but it was too long ago, and I do not think about it anymore. My life is in Compensation. It is not so bad. We have built new houses, and the life is very different from that when we initially arrived to Compensation. We do not want to go back, for we have established our new ways of life here,” maintained Mr. Hlophe.⁵¹

Another issue that was difficult to miss was the demography of the place. A lot of Compensation’s residents are between seventy to eighty years old. One of the two ladies, whom we met upon entering Compensation, commented in regards to the situation: “No, we do not want to go back. We want to stay where we are. I am 80 years old, and in my age, I do not want any changes in life. I just want to stay here until I die”.⁵² Another comment was similar in nature: “I would not want to go back to Kwapitela because I am too old and have no strength to work in the field. I want to die in Compensation”.⁵³

Compensation is not a perfect locale itself. Its residents complain that they live too close to each other and had no arable land. There are also no endogenous economic activities taking place in Compensation. The land that surrounds Compensation belongs to a Chief, and the residents can’t use it. Compensation’s main income comes from Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and Johannesburg by the residents’ children that live and work there.⁵⁴

When asked if there were any felt changes for the residents of Compensation since the dismantlement of apartheid, the answer was “no.” The people said that now they can speak

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Anonymous, Personal Interview in Compensation

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Mhlophe

freely, but they feel no economic improvements at all. Even Afrikaans, the language that they do not need anymore, is still being taught in the local school built for the town under the National Party.⁵⁵

When in 1994, the new South African government passed legislation allowing dispossessed people to file land claims for the return of their lands, the residents of Compensation along with many other South Africans responded by filing a suit to receive a compensation. They, however, have not heard back from the government since. These developments show that the issue of land redistribution must be scrutinized within the limits of reality. One must not forget that while Compensation residents were forced to leave Kwapitela, the owner of the land stayed there. The inhabitants of Compensation do not wish to go back to rural areas and work in the field. Instead, they want to be recompensed in cash and not in land.

Conclusion: Current Debates on Land and ‘Compensation’

Although Compensation’s residents have a clear stand on how they want to receive their compensation for the land on which they used to live and work, the question of land redistribution in South Africa is very sensitive. There are various arguments in regards to how the land reform in South Africa must be implemented. At the core of the issue is semantics. While black claimants regard their right to their land as ‘restitution,’ white farmers see moves to get them off their holdings, ‘bought fairly and squarely generations ago,’ as ‘dispossession.’ One of the arguments is that South Africa needs to modify its approach to land reform to end racial inequalities. Since coming to power in 1994, the current government has adopted a ‘willing buyer, willing seller’ approach to land redistribution, paying the market price for land that white owners are prepared to sell, and then distributing it to the landless Africans. For many, however, this approach seems

⁵⁵ Ibid

unworkable, and as a result there is some pressure for more radical measures, but much of it comes from black farmers, who simply want more land.⁵⁶ Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka promulgated that the current market-based approach was not working. “The pace of reform has been negatively influenced by the ‘willing buyer, willing seller’ approach,” asserted Ms Mlambo-Ngcuka. “Markets don’t have mechanisms to redistribute land for the poor,” she added.⁵⁷ This argument assumes that an accelerated redistribution and restitution of land to ‘the poor’ will solve the problem of poverty and unemployment. But one must answer the question what is this assumption based on. Do the poor/landless have the skills and the desire to transform their poverty into wealth by exploiting the land? The inhabitants of Compensation discredit this assumption. Furthermore, does this assumption fit into today’s modernized, urban and ‘landless’ oriented growth of the global and South African economies? Answer to these questions must be the prerequisite to the assumption in question, and not the way around.

Tozi Gwanya, South Africa's chief land-claims commissioner, said the willing-buyer, willing-seller model will no longer apply to land-restitution claims, as many white farmers want more money than the government is prepared to pay. According to Gwanya, just over 80,000 of the 3,5 million people dispossessed by racists legislation lodged claims before the 1998 deadline.⁵⁸ This piece of statistics illustrates that there is a range of barriers to a faster transfer of land from whites to blacks.

One can only speculate why more people do not lodge complaints. One of many possible answers is that people simply do not believe in a successful outcome of their claims. There is also a lack of clarity on what foundation should the people base their claims. An example would be the residents of Compensation who had lodged a claim asking for cash

⁵⁶ “Righting Past Wrongs”

⁵⁷ “South Africa Proposes Quicker Land Reform”

⁵⁸ “Land invasion ruling sets benchmark”

compensation. They have not received any answers from the government. In the case of Kwapitela, the land was not seized from its owner. And when they arrived to Compensation, the removed tenants were given monetary support, as meagre as it was. In addition, if all 3.5 million South Africans applied, many of whom having a very specific request and claim, would the South African government be able to process them all if it is struggling with the 80,000 that have applied? The government must be realistic about accomplishing its goals.

