

THE UITENHAGE EXPERIENCE. 1983-1987.

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the situation and life experience of residents of Uitenhage living in the Langa, Kwanobuhle and, later, Tyoksville communities from 1983-1987. Many parts of the experience are not unique to Uitenhage, but these five years do represent a microcosm of most of the major issues of Black experience in the context of Apartheid - South Africa. Uitehages' townships have lived and suffered through the Langa Massacre, the massive removal of 40,000 people and the violence engendered by an unrestrained vigilante force. They have endured extreme poverty and unemployment, detentions, constant police surveillance and action, people in hiding with the resultant atmosphere of immobilizing fear. This paper concentrates on the experience of people but within the context of facts and figures from the research and documentation done during this period.

Prevailing issues before the Langa Massacre.

General:

Uitenhage is an industrial town situated in the Eastern Cape some 20km. from Port Elizabeth. It has a total population of 210,000 people. Official sources give the 1987 breakdown of this figure as follows:

| | | |
|----------|---|---------|
| Black | - | 150,000 |
| Coloured | - | 35,000 |
| White | - | 25,000 |
| Asian | - | 650 |

It has two black townships, Kwanobuhle to the south and Langa (now very small) to the north. Uitenhages' industrial life is heavily dependant on the motor industry, Volkswagen and Goodyear providing major sources of employment with well-organised, effective unions.

The small white community have shown themselves to be a politically conservative group, nervous of the huge black township to their south. The "coloured" group, have Allan Hendrickse as their Member of Parliament, and in recent years have not been seen to take a strong anti-Government stand on crucial issues. The black community, on the other hand, like many Eastern Cape townships is known to be both politically aware and strong in its commitment to the struggle for equal rights in South Africa - a commitment that has acquired negotiating and organisational skills in the workplace.

Community Councils.

The end of 1983 saw the establishment of these Councils nation-wide following the enactment of the Black Local Authorities Legislation. This attempt by the State to allow blacks to "govern themselves", met with rejection and derision and those who joined the ranks of councillors were viewed as sell-outs, traitorous to "the struggle." The Kwanobuhle Councillors were seen to be particularly illegitimate as all sixteen were nominated and almost immediately after their appointment, these black councillors began to live in fear of attacks on their homes and themselves.

The States' appointment of the Councils was done with little apparent consideration of the financial necessities of their survival. Rent and service increases became imperative, but it was clear the people would not accept them and eventually their anger led to the resignation of most Councillors.

School Boycotts.

The school boycotts that began in Cradock with the detention of teacher and UDF leader Matthew Goniwe in 1983 had, by 1984, spread

to Uitenhage - and the rest of the country. Students moved from the classrooms to the streets and the climate of conflict mounted as they focussed their energies and anger on conditions of township life, on the hated community councillors, on demands for an improved system of education, and on a joint response to the violent action being perpetrated on black people by the Security Forces. By early 1985 a civil war was raging in many townships, amongst them Kwanobuhle and Langa.

During 1985 a near-total Consumer Boycott of white shops in the city had also been called for and implemented.

Police Action.

By early 1985, Molly Blackburn and others, including Black Sash members, were being inundated with reports of police brutality, (typical is the statement in Addendum A). In February the collected affidavits were sent to the State President and the Minister of Law and Order with a call by the PFP for the appointment of a commission to investigate allegations of police misconduct. It seems no corrective action was taken and on the 21st March the Langa Massacre took place.

Langa Massacre.

The massacre took place in Maduna Road, Langa on the morning of 21.3.85. when a crowd of Langa residents marching to a funeral in Kwanobuhle were fired on by the police leaving 20 dead and many wounded and crippled.

Official findings at the post-mortem revealed that 17 of the bodies had gunshot wound in the back parts of the body, that fifteen of the twenty were 20 years old or younger and that the youngest was an eleven year old girl, Fundiswa Wambi.

The 166 page report by the sole commissioner, Mr. Justice D.D.V. Kannemeyer stated that:

1. Blame for the deaths and injuries on March 21 could not be attributed to an error of judgment or the human frailty of one person.
2. Had the funerals planned for March 21 not been prohibited the incident would not have occurred.
3. Had proper equipment been available the gathering might have been dispersed with little or no harm to the person involved.

In August, 1987, in what amounted to an admission of liability, the Minister of Law and Order paid out R1.3m. to 51 people injured in or widowed by the Massacre.

Community response to the Massacre.

The immediate response to the shooting was a wave of rage and anger that swept through the townships, resulting in the burning of policemen's homes and the killing of the one remaining Community Councillor, T.B. Kinikini. Another result was the upsurge in community consciousness and growth of township organisations, the street and area committees too grew in their control structures and confidence. An Advice Office was set up in the Catholic Church manned by community and Black Sash workers to monitor the situation and do para-legal work for the lawyers acting for the families. The Langa residents began to formulate strategies to avoid the removal they knew was planned for their future.

The reaction of the white community to the massacre was to draw up a petition signed by 356 residents of Levyvale calling for the removal of that section of Langa (Kabab) closest to their houses. They complained of burglaries and feared petrol bombs. The Kwanobuhle Town Council - since the collapse of the Councillor system-now consisted

of a white town clerk and Administrator, and they took the petition seriously, pressured in addition by an appeal to Minister Heunis by the Uitenhage Municipality at the Nationalist Party in September, 1985 to do something about the squatter camp.

A World in Action TV programme shown in the U.K. at this time had focussed on "responsible members" of Uitenhages' white community. Included was an interview with Uitenhages' Mayor who stated, "If we are attacked we will resist", also CP Chairman Leon van Dalen, "They (blacks) can't expect to have a vote and a say in their own home (homeland) as well as where they work.."

This then was the climate of local white feeling the Langa community had to combat in order to stay in their homes.

Langa prior to the Removal.

To look briefly at Langas' history, it was established as a township in 1955 with a northern section of semi-detached concrete block houses, a central section of wood/iron and brick houses and a southern section consisting mostly of shacks, known as Kabah. The East Cape Development Board claim that the decision to relocate Langa was taken twenty years ago and only shortage of funds prevented this.

By 1985 the official policy of influx control - a policy that had caused untold hardship and misery to hundreds of thousands of people - had to be seen as having failed. All the State could do with the urban influx was to try to manoeuvre and manipulate these communities to settle where it suited the authorities - irrespective of the wishes, social structures, labour needs or existing facilities of the people involved. Areas chosen by the State were usually situated well away from white residential suburbs, were easy for the security forces to control, and the needs of industry would also be considered.

However, because Langa had become, since the Massacre, an extremely high profile community, and because the townships organisational structures were operating effectively despite some divisions, the KTC had to take representatives of the newly formed Langa Coordinating Committee seriously and negotiations began to take place in October, 1985. These were as a result of eviction notices being served on 8.9.85 to the occupants of 426 houses between 9th and 4th Ave. in Kabah.

The people of Kabah lived in conditions of extreme poverty, lacking adequate water, sewerage, clinics, but felt their chances of survival were higher in Langa than in remote, expensive Kwanobuhle. They demanded the upgrade of Langa, the release of their leaders, that they be allowed to hold meetings, and live where they chose.

A Supreme Court order followed the eviction notices, and the residents decided to contest the action. The LCC then contacted academics to get professional advice on the development of Langa and Dr. Michael Sutcliffe produced a memo which concluded that the upgrade was possible both technically and socially and that it had broad community support. This memo was presented to the Task Group and the KTC., the Task Group having been appointed by the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning to investigate the Langa problem (it included police and army members). It seems that neither group seriously considered this excellent and positive document.

In addition, negotiations between the KTC and LCC broke down, as Mark Swilling puts it, "for the KTC, negotiations were seen as useful only to the extent that they could implement their own pre-conceived plans. When this possibility was thwarted by the LCC that had no mandate to compromise the squatters demands, the KTC officials used their power to terminate the negotiations."

The KTC pressed ahead with the Supreme Court action and then brought a second action in February, 1986 against 72 families in Kamesh Road.

They also attempted to put pressure on the community by offering to investigate Langa's upgrade if the Kabah squatters would move voluntarily to Kwanobuhle - this offer was rejected, the Langa community stood firm, but in fact there was little hope of a legal success in either area. Once again it was evident, as these actions proceeded that South Africa's system of public law was, "an instrument of power rather than justice."

