

Despite two decades of persistent, state-enforced removals in Natal, the majority of black spots have not yet been eliminated in this province, and an estimated 230 000 people are living under threat of removal as a result. (See AFRA Report 16, April 1982). Some of these places are relatively well-known - Matiwane's Kop, Driefontein, St. Wendolins, Acton Homes. Most are obscure and disregarded, names that have meaning only to the communities living there - Langkloof, Beersheba, Free State, Bartman, Malota's Kraal, Lusitania, Cornfields, Jonono's Kop, Undaryane, The Stick and many, many more, scattered through most of the province. Although the rate of removals has been sluggish in the last couple of years, this does not mean a reprieve for these communities. The government has made it clear that it will not tolerate the continued existence of black-owned land in what it has defined as the white countryside. A few communities may find themselves consolidated into KwaZulu without being physically moved. The bulk, however, are to be stripped of their titledeeds, cleared off their land and shunted into resettlement camps which eventually, when full enough, will be handed over to KwaZulu. If this policy is successful, Natal will see many more Linehills and Nondwenis and Compensations; there will be many more displaced and dispossessed people - dispossessed not only of their land but, as supposed citizens of a self-governing KwaZulu, of their rights to security, work, justice and social welfare inside South Africa as well.

This Report looks at the historical background to this process: how did black spots come into being? It should be read in conjunction with Report 16.

What is a 'black spot'? The term 'black spot', although widely used, is ideologically charged, an emotive piece of propaganda bred out of white supremacy. It is often used extremely loosely by government officials to describe - condemn - any black occupied area that they want to move. In its strictest sense, however, it describes land owned by Africans that falls outside the limited areas set aside for African occupation by successive white governments (the reserves, now glorified by the name 'national states'). This land is freehold; most black spots have titledeeds that predate the establishment of Union in 1910. Their deeds proclaim, 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 be used to describe certain mission-owned properties which were bought, 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.

Beginnings of African freehold land: The origins of African 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 (and other parts of the country). In response to expanding market opportunities, under pressure to enter the cash economy in order to meet tax, rent and consumer demands, an increasing number of African households began producing an agricultural surplus for sale on the open market. At first this new class of small farmers and entrepreneurs was based mainly on white-owned or crown land but by the 1860s some peasant producers had begun to enter the property market as well. In 1851 Edendale, just outside Pietermaritzburg, was bought by an ex-Methodist missionary on behalf of his mission community; the land was then sub-divided and rapidly sold off among his followers. These pioneers were followed by a group of men from the Ndalen 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 purchase of land - although there were definite financial and social bars - and the next three decades saw a rapid increase in the amount of land in African ownership. Most purchases were inland where land was cheaper than on the coast, concentrated along the Drakensberg foothills and in the northern districts round Ladysmith and Newcastle, where very little land had been set aside as reserves. By 1870 Africans owned 12 357 acres 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 - a miniscule percent of the total freehold land then allocated in the colony but the beginning of a radically different form of land tenure within African society and the base on which a tiny class of landowners was forming.

However, although the amount of land in African ownership continued to increase (to 397 754 acres in 1910), the pace of purchases began to slacken and then fall off in the 1890s. This relative decline coincided with the 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 unleashed a voracious demand for cheap labour by both the mines and the farms of white South Africa. In response to these new opportunities, the various white governments began laying the foundations of the modern migrant labour system: restricting black access to land, controlling black mobility and passing a series of tax and land laws designed to force blacks into wage labour. In Natal the white settlers achieved responsible government in 1893. They immediately began to use their new political clout to block Africans from buying more land. In the 1890s the Mission reserves were prohibited from allowing 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.

By the time Natal joined the Union in 1910, African acquisition of freehold land had already been checked and the economic basis of the peasantry smashed. Nevertheless, a small but significant amount of land remained in African hands and continued to nurture an embattled but relatively powerful stratum of African society into the era of bantustans and homeland governments. In 1905 there were 1 545 registered landowners in Natal and 3 in Zululand, owning an average of 250 acres each: the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the present generation of threatened landowners. 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. At the same time, the growing landlessness in the reserves, coupled with unsatisfactory conditions on white farms, was forcing many rural blacks to look for alternative 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.

The passage of the segregationist Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 put an end to any further African purchase of land outside the proclaimed reserves. Many black farms were incorporated into the reserves but some were not. They became isolated and contained, enclaves in the midst of the white hinterland. A cycle of underdevelopment, reminiscent of what was already visible in the reserves, was slowly gathering force. Too many people, trapped on a fixed amount of land, increasingly dependent on migrant labour: yet coherent societies still, with strong traditions and the precious assets of their own land. With the refinement of apartheid policy after 1948, these communities became even more vulnerable. Their very existence contradicted - disproved - official arguments of traditional and separate 'homelands' of the African population. 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 eliminated.