

The national campaign against incorporation is not only about the communities' return to South Africa. It is about the eradication of the bantustans and the founding of a non-racial, democratic South Africa. **JO-ANNE COLLINGE** reports.

Forced removals and incorporation into the bantustans have usually been treated as human rights issues - as questions of the right to hold land and to retain the nationality of one's country of birth.

Increasingly, though, struggles against incorporation in the bantustans are being waged with a clear awareness of their bearing on a central goal of liberation forces: an undivided South Africa.

This new focus is reflected in the national campaign against incorporation mounted by eight communities in the Transvaal, Eastern Cape and Free State.

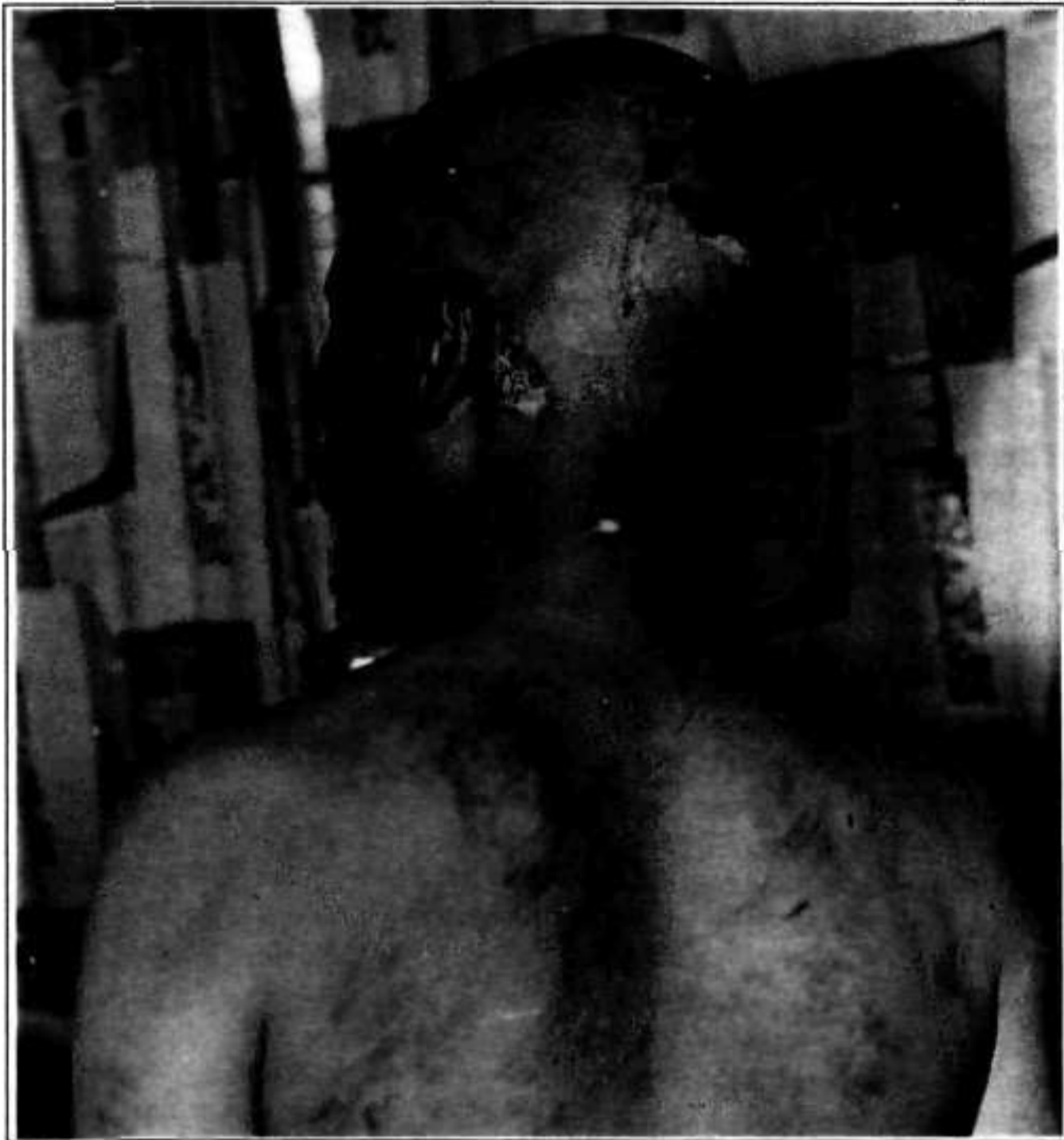
Not only are residents of these areas mobilising and petitioning for an end to incorporations and their own return to South Africa, but for termination of the bantustan system and the founding of a 'unitary, non-racial and democratic South Africa'.

These are the demands which they hope to put face-to-face to state president FW de Klerk.

Similar demands were made by the 50 000 people who marched at Botshabelo several weeks ago in a bid to ward off their inclusion into QwaQwa.

'These people fighting incorporation are in the forefront of the anti-bantustan struggle,' insists Bahle Sibisi, a fieldworker with the National Committee Against Removals (NCAR). 'They are fighting this system in quite a concrete way'.

The most sustained form of struggle in many communities is one of refusing to co-operate with bantustan authorities. In Peulton, for instance, people refused to pay Ciskei taxes. In Braklaagte and Leeuwfontein they are rejecting Bophuthatswana pensions and demanding re-instatement of their South African pensions (as most residents of those areas had regained their South African



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Waging war on the bantustans

citizenship prior to incorporation).