The upgrade report was finally completed, entitled Langa: the Case for Upgrade, and on 19.3.86. it was made available to the public at a large press conference. The KTC were noticeably absent, and Minister Heunis sent his apology. The response to the report was very positive from the press, the communities and support groups. Two days later 60,000 people attended the anniversary memorial service commemorating Langa and Sharpeville in the Kwanobuhle stadium, with a 99% stayaway in Uitenhage.

At this time the Midland Chamber of Industries became involved, and their proposal that the Kamesh Road squatters consider moving further into Langa was put to a mass meeting on 8.5.86. It was rejected as divisive, but negotiations continued between MCI and the LCC that were of an interesting and potentially fruitful nature. Indeed so fruitful that by June there was agreement between the Uitenhage Municipality, KTC, MCI, Nat. MP Dawie le Roux and Minister Heunis that upgrading should be explored.

All this positive negotiation and discussion between the various business and Government groups and the community petered out when, on the 12.6.86. the State of Emergency was declared. The LCC itself was battling to survive internal tensions and conflict, with some members threatened with detention and contact between organisational structures extremely difficult.

On 11.7.86. the KTC called a meeting attended by the SAP and it was decided to erect an interim police station in Langa, stop any additional shack erection in Langa, and persuade people to move to Kwanobuhle. After this meeting a spate of arrests followed with many activists in Langa being arrested, and the activation of the National Security Management System meant that the "securocrats" were now making the decisions, and the removal of Langa was about to begin.

Removal of Kabah and Langa.

The JMCs decision to begin the removal was taken two weeks before the final judgment of the Port Elizabeth Supreme Court in the case of the KTC versus the residents living between 4th and 9th Avenues in Kabah. On the night of the 14th July removals began in this area and very soon the Community, Black Sash and support Church workers were aware that the removals were proceeding throughout Langa from 10th-24th Avenue, section by section. The State of Emergency enabled authorities to proceed by using the increased powers afforded them by the Emergency which virtually sealed off the area to the press and others.

The KTC, when approached by the press, union members, the Church and concerned support organisations declared that the people were moving voluntarily that those (apart from the areas affected by the court orders) moving were not being forced in any way.

The realities of the situation were that the Municipal Police (newly formed and supported by the SAP and SADF) had begun the process of removal by waking people from 11p.m. on through the night. Large floodlights were installed, loudhailers used to tell people to break down their shacks that they were moving to Kwanobuhle. Huge trucks roared through the night carrying the belongings of those who had

broken down their homes. Intimidation strategies such as knocking holes in walls, breaking down doors, foul and abusive language and alleged drunken behaviour were the main elements of the experiences given by residents in statements taken by Black Sash and Church workers on July 30th, 1986. On that day over 150 people came to the Uitenhage Advice Office at the request of the lawyer acting for the people of Langa to give statements in an attempt to provide evidence which might be used to halt the removals. They were very afraid and desperate. A typical statement was one given by Mr. Siphon Mandabana describing how police went to his house in 20th Avenue. They were told by an old woman there that the owner was at work. They proceeded, violently, to remove the fence saying they would return that night to take them to Kwanobuhle and they must be ready. The old woman and children were totally unable to break down the substantially built shack themselves.

Reasons given for wanting to remain in Langa were:

- Kwanobuhle was too far from town for work or work seeking.
- Costs of transport were prohibitive.
- Rents were higher in Kwanobuhle, some who could not afford these had moved back to Langa.
- Langa was close to the hospital. Many were pensioners and attended clinics or outpatients and needed to be visited on a regular basis.
- Children would not be able to continue schooling in Langa, it was too far and fares too high.
- Fear of the developing Vigilante/UDF feud.

These reasons were confirmed in a subsequent survey done by ORSA (Operation Real South Africa) which showed that 100% of those interviewed had not wanted to move.

To return to 30th July, the lawyer went to see Mr. Coetzee, Town Clerk of the KTC and was told again that no one would be forced to move against their will. No statement to this effect had ever been posted in the community. Printed statements to this effect were issued by the lawyer to the crowd waiting at the Advice Office and hope and relief flooded their faces. They felt they had some protection when the police came to their shacks. However, before they had even reached home police had confiscated many of the papers, laughing and tearing them up, many were arrested for questioning. The intimidation continued, fear was everywhere, one couple with a two year old spent the night in the bitter cold beside their demolished shack, people continued to pack until November. By that time Langa was empty, 49,000 people had been moved and issued with tents. This included 10,000 people moved in the same manner virtually overnight from the small community of Despatch, between Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth. Mr. T. Kula, of this community, said in a statement, "police pointed guns and said people must demolish their shacks as soon as possible or they would bulldoze them."

The cost of the Langa removal was R3.5 million rand, spent (according to Mr. Coetzee) on transport, bush clearing, purchase of toilets and buckets, tents, communal water containers, building materials such as nails to enable people to rebuild their shacks. Those moving were given two bags of nails, 500g. salt, 500g. samp, 500g. sugar beans, 200g. mealie-rice and a tin of pineapple canned fruit. The cost of upgrading Langa as estimated in the Planact Report was R3.5m for emergency services and R12m. for full upgrading. Langa removals were an example of the terrible cost of implementing Apartheid both in money and in human suffering.

Post Removal Experience.

Conditions in the Tent Town:

The experience of Langa and Despatch residents after removal has been a year of struggle, deprivation and poverty. Before the move was completed four had died of carbon monoxide poisoning. The situation that people moved to was a desperate one with hopelessly inadequate services and almost no support structure.

The tents issued to families were small and many had furniture ruined as it stood out in the rain. Water was provided in rubber containers each serving at least ten families. Open at the top, the water soon became foul with dust, and they were not filled often enough to provide a constant supply of water. Sanitation facilities consisted of plastic bucket toilets, also insufficient and irregularly emptied so that residents had to empty them in the bush, also they blew over on windy days.

An inspection team of doctors, Sash members, ORSA, an architect and psychologist and church workers shortly after the removal were shocked by what they found. Their findings included a number of ill residents who could not afford transport to hospital and who were too far from the nearest ambulance service to make use of it. They requested the Minister of Health to provide resources for a health survey to be conducted.

There was no drainage system, not even trenches for water reticulation.

The residents of Langas' fear that transport from Kwanobuhle to Uitenhage would prove a heavy financial burden were realised at once, with the bus fare of R1.60 a return trip being prohibitive for many.

In a meeting between the KTC Administrator, Barry Erasmus and PFP MP Mr. Andrew Savage promises were made to the effect that the KTC would shortly be building 6 clinics, providing a telephone service with Tyoksville, provide an ambulance service, install sanitary and drainage services within 3 months and that the tent town would be converted into a model township.

On a visit to the area made in November, 1987, by Judy Chalmers and Lou-Ann Parsons there was no evidence of any significant change in Tyoksville conditions. Bulldozers were digging trenches for water pipes and 4 satellite clinics have been erected and a few streets had been tarred. The hillside was enveloped in red dust which must create an ongoing health hazard. Mark Swilling, visiting the area in November was told that "many, many people are sick here," with many having lost jobs because of sickness.

This "sickness" must have psychological as well as physical roots. Everyone we spoke to longed to be back in Langa, and were carrying the scars of the long years of struggle and the uprooting from their stable, chosen community. The Langa experience came about because of the determination of the apartheid government to continue to implement the Group Areas Act and the separation of people. Some residents were told by the municipal police that they were being moved because Langa was for "coloureds."

The implementation of this along with complaints from whites bordering Langa is the bottom line of the Langa removal.

Vigilante Action in Kwanobuhle, Uitenhage.

The factors contributing to the growth of Ama-Afrika in Kwanobuhle are extremely complex. Apartheid creates social pressures within communities that foster conflict and encourage opportunism and the State is quick to take advantage of divisions that in a normal society could be resolved by public debate and meetings between dissenting groups.

A brief look at what was happening in the unions and in the civic structures in Uitenhages townships show a history of divisions and conflict going back to 1980. NAAWU (National Automobile and Allied Workers Union) was formed then, also UBCO (Uitenhage Black Civic Organisation) to voice community grievances. At about the same time MACWUSA (Motor and Component Workers Union of S.A.) came into being and a basic difference in objectives between the two unions inevitably led to conflict aggravated by personality clashes between the leaders of the two groups.

The school boycotts of the early eighties caused a rise in political awareness amongst students and young people and in 1983 UYCO was formed, (Uitenhage Youth Congress) who, with the formation of the UDF in mid-1983 became a key UDF affiliate. Prior to the launch of UDF UYCO had contained members with Azapo sympathies, and in fact had observer status at the National Forum. The tremendous surge of support nationwide for UDF seemed to cause consternation and anxiety amongst individuals who were against non-racialism, and it was at this time that the seeds of what became Ama-Afrika in Uitenhage were sown.

In 1983-4 a committee was formed called Save the Starving Committee (SSC). It came about in an effort by unionists and Church ministers to help those affected by the retrenchments, particularly in Volkswagen and Goodyear, also Borg Warner. Its aims were to assist with food, to found pre-schools and help with self-help projects.

By 1985 the schools were once again boycotting and a consumer boycott had also been implemented. The SSC continued to function but as the year went by ideological differences began to surface within the SSC and certain members were found to have aligned themselves with the Africanist movement headed by Ebenezer Maqina in Port Elizabeth, with particular emphasis being put on winning the minds and allegiances of young people. A youth section of the Africanist movement formed, calling themselves Azanyu. They formed the core of Ama-Afrika and established their headquarters at 9 Socwayi St., Khayelitsha, a section of Kwanobuhle. This was done despite a strong directive from the civic body that no one should move to Khayelitsha. Maqina was alleged to be a frequent visitor to the house, taking food and supplies.

The Ama-Afrika were reported to be heavily armed and attacks began to occur on UDF activists. In May, 1986 a leading Ama-Afrika member was killed and throughout 1986 the mini-war continued. In April, 1986 the consumer boycott was reimposed, and with the declaration of the State of Emergency in June, 1986 and the detention of most of the leadership it became increasingly difficult to maintain the discipline necessary for an effective boycott. At the same time the Langa removal took place, and the unfortunate and destitute squatters trying to survive in Tyoksville began to be harassed and driven into joining the ranks of Ama-Afrika. By January, 1987 the vigilantes, their numbers swelled by (reportedly) a new criminal element felt strong enough for a mass action against the UDF who had been seriously affected by the Emergency.

In the early hours of 4.1.87. the vigilantes went from house to house in Tyoksville and Khayalitsha demanding that all the men join them to march through the streets of Kwanobuhle to deal with the youth. It is reported that as many as 1000 were marching including union officials from Volkswagen who claim they were coerced, threatened and forced to join for fear of reprisals. By mid-morning one youth and one man were dead and 12 houses belonging to UDF leaders had been attacked and their contents taken out and burnt with many injured. The SAP and Municipal Police were present but did nothing to stop the rampage, indeed it was reported that a SAP helicopter prevented fleeing youths from making their escape and herded them back to the attackers.

Since January, 1987 the press has repeatedly reported deaths and maimings at the hands of Ama-Afrika, with responsive action being taken by those attacked. These have been born out by statements taken at the Uitenhage Advice Office, now installed in a small house in Uitenhage. In March the monument erected by the community in memory of those who died in the Langa massacre in 1985 was destroyed.

Investigations by the Human Rights Trust (previously ORSA), lawyers and the Advice Office have resulted in affidavits being compiled and sent to the Minister of Law and Order who agreed to authorize an official enquiry into alleged assaults by Ama-Afrika and to investigate alleged police and municipal police complicity. This inquiry is still taking place. Four young women, brutally assaulted by Ama-Afrika in August, 1987 have laid charges and this too is proceeding. Many UDF activists have left Kwanobuhle and are now living in Port Elizabeth.