There are also arguments that blame the South African constitution for impeding a quicker and more just land reform. As Motsoko Pheko, a South African theologian, human rights lawyer, and a former diplomat to the United Nations, asserts:

The basic problem which these reformists conceal is that the constitution of South Africa forbids Africans from acquiring land stolen from them before 19th June, 1913. Therefore, there is nothing to reform. There is no land left for Africans. You cannot reform what does not exist. Land must be taken from the minority Whites, not because they are whites, but because they acquired this African land and its resources by foul colonial and apartheid means (73).

This argument answers the question of why black South Africans do not have the land, but it does not advise on how to improve the conditions of the dispossessed. This is also a very risky argument because being the continent's economic super power, South Africa must be very careful not to fall under an influence of emotionally constructed political advices.

White farmers are very wary about the potential changes to the government's careful treatment of the land issue. For example, Agri South Africa, an organisation representing commercial farming interests, asserted that South Africa could not afford to send "mixed messages" about property rights to potential foreign investors. "The rule of law and adherence to a market assisted approach is of great importance," told Agri SA chief executive

Hans van der Merwe.⁵⁹ The constitution of South Africa is a bulwark that keeps the country's dangerously eclectic reform suggestions checked and balanced. Section 1 of Article 25 of the Constitution stipulates: "No one may be deprived of property except in terms of law of general application, and no law may permit arbitrary deprivation of property".⁶⁰ This article is a solid protection from anarchical land seizures that would potentially lead to a collapse of the South African agricultural sector.

It is very true that while there is plenty of prime land in South Africa, a twenty-minute drive, or even a walk, from an affluent city district or an ample farm leads to destitution, homelessness, and unemployment.⁶¹ Because of these sordid realities, it is very easy and convenient to blame South African previous white regimes for that. And although this blame is valid, as in the case of Compensation, it only answers the question of how these conditions became reality; but it does not provide a solution to how these conditions can and should be ameliorated. "The best route out of poverty," argues a latest research on the country's land reform, "is access to employment opportunities, which will mostly be found in urban areas"⁶² As evidenced by the case of Compensation, people would rather develop their already established communities, improve their houses, and maintain their connections to cities. The few children that are growing up in Compensation are members of a new generation of South Africans, for whom Compensation is the only place they know. As they grow up, they will probably strive towards the lifestyle and opportunities associated with the urban setting, and not around that of KwaPitela, which is absolutely unknown to them. Therefore, the South African government must pay close attention to the changing demography of the country.

According to a recent research conducted by the Centre for Development and Enterprise, most black South Africans, just like the residents of Compensation, do not want to

⁵⁹ "South Africa Proposes Quicker land Reforms"

⁶⁰ Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

⁶¹ Pheko, vii

⁶² "Land Reform in South Africa," p. 26

farm but would prefer jobs, houses and effective services in the areas of where they live. The residents of Compensation, for example, are much more concerned with an improvement of their current place of living than with the fact that more land will be transferred from whites to blacks. The study points out that South Africa's current land reform model is largely informed by an out-of-date vision of the role of agriculture and rural areas in the country.⁶³ Compensation serves as a good example to show how this is true. No one from Compensation expressed a desire to return to the rural Kwapitela to work on the field, while the interviewees do claim that the land in KwaPitela was their biggest asset. Whether they have been affected by the changing economic milieu of the country or perhaps by not having an access to land for 25 years, rural agricultural opportunities are not major expectations for the inhabitants of Compensation.⁶⁴

Minister Thoko Didiza promised that by 2014 the government will have been able to deliver 30 per cent of agricultural land to the black majority. So far, only 4 per cent of land has been acquired by the government from private owners for redistribution purposes, and unused state land has also been redistributed. White farmers are concerned that changes could create an atmosphere conducive for land grabs, similar to the land invasions seen on white-owned farms in Zimbabwe.⁶⁵ Article 25 of the South African constitution gives clear guarantees about property rights, which ministers are quick to pinpoint to when asked about the possibility of farms being expropriated, as they have been in Zimbabwe. Even though some land encroachment occurs, no widescale invasion seems plausible in South Africa.⁶⁶

Against this background of increased land hunger and frustration with the pace of land reform, the farm violence continues. Captain van Zyl hunts for clues at a farmhouse where the owner and his wife were murdered. "The two elderly people were literally

⁶³ "Land Reform in South Africa," 14

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "South Africa Proposes Quicker Land Reform"

⁶⁶ "Righting Past Wrongs"

chopped up,” he says. “The old man was stabbed 38 times.” Other victims the captain has seen have been burned with smoothing irons, poisoned, raped, or had boiling water poured down their throats. “You can’t rest,” he says, traumatised by what he has witnessed. “How can you put your head to a pillow and sleep?”⁶⁷ White farmers firmly believe that the high farm crime rate is political retaliation for their past wrong doings. The violence is one of the major problems that thwart South Africa’s progress on its way to a successful land reform. It is very misleading to think that replacing white farmers with black will stop the crime. In South Africa where common crime affects everyone, farm murders are a part of life that encompasses every race. Statistics just released show black farmers are also coming under attack. The bloody battle for rights and land in South Africa, therefore, does not seem to be a simple issue of racial tension and ownership.⁶⁸

Notwithstanding, white farmers tend to believe that although the South African constitution stands in the way of Robert Mugabe-style land grabs, the crime is a move to intimidate them into abandoning their land to speed up handovers. Black farmers, who want more land, justify the Zimbabwean approach to land reform and say that is what South Africa needs. “Mugabe is right,” says a black farmer, “One hundred percent right”.⁶⁹ However, by looking at Zimbabwe, where the agricultural sector collapsed after the country’s white farmers were forced away and whose economy’s performance was the worst in the world in 2005, the South African audience has to be very careful of not following its neighbour’s path.

South Africa’s land issues should be looked at more progressively. The popular debate on land reform in South Africa is influenced far more by beliefs about the country’s history than by plans for its future well-being. South Africans, it must not be forgotten, live in a very different world from that of 1913, 1948, or 1994.⁷⁰ The country needs an informed

⁶⁷ Bestall

⁶⁸ Ibid.,

⁶⁹ Ibid.,

⁷⁰ “Land Reform in South Africa,” 5, 6

public debate on land issues. If people who lost their agricultural land have lived a long time in non-agricultural sector, their interest shift and they become more attached to the new environment.

It could be extremely important for future peace of and progress of South Africa that the country promotes a judicious and a well informed debate. While many various suggestions have been brought up to the table, not all of them are appropriate for the demographic and socio-economic environment of South Africa. People are driven by their own interests. For South Africa to progress as a nation, the question of land reform must be of major importance. While Compensation is a drop in the sea, it still well illustrates how people's perception of land has irreversibly changed after years of not working it.

The challenge facing South Africa today is to reconceptualise and modernise the understanding of land reform. South Africans need to redefine 'land reform' to take account of the realities of an urbanising, modernising, economy; make it consistent with the South Africa's shared vision of where the country must go, and with other critical dimensions of government policy; and ensure that it is a policy area with achievable goals, compatible with the country's developmental constraints.⁷¹

Land reform in any country is a difficult and complex process. The Zimbabwean people, whose land reform has failed, will have to pay a very lofty price for a long time. South Africa's case is as complicated as it can possibly be due to its history of racism, discrimination, and forced removals. South African policy makers should be under no illusions about its complexity and scale in today's economic environment. All this means that very high costs may incur from any policy or programme of land reform that can be demonstrated as failing to accomplish its aims, or simply as taking too long to make an impact. South Africa needs a land reform programme that is both developmentally and

⁷¹ "Land Reform in South Africa"

politically successful. By this I mean that people who lost their land must indubitably be recompensed. But it must be done keeping in mind the well being of the whole country. The land reform's outcomes must make land reform beneficiaries better off and create an increasing degree of confidence – domestically and internationally – that land issues are firmly under control, and that historic wrongs are being righted at a steady pace and a reasonable dimension.⁷²

South Africa is in a new era of its economic and social growth. The topic of land reform must be adjusted to the socio-economic and political specificities of this era. Otherwise, any changes in land policies may lead to a poorly used growth of the agricultural sector of the country. The country needs to work on improving the sectors in which the majority of its citizens live and work. South Africa must vigorously focus its institutional capacity on bettering its future instead of wrathfully looking back into its past seeking those it can blame for today's pains. History must be remembered and taken into consideration by policy makers. The country, however, must move on if economically and ideologically it wants to surpass the impediments imposed by its history. If South Africa can accomplish it peacefully in respect to its land, it will one more time teach the world a lesson that people of different colors can unite and forgive for all to have a brighter future.

⁷² "Land Reform in South Africa," 6

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