In Moutse, teachers have, for more than two years, refused to be transferred to KwaNdebele employment, businessmen have failed to apply for renewal of licences, pupils refused to accept a KwaNdebele school syllabus.

In Moutse, the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (Trac) notes, 'this passive resistance went as far as vehicle owners refusing to license their cars because they were compelled to take out KwaNdebele registration plates'.

Trac notes that the response of bantustan authorities has been heavy. 'They have tended to act like an army of occupation and have tried to force

people to accept the order they do not recognise. In Moutse, for example, businesses were closed down and even bulldozed to the ground when their owners would not co-operate with KwaNdebele rule'.

Mass arrests and torture have become part of the post-incorporation pattern. Often violence becomes endemic and the resistant community hits back at bantustan armed forces and at collaborators in the community.

Sibisi believes that broader democratic forces are aware of the significance of direct resistance to bantustan authorities, but notes that 'when it comes to translating this action, such struggles are not a priority' for broader political

organisations. It has been left largely to service organisations, lawyers and church groups to support rural resistance.

A number of factors have contributed to the heightened political content in removals and incorporation struggles.

*Firstly, as fieldworkers have pointed out, since the Mogopa removal was carried out — illegally and with considerable force in 1984 — Pretoria has tended to avoid physical removal and the blaze of publicity it calls forth. Instead it has resorted to incorporation, redrawing the boundaries of bantustans so that 'black spots' fall within them. Whole communities of black South Africans then become exiles without moving an inch.

Trac has sketched some of the consequences of this changed strategy. 'Forced removal is a highly physical process,' it points out. 'It requires that people be counted, that property be valued, that transport arrangements be made. Accordingly, each step of this process is one that affected communities can respond to in a similarly physical way so that resistance can be offered to counter each stage in the removal process'.

In contrast, for forced incorporation to occur, all that is needed 'is for the decision to be taken and for boundaries to be redrawn on maps in the government printer's office after agreement has been reached in private with the homeland government. For the affected communities it is an invisible and intangible process whose effects are only felt when it is too late and incorporation is a "fait accompli".'

Not only does incorporation make resistance more difficult - but it redirects it so that the bantustan authorities are as much in the line of fire as Pretoria is. In physical removals, attention tends to focus on the drama of demolition and destruction. In incorporation these don't occur and instead the spotlight falls on the actions of the acquisitive bantustan government.

* Sibisi also points out that incorporation is often accompanied by the bantustan authority deposing the chosen leader of the newly acquired territory and installing a man who satisfies

the new government's needs.

The lesson people draw from this experience, he reflects, is that bantustan rule is not compatible with self-determination. Their fight against the bantustans inevitably becomes a fight for democratic choice.

At the same time they are aware that it was Pretoria which high-handedly 'gave them away' in the first place. 'Residents are often quite clear that going back to South Africa is only part of the solution to their problems'.

* The responses of both the bantustan governments and the central government to opposition to incorporation have also tended to throw the political issues into sharp relief.

Sibisi points out that the National Party government has been unable to accept victories that people have won through the courts - victories which saw the 120 000 people of Moutse released from the clutches of KwaNdebele and as many as 500 000 in Botshabelo extricated from QwaQwa.

It has prepared new legislation - the Alteration of Boundaries of Self-Governing Territories Bill - which will make it virtually impossible for residents to challenge incorporation through the courts and has the particular capacity to reverse the Moutse and Botshabelo victories. With the legal avenue closed, mobilisation and organisation become the only recourse of resistant bantustan residents.

Trac's Joanne Yawitch argues that bantustan leaders have responded to the angry newcomers 'as if they constitute a major challenge to the state and in doing so have actually elevated the political stakes in the struggle'.

This over-reaction, the heavy repression that accompanies it and the fact that incorporation is a fairly high-profile issue, turns communities opposing incorporation into 'symbols of resistance' widely admired by other residents.

The fight of the Moutse people against KwaNdebele rule, which began in earnest after incorporation on New Year's Day 1986, was one such example, she agrees. It was certainly more than a simple forerunner to the virtual civil war that engulfed KwaN-

debele from mid-1986, as residents rose up against the tyranny of the Skosana regime with its Imbokodo vigilante army and against the notion of KwaNdebele independence.

In Ciskei, residents are debating how best to support the people of Peleton and there is talk of a boycott of shops of businessmen with direct government links.

The significance of this type of mobilisation is underscored by the suggestion by Transkei's military ruler Bantu Holomisa that a referendum might be held in the territory to determine the people's attitude on re-uniting with South Africa.

The stony silence from the presidents of Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei indicated that they were less than enthusiastic about Holomisa's initiative.

And legal experts have pointed out that rejoining South Africa requires something like a willingness by the central government to allow its disowned people back.

Unisa law professor Dawid van Wyk summed up the legal position: 'This cannot be done unilaterally. They (bantustan and central government leaders) will have to enter into some form of agreement to reunite'.

All of this suggests that unscrambling the grand apartheid scheme will be a complex and uphill process, contingent on negotiations between the government and the liberation forces.

Few in the democratic movement believe that Holomisa is about to go knocking on De Klerk's door in the current context to ask to occupy a different place in apartheid South Africa. If he makes his promised move, it is likely to be once negotiations to end apartheid have seriously begun.

Many people confidently predict that immediate and tangible prospects of liberation in South Africa would generate such pressure from disaffected residents of the bantustans that these 'independent states' would tumble like houses built of cards.

Only time will tell how true this assessment is and the significance of the tradition of struggle by newly incorporated communities to the unfolding of grassroots pressure.