Efforts have been made by the community to deal with the conflict and a meeting was held in October, 1987. Present were representatives of the community, Town Clerk Coetsee and the police. However, this meeting did not have the full support of all involved in the leadership and little came of it. In the last three months of 1987 it is reported that Ama-Afrika has now split into three groups. Magina has publicly dissociated himself from what he says is the "criminal element" in the group and from 9 Socwayi St, former headquarters of Ama-Afrika saying they are not really Africanists and are not ideologically with him. A few have returned and been reconciled into the community.

The atmosphere of extreme tension and fear in Kwanobuhle has, now in early 1988, lessened somewhat, but the problems within the community are far from solved. In addition, the realities of support structures working in such an extremely conservative white community add to the problems. On December 12th, 1987, the Inter-Church Trust Advice Office in Uitenhage had the official opening of the building when the house was dedicated to the memory of Molly Blackburn and a plaque unveiled bearing the inscription, "A Warrior for Justice." During the night before the opening the conservative elements in Uitenhage had got to work and upon our arrival we were met by a warning threat painted in red across the entire front of the house. It said, "Advice Office instigators you are not welcome in Uitenhage," also "Eurelia and Rory get out." Mrs. Eurelia Banda is the Director of the Office and Rory Riordan is Director of the Human Rights Trust in Port Elizabeth.

Apartheid breeds dissension, mistrust, complex responses and hatred, and these emotions we find abound in Uitenhage. But there is also an amazing ability to survive to be found and hope for peace and justice does not die and we are continually strengthened by the peoples of Kwanobuhle and Langa.

Lou-Ann Parsons.

Judy Chalmers.

January, 1988.

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 " " from Black Sash, Port Elizabeth.
 Documentation compiled by Molly Blackburn, 1985.

NAME: CHRISTIAN MONGAMELI TEMBANI.
(SON) 60 MGOLODELA ST
KWA.

AGE: 20, 1971.

NAME: MARIA TEMBANI
60 MGOLODELA ST.
KWA,

AGE: 3. 1921.

LAST NIGHT, 14TH FEBRUARY 1985. THERE
WAS A KNOCK AT THE WINDOW. I
WENT TO OPEN THE FRONT DOOR.
AT THAT MOMENT A WHITE POLICE
MAN IN UNIFORM CAME QUICKLY
INTO THE HOUSE POINTING A GUN.
THERE WERE THREE WHITE POLICE-
MEN IN UNIFORM, AND A COLOURED
MAN IN PRIVATE CLOTHES.

THEY ASKED FOR MY SON
MONGAMELI - I POINTED TO
MY SON SLEEPING ON THE BED -
HE WAS AWAKE AT THIS TIME.
THEY ASKED HIM WHERE HE HAD
BEEN DURING THE UNREST THAT
HAD HAPPENED DURING THE DAY,
HE SAID, I WAS NOT THERE,
I HEARD FROM ANOTHER CHAP
THAT SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED.
THE POLICE SAID BRING HOM,
BRING HOM, EK SAL HOM SLAAN
TOT DAT HY KAK EN DIE WAARHEID
R A T F

PRAAT. THEY TOOK HIM TO A HIPPO
OUTSIDE. HE WAS NAKED AT THIS
TIME, WHEN I RAN OUT WITH
THE CLOTHES THE HIPPO HAD ALREADY
DRIVEN OFF.

I WENT TO THE CHARGE OFFICE
THIS MORNING WITH SOME CLOTHES
FOR MY SON, BUT THEY WERE
NOT ACCEPTED.

ONE OF THE C.I.D. SAID "OH YOU
ARE COMING TO GIVE HIM CLOTHES
AFTER YOU HAVE TOLD HIM TO
BURN THE HOUSES AND THAT SORT
OF THING." I HAD TO
RUN, AS I WAS AFRAID OF
BEING ARRESTED.

I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT MY
SON'S APPEARANCE IN COURT.
I KNEW HE IS IN THIS JAIL
IN CHURCH STREET AS I
COULD HEAR HIM CRYING
"MAMA, MAMA THIS BOETIE IS
BEATING ME HARD". HE COULD
NOT HAVE KNOWN I WAS THERE.
I HAVE NOT APPROACHED A
LAWYER AS I DO NOT KNOW
WHAT MY SON'S RIGHTS ARE.

B Maria Tembani

Affidavit taken by Molly Blackman.