

IDE Discussion Papers are preliminary materials circulated to stimulate discussions and critical comments

**IDE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 351**

**Casting a Voice for Rural Struggles  
during Apartheid: The Case of AFRA**

Chizuko SATO\*

March 2012

**Abstract**

This paper explores the attempts to co-ordinate rural resistance and struggles in South Africa during apartheid through a case study of the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA), a land NGO established in Natal in 1979. It was a small group but had a significant local and national impact. The paper addresses three key questions concerning the character and works of AFRA: (1) What was the character and strategy of AFRA in the politicised context of the late 1970s and 1980s? (2) Was there any historical continuity and discontinuity with early attempts by Natal liberals and African landowners to organise anti-removal campaigns in the 1950s? (3) How and to what extent could AFRA negotiate the increasing influence of the Inkatha and KwaZulu government over Natal rural communities? The paper aims to serve as a critical evaluation of AFRA's strategies and activities, and its relationship with rural communities up to 1990 when land movements became nationwide.

**Keywords:** South Africa, land struggles, land NGO, forced removals

---

\* Research Fellow, African Studies Group, Area Studies Center, IDE (chizuko\_sato@ide.go.jp)

The Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) is a semigovernmental, nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute, founded in 1958. The Institute merged with the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) on July 1, 1998. The Institute conducts basic and comprehensive studies on economic and related affairs in all developing countries and regions, including Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Oceania, and Eastern Europe.

---

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s). Publication does not imply endorsement by the Institute of Developing Economies of any of the views expressed within.

---

**INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO**  
**3-2-2, WAKABA, MIHAMA-KU, CHIBA-SHI**  
**CHIBA 261-8545, JAPAN**

©2012 by Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO

No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of the IDE-JETRO.

## **Introduction**

The dispossession of land through the policy of forced removals undertaken by the National Party government was the central feature of experiences for many rural communities in South Africa during apartheid. More than 3.5 million people in total were estimated to have been relocated from their land during the heyday of apartheid between 1960 and 1983. About half of them (1.7 million) were African farm workers and labour tenants evicted from white farms and those who were removed from so-called “black spots”, rural freehold land bought by Africans before the 1913 Land Act that subsequently fell within “white” South Africa (SPP [1983a: xxiv-xxv]). This means that at least about 16 per cent of rural Africans suffered from forced removals in the country (Beinart [1994: 261, 263]).

The impact of forced removals on rural African communities was enormous (SPP [1983a], Platzky and Walker eds. [1985], Mngadi [1981], Desmond [1976]). Removal uprooted people from the land that provided not only a rural production base, but also had social and symbolic importance. The centrality of forced removals in the experiences of the apartheid regime for many rural communities brought about peculiar features of rural struggles in the second half of the twentieth century in South Africa. While we need to be aware of the extent of wage and welfare dependence amongst the rural poor during this period, it is nevertheless striking that the rural politics of dispossessed communities were still centrally concerned with rural resources, most importantly land. This is well demonstrated in the recent case studies of Cremin (Walker [2008: chap.3]), Roosboom (Sato [2010a]) and Weenen (Sato [2010b]) where community struggles of the early 1990s were driving forces in the realization of land reform. Roosboom and Cremin were leading communities in rural land struggles led by former black spot communities that obtained a national voice in the early 1990s when the apartheid was finally coming to an end. They also participated in national debates on the formulation of land reform policy of the post-apartheid government in waiting (NLC [1994]).

Rural land struggles during apartheid were not isolated events. Nor were they particularly close to mainstream anti-apartheid movements that began to emerge since the early 1970s in the forms of trade unions, black consciousness groups and finally the United Democratic Front (UDF). The principal purpose of this paper is to explore the attempts to co-ordinate rural resistance and struggles in South Africa during apartheid through a case study of the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) established in Pietermaritzburg in 1979. It was a small group but had a significant local and national impact. The paper aims to address three key questions concerning the character and works of AFRA. The first question is about the character of AFRA in the politicised context of the late 1970s and 1980s: whether it was to represent and publicise,

or to mobilise rural communities. The second issue is the historical continuity and discontinuity with early attempts by Natal liberals and African landowners to organise anti-removal campaigns in the 1950s. The third question concerns the presence of Inkatha and its influence over Natal's rural communities. How and to what extent could AFRA negotiate the increasing influence of the Inkatha and KwaZulu government in such communities? And how did the political rivalry between Inkatha and the UDF affect AFRA's activities? The paper aims to serve as a critical evaluation of AFRA's strategies and activities, and its relationship with rural communities up to 1990 when land movements became nationwide.

This paper consists of six sections. The first section briefly reviews existing literature on popular struggles in the 1970s and 1980s in the South African countryside and identifies a vacuum which this paper attempts to fill in. The second and third sections deal with the founding and formative years of AFRA, examining the immediate cause of its formation, the background of its founding members, and early debates which determined the focus and subsequent directions of AFRA. The fourth and fifth sections explore major issues confronted with AFRA during 1985-1989, namely its relationships/interactions with the apartheid state, other land NGOs to form a national umbrella body, and Inkatha. Finally the sixth section discusses AFRA's relationship with rural communities.

## **1. Popular Struggles in the 1970s and 1980s in the South African countryside: A Brief Review of Relevant Literature**

Compared to urban popular struggles against apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s (Beinart [1994: chaps.9 and 10], Lodge et al. [1991], Seekings [2000]), not much literature has discussed or explored their rural counterparts. The official history of the UDF written by Jeremy Seekings [2000] argues that the key to the success of the liberation struggles in the 1980s lay in urbanisation. These urban struggles were led by "second generation urban residents, born or socialised in urban areas", who no longer had rural and/or ethnic-oriented identities (Seekings [2000: 8-11, 16-21]). Although Seekings briefly mentions rural mobilisations in Sekhukhuneland and in KwaNdebele, as an overall argument, he suggests that rural people were hardly mobilised in the anti-apartheid struggles of the 1970s and 1980s or were peripheral to their main thrust. This is in contrast to earlier history of the South African countryside which was a site of frequent episodes of both overt and covert resistances such as the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in the late 1920s (Bradford [1987]), and a series of peasant resistances in various parts of the African reserves from the late 1940s to the early 1960s (Mbeki [1964: chap. 9], Lodge [1993: chap.11], Beinart and Bundy [1987], Delius [1993; 1996:

chap. 4).

To be sure, in the 1970s and 1980s, in contrast to the volatile urban environments filled with popular protests, there are few recorded cases where rural people were mobilised in anti-apartheid movements. However, evidence of rural protests in homelands is accumulating (TRAC [1988], Delius [1996: chaps. 5 and 6], Van Kessel [2000]), and some scholars began to look at the role of NGOs as new agents in rural civil society (Moyo [2002], Moyo and Yeros eds. [2005], Nauta [2004]). Indeed the land NGOs and associated activists feature prominently in the land struggles by 'black spot' and labour tenant communities in white farming districts, both as agents in rural mobilisation and as authors of related literature in South Africa.

Starting in the late 1970s, several land NGOs were separately formed by mainly urban-based white activists in Transvaal, Cape and Natal and they began to advocate termination of forced removals<sup>1</sup>. Links developed between these land NGOs, and activists came together in the early 1980s to participate in the Surplus People's Project (SPP) research project (SPP [1983a], Platzky and Walker eds. [1985]). They coalesced to have a national impact in the mid-1980s by forming a national representative body, the National Committee Against Removals (NCAR), a predecessor to the National Land Committee (NLC) (NLC [1993]).

These land NGOs not only provided support for each black community's defence against the implementation of forced removals, but also tried to establish some linkages among communities threatened with removals. One of their major achievements was to raise embarrassing publicity about removals through research and publication of their findings in various media, including newsletters and reports. No doubt this was illustrated best in the success of the SPP research project and its reports are still regarded as the most extensive study of forced removals in South Africa. These land NGOs, together with the Legal Resource Centre (LRC) that was set up around the same time as them, also helped communities in taking legal action against the implementation of removals (Claassens [1990], Harley and Fotheringham [1999]). However, it is less clear to what extent their activities were effective in stopping removals per se. Nor is it evident why their activities focused on research and publicity rather than rural mobilisation.

The character of land movements initiated by NGOs changed after 1990 when president F.W. de Klerk announced the unbanning of political organisations and the government's intention to repeal the Land Acts. With the end of apartheid finally in sight, former black spot communities,

---

<sup>1</sup> They were AFRA in Natal, the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC) in Transvaal, the Surplus People Project (SPP) in Cape Town, and the Grahamstown Rural Committee (GRC) in eastern Cape.

together with supporting land NGOs, started to express their demands for the restitution of their land rights. They stressed the fact that they had freehold title deeds before removals and often legitimised their claims as a struggle for “ancestral” land. Their nationwide “back to the land” campaign not only put effective pressure on the de Klerk government to consider further reforms, but also had a significant impact on the formulation of the land reform policy of the post-apartheid government (Minnaar [1994], Brown et al. [1998: chap.2]). The land restitution process for many of these former black spot communities which joined the land movements preceded the enactment of the Restitution of Land Rights Act in 1994 (Sato [2010a]). Many former land activists joined the Department of Land Affairs and became responsible for implementing land reform under the post-apartheid government (James [2000]). Thus there was an attempt to mobilise wider rural communities around the issue of land in the 1990s and it had a significant impact on the state. What is largely unexplored are the characteristics of land struggles up to 1990, the degree of co-ordination between different communities, the relationship between land NGOs and the land struggles of individual rural communities, as well as the differences between rural land struggles and anti-apartheid national liberation struggles. What follows is an attempt to address this vacuum in the existing literature on rural land struggles by exploring the character and activities of AFRA.

## **2. The Birth of AFRA and its Founders**

In understanding the formation of AFRA, the first land NGO in South Africa, one needs to know the personal networks and connections of people who are broadly categorized as “liberals” as well as two earlier organisations by white liberal groups in the Natal province. The first was the Natal branch of the Liberal Party in the 1950s and early 1960s that advocated the de-racialisation of South African politics and society and concentrated on opposing the removal of black spot residents (Sato [2007], Vigne [1997: chap. 10]). The second was an experimental development organisation called the Church Agricultural Project (CAP) led by Neil Alcock, that tried to improve the living conditions of rural Africans by transforming their agricultural practice (Alcock [1977], Sato [2006: chap. 3], Malan [1990], Jaster and Jaster [1993]). CAP started as a cattle farming project for Africans in white farming districts, but increasingly it was drawn into the racial tension between white farmers and African labour tenants and the question of farm removals.

It was Neil Alcock who convened the meeting in a small church in Pietermaritzburg in October 1979, which eventually gave birth to AFRA. The district of Weenen, where his project was based, was in turmoil due to the resurgence of mass removals of farm dwellers. Something had

to be done, and through his old network of urban white liberals and church leaders living in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, 36 people – mainly university academics, church leaders and lawyers -- were mobilized to attend the meeting. Alcock brought several African labour tenants to the meeting and they explained ongoing farm evictions in Weenen and the unfavourable conditions in many resettlement villages. Cherryl Walker, who was working for CAP at that time, gave a background report on the labour tenancy system and the associated problems. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that an action committee be formed on the matter of ongoing farm removals in Weenen, and Peter Kerchhoff, who was an organiser of the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA), was tasked to convene another meeting to form this committee.<sup>2</sup> One of the initial foci of PACSA founded by Kerchhoff in 1979 was fighting against removals, as Kerchhoff thought of PACSA as a sort of successor to the Christian Institute in Pietermaritzburg where Cosmas Desmond, who wrote *Discarded People* (1976), the first extensive account of people's suffering due to forced removals, was a director until the Institute was banned in 1977.<sup>3</sup>

The second meeting convened by Kerchhoff in the following month could not find a person who was willing to take up the position of chairperson of the action committee to be established. Nonetheless, the meeting agreed to name the new organization AFRA, the Association for Rural Advancement. The rather ambitious name of the organisation seemed to embody its broadly conceived objectives which are stated as follows:

- To monitor, enquire into, record and publicise the social and economic position of rural people of Natal, and
- To take action to alleviate hardships, discrimination and oppression suffered by them and to encourage their social and economic advancement.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to emphasise this in that they clearly did not wish to restrict the scope to a purely defensive pressure group against removals. Rather, it advocated a pro-active role that the organisation hoped to play in upgrading the socio-economic circumstances of the rural poor.

However, at the following meeting, the action committee realised the need to take a more

---

<sup>2</sup> PC16/3/1/1. Notes, Meeting of concerned people on the Natal rural scene, 4 October 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Even after the work of resettlements was largely taken over by AFRA, PACSA kept its concern on the issue of resettlement in the early 1980s, in particular, the destruction of KwaPitela, a black spot near the Underberg/Himeville area. After that, a focus of PACSA's work shifted to provision of support for families of the detainees who were charged with state treason (Levine ed. [2002]). Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives (APC), KwaZulu-Natal Oral History Project (KZN-OHP), Interview transcript: Peter Kerchhoff, 10 February 1998.

<sup>4</sup> PC16/3. AFRA factsheet, No.1, July 1980.

realistic view of its resources and activities. It decided to take an area-specific approach and agreed to choose Weenen as the focus of its first project due to the apparent emergency situation in the district. Peter Brown, who had served as the chairperson of the Liberal Party in the 1960s before he was banned for ten years, finally agreed to take up the position of chairperson after repeated urging. On his decision to take up this position, Brown explained that he was persuaded that he was the only person who could control Alcock. Apparently Brown was rather reluctant to get involved with Alcock, as he got upset when he knew that Alcock had written a nasty letter to Archbishop Denis Hurley criticising him for his lack of support for CAP. In the end, Alcock's influence on AFRA was limited to the initial phase as he was busy with his own organisation, CAP. It was Brown who founded and navigated the direction and development of AFRA.

Brown saw AFRA's aims in a more definitive and narrow sense than the broadly conceived objectives of AFRA. In his inauguration speech as a chairperson, he made it clear that the organisation was to fight against forced removals and to alleviate the suffering of those already removed.<sup>5</sup> For him AFRA was unfinished business, a continuation of what he and his colleagues did in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a part of the activities of the Liberal Party. Most of the founding members of AFRA, who were former members of the Party in Pietermaritzburg, regarded Brown as an expert on the issue of forced removals. Therefore they expected and specifically asked him to take up the chairmanship of the organisation when AFRA was formed. The ex-Liberal Party members maintained a close social network after the Party was banned in 1968, through the publication of a journal called *Reality* which was started soon after the Party was closed down, and through active involvement in unbanned liberal organisations such as the Black Sash, the Christian Institute, and the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR).

The initial funding for AFRA came from the South African Council of Churches (SACC) which donated R2,420 to the organisation.<sup>6</sup> AFRA employed Cheryl Walker who had found herself sacked by CAP upon returning from her sick leave.<sup>7</sup> AFRA also employed Jean Ngubane, a graduate of the University of Zululand, on a part-time basis as a second fieldworker.<sup>8</sup> The fieldworkers' main task was to collect first-hand information on removals and resettlement areas in rural areas through fieldtrips and report back to the AFRA committee. They also tried to establish contact with possible local leaders. Walker and Ngubane, together with Laurine

---

<sup>5</sup> PC16/3/1/1. Minutes, AFRA ad hoc committee, 28 January 1980.

<sup>6</sup> PC16/3/1/1. Minutes, AFRA committee, 12 March 1980; 12 April 1980.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Cheryl Walker, 4 July 2002, Durban.

<sup>8</sup> PC16/3/1/1. Untitled document summarising AFRA's work in its first year [1980?].



Platzky from the SPP made their first fieldtrip to northern Natal in mid-1980. They covered a very wide area, ranging from Ladysmith and Ezakheni, through Nkandla, to Paulpietersburg district within eight days and gathered information on 65 resettlement areas, 26 areas threatened with removals, and 15 areas from which people had already been moved.<sup>9</sup> Soon afterwards they visited black spots in the Bergville district where the Liberal Party had strong support in the 1950s. The old contacts were still effective and AFRA was well received.<sup>10</sup> Findings from fieldtrips were distributed to people who were interested in AFRA's work through its newsletters. The mailing list contained nearly 580 addresses in late 1980, the overwhelming majority of which were within South Africa.<sup>11</sup>

Since the formation of AFRA was the direct response to the problem of farm removals in Weenen, one of the first things AFRA did was, in collaboration with Alcock and CAP, to arrange for liberal lawyers to take up cases on behalf of African tenants in order to prosecute illegal behaviour by white farmers. Most cases concerned either seemingly excessive pound fees levied on African stock-owners at the Weenen pound, or assaults on Africans by whites. Kerchhoff went up to the Weenen and Muden areas to collect statements from evicted farm dwellers. Legal costs were financed by AFRA by utilising a grant from the SACC.<sup>12</sup> The farm removals in Weenen remained one of the most important areas of AFRA's activities through the 1980s (Clacey [1989], Kockott et al. [1993]), but AFRA quickly realised the grave limitations in their legal approach and its ineffectiveness. For one thing, legal measures had been time-consuming and expensive, and only able to delay eviction. For another, they had placed a considerable burden on a local lawyer who was sympathetic to AFRA's work. Realisation of this brought about a re-orientation of AFRA's activities, but this was by no means reached easily.

It was Walker who had a more radical view and envisaged the idea of AFRA engaging in the possibility of developing local organisations among farm workers and labour tenants as the long-term solution. She argued that:

AFRA [should] consider employing an organiser to work in the Weenen district: initially he would focus on the problem of evictions and impounding of stock etc and try and build up a group who would be able to represent the farm workers in negotiations with local farmers and higher authority concerning their future.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> PC16/3/1/1. Report on a trip through northern Natal, July 1980.

<sup>10</sup> PC14/5/3/1. AFRA field report No.2, July 1980.

<sup>11</sup> PC16/3/1/1. Minutes, AFRA committee, 8 October 1980.

<sup>12</sup> PC16/3/1/1. Minutes, AFRA committee, 19 February 1980; 21 May 1980.

<sup>13</sup> PC16/3/1/2. Notes, AFRA sub-committee on farm evictions, 21 January 1981.

Her view was probably influenced from her study background. She majored in history at the University of Cape Town and extensively researched the development of the women's movement in South Africa from 1910 to the early 1960s for her MA thesis, before she joined CAP.<sup>14</sup> She knew well of the precedent of the ICU as a case of rural mobilisation in the South African countryside in the 1920s. In contrast, Brown was more cautious and worried about the "extreme vulnerability" of black organisers; they might lose not only a job but also a home. He argued that AFRA was not prepared to deal with this sort of "victimisation". In the end Walker gave in to Brown.<sup>15</sup>

Another point of contention between Walker and Brown was over the prioritization of black spot removals over the farm removals. While Brown felt that AFRA was "in a stronger position to intervene positively" on the issue of black spot removals, Walker raised certain reservations concerning AFRA's work with black spots. She pointed out the division between landlords and tenants within the communities and said that she was not happy with "the fact that AFRA's work tend[ed] to be with the landlords who [were] the elite and the power group in these communities." She argued that further discussion was necessary within AFRA to debate and clarify AFRA's long-term goals: "whether to stop removals or contribute to the politicisation of rural people."<sup>16</sup>

At the meeting held in early 1981 to discuss AFRA's priorities and commitments for the year, an argument was made, perhaps by Walker, that AFRA's work should be geared towards building up a progressive organisation within rural areas in order to politicise them, "even while recognising that AFRA's role in these areas [would] necessarily be limited by its size and the nature of its overwhelmingly white membership."<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the problems of mobilisation were also pointed out: Walker illustrated this by referring to the case of Crossroads in Cape Town where intervention by outside organisations had a negative effect on local community organisation in several respects. The ultimate issue was whether AFRA should be responsible for solving conflicts within rural communities, and whether AFRA would be capable of doing the task well. AFRA's leadership was sceptical about AFRA's capability of doing this kind of job, mainly because of AFRA's composition as "a predominantly white body". Therefore, although they stressed the importance of being aware of differences within the communities, they concluded that AFRA should not embark on organising rural communities. The founding members of AFRA thus clearly defined the limits of the scope of their

---

<sup>14</sup> Her MA thesis was later published as Walker [1991 (1982)].

<sup>15</sup> PC16/3/1/2. Notes, AFRA sub-committee on farm evictions, 21 January 1981.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> PC16/3/1/2. Notes, AFRA ad hoc discussion group, 23 January 1981.

involvement and its intervention in the rural communities.<sup>18</sup>

### **3. Early Activities of AFRA – Research, Community Workshops and Rural Advice Office**

If rural mobilisation was an impossible task for an organisation dominated by white liberals, the early activities of AFRA were based on what they were good at, and in particular on the strength of the first two fieldworkers AFRA employed – Cherryl Walker and Jean Ngubane.

Fact-finding fieldtrips were one of the most important achievements of AFRA during its early years. AFRA's fieldworkers visited all over the Natal province. Most of Walker's informants were local priests, doctors and nurses at mission stations and hospitals, and teachers. Although they were not victims of resettlement themselves, Walker thought that they were well-informed with what was going on in their localities. For instance, in the Nqutu area, doctors and matrons at the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital provided vital contacts for AFRA especially as a base to visit the nearby resettlement village of Nondweni. Information collected through fieldtrips was reported back at meetings of the AFRA committee and filed at the AFRA resource centre. AFRA produced detailed stories of selected communities in its newsletters. By mid-1982 AFRA had published 17 reports and two special reports, which were sent to about 1,200 addresses in AFRA's mailing list. Since report No.8 in 1981, AFRA produced its reports in both English and isiZulu. In addition, AFRA produced four "factsheets" in both English and isiZulu, aiming to educate rural communities both on practical matters such as how to take a statement and how to get a pension, and on legal aspects of removals.<sup>19</sup>

AFRA's fieldtrip reports were compiled into the SPP report by Walker who developed a more extensive analysis of forced removals in Natal. Volume four of the SPP report which deals with Natal became an invaluable source for anyone interested in the matter. It not only reflects a geographically wide coverage of Walker's fieldwork, but also her knowledge of new materials on agrarian history; associated academic debates on proletarianisation, and the resilience of peasant production in the early twentieth century South African countryside (SPP [1983b]). Contrary to hitherto dominant revisionist analyses of South African agrarian transformation, which argued for the linear proletarianisation process of African peasants accelerated by the discovery of minerals, industrialisation and the Land Acts, the emerging agrarian historiography written by social historians tried to show that the process was much more complex and had wide regional variety. They also argued for the persistence of an African peasantry and the depth of

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> PC16/3/2/1. Walker, Organiser's report to AFRA AGM, 15 June 1982, pp. 2-3.

African attachment to land (Beinart and Delius [1986], Beinart [1988], Saunders [1988]). In Walker's analysis of forced removals in Natal, she emphasised the scale of farm removals and the resilience of labour tenancy in several white farming districts. She was developing the analysis of labour tenancy as an institution based on compromise between the labour needs of the uncompetitive white farming sector and the deep African attachment to the land and their social and cultural needs of keeping cattle (SPP [1983b: 70-82]).

Apart from research work which occupied considerable time and energy of AFRA fieldworkers, AFRA started to bring together threatened rural communities at a series of workshops. The workshops were intended to give them an opportunity to discuss their common problems and consider ways of organising themselves to resist removals. The first AFRA workshop on resettlement was organised in mid-1981 in Ladysmith, in which about 45 people, representing black spots around the area (Lusitania, Matiwane's Kop, Driefontein, Steincoalspruit, Umbulwane, Tembalihle, and KwaPitela) and other places (Reserve Four, Phoenix and Ezakheni), participated.<sup>20</sup> About 80 people from 12 communities attended at the second such workshop. At the end of the second workshop they produced a public statement in which they pleaded to end removals by reminding the government of the promise made by Piet Koornhof, the Minister of Cooperation and Development, a year before. According to them, Koornhof said that "people [would] not be removed against their will."<sup>21</sup> However, AFRA learnt with great disappointment that these representatives did not necessarily take feedback from these workshops back into their communities.<sup>22</sup>

Even after Walker left AFRA for personal reasons in early 1983, AFRA's major activities, largely set by her, were carried on by subsequent organisers. Ian Donald, who succeeded Walker, took a number of journalists and film crews as well as foreign visitors to resettlement villages and threatened areas on several occasions. The AFRA's mailing list reached about 1,900 by mid-1984.<sup>23</sup> The effort to bring rural communities together was also continued. At a workshop held in Ladysmith in early 1983, two representatives from other provinces, one from Driefontein in Transvaal and the other from Mgwali in eastern Cape, also attended.<sup>24</sup>

Another early activity of AFRA was opening an advice office for rural people to inform them

---

<sup>20</sup> PC16/3/1/3. Report, AFRA workshop, n.d. [1981?].

<sup>21</sup> PC16/3/1/3. Report, AFRA workshop, 7 November 1981.

<sup>22</sup> PC16/3/2/1. Walker, Organiser's report to AFRA AGM, 15 June 1982.

<sup>23</sup> PC14/5/3/5. AFRA, fieldtrip report No.1, 1983; PC16/3/2/3. [Ian Donald?], Organiser's report, May 1984.

<sup>24</sup> The representative from Driefontein, Saul Mkhize, was shot dead by a policeman at a meeting at Driefontein a week after the workshop. PC16/3/2/2. Brown to Rev John McIntyre, Church of Scotland, 25 April 1983.

about their rights and give them practical legal advice. The legal advice centres were first opened by the Black Sash, a women's organisation protesting against the apartheid government in the mid-1960s in order to give first African women, and later men, legal advice on their problems imposed by the pass laws. Over the years, the issues dealt with at their legal advice centres widened to include other issues directly affecting people's daily lives, most importantly, social welfare and social security (Davis et al. [1988: 384-385]). While most Black Sash advice centres were in the cities, AFRA considered opening a similar advice office in a rural area as an alternative way of assisting farm workers and tenants. AFRA sent Ngubane to the Black Sash office for her legal training.

The AFRA rural advice office was opened in early 1983 in Wembezi township, outside Estcourt. The Wembezi township was not exactly a "rural" location, but it was a result of compromise since AFRA's efforts to find premises met with fierce resistance from property owners in Greytown, a small white city surrounded by white farming areas, which was also relatively close to resettlement villages in KwaZulu. AFRA's second choice of Estcourt, which was also surrounded by farms, did not work either. In the end, the Anglican Church in the Wembezi township agreed to lend a place to AFRA. Although there were certain disadvantages to opening the office in this isolated township, most notably extra transport costs for farmworkers and non-residents, AFRA accepted it.<sup>25</sup>

After opening, Ngubane received 80 requests for advice within the first three months. Nearly half of them concerned old age pensions. By the latter half of the twentieth century, the old age pension became the chief source of income for many African rural households in South Africa. However, Ngubane's report tells us that it was not easy to receive pensions regularly. There were three types of problems that rural Africans experienced in getting their pensions. Firstly, some people had difficulty in being qualified for old age pensions, as they did not have birth certificates or clear birth dates. Pension clerks arbitrarily estimated their ages and as a result some legitimate pension claims were lost. Secondly, she encountered many people whose pensions were suddenly cut off without proper explanation. These people had to go through a lengthy process to resume receiving their pension. Finally, there were people who had been waiting for their payments for more than two years after submitting applications and were not informed why their applications were not accepted.<sup>26</sup> The number of cases she dealt with at the AFRA advice office increased to 300 a year later.<sup>27</sup> Obviously popular demand for para-legal

---

<sup>25</sup> PC16/3/2/1. Walker, Organiser's report, June – December 1982.

<sup>26</sup> PC16/3/2/3. Ngubane, "Pensions: the case of Natal", n.d. [May 1984?]; PC16/3/2/2. Ngubane, Advice office report, May 1983.

<sup>27</sup> PC16/3/2/3. Ngubane, Advice office annual report, May 1984.

advice was very high among residents in the township and surrounding farmland, and AFRA deserves credit for fulfilling their mounting needs.

#### **4. AFRA's Experience/ Interaction with the Apartheid State**

The principal focus of AFRA's work was to voice its opposition to forced removals through research and advocacy, and to provide support to rural communities threatened with such removals. Therefore, the announcement by G. van N. Viljoen, the Minister of Co-operation and Development on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1985, that forced removals would be suspended, while the government reviewed and finalized its consolidation proposals for homelands, could have been welcome news. To be sure, this was not the first time that the government made such announcements which ended up as empty promises.<sup>28</sup> Therefore AFRA was very sceptical about their honesty. However, this time, the government went a step further. Following Viljoen's statement, many urban townships in Natal were reprieved, and their residents were given 99-year leaseholds. Although AFRA still felt the need to carry on pressurising the government, the address given by its chairperson at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in 1985 expressed a sense of achievement.

The 30 year struggle against removals was at last having some results. .... The government was confused and had lost the rigidity of Verwoerd and his policies. The granting of [a] 99 year leasehold to township residents in the Western Cape and Natal was a major shift (99 years was the equivalent of freehold since apartheid could not last 99 years.) We hope that the suspension of removals by Viljoen will lead to their abandonment, but this will not happen without continuing pressure.<sup>29</sup>

The final consolidation proposals for Natal and KwaZulu by the Commission for Co-operation and Development were submitted to the Minister of Cooperation and Development in early 1985. It abandoned the previous proposals for the consolidation of KwaZulu, which meant that the territory of KwaZulu homeland would remain un-integrated and bits of territories would be scattered across white Natal. Other key elements included a commitment to minimising resettlements and finding land for those squatting on white farms. The Commission recommended that about 810,000 hectares should be added to KwaZulu.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> PC16/3. AFRA Report, No.8 (March 1981); No.17 (June 1982); No. 19 (February 1983); No.20 (May 1983).

<sup>29</sup> PC16/3/3/1. Minutes, AFRA AGM, 9 May 1985.

<sup>30</sup> PC16/3/4/8. Commission for Co-operation and Development, Memorandum on the consolidation of KwaZulu, 23 September 1985, p. 2.

Such a recommendation by the Commission provoked the widespread criticisms from various parties, but the government went ahead with public hearings with communities which would be affected by the proposals. These started in late 1985 in Vryheid, followed by Richard's Bay, Margate, Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith, and Bergville. It was very short notice, but AFRA informed a number of communities of the proposals and encouraged them to voice their opposition to removals at the hearings. According to AFRA report No.29 (February 1986) which reported the Commission hearings in various cities in Natal, in every city, delegations and representatives of community members who would be affected by the proposals came forward to present the history of their occupation of land. In some cases, they argued that overcrowding, and the resultant deterioration of the quality of land in their areas, necessitated that the Commission should buy more farms for them in the same district. In several cities, chiefs or KwaZulu MPs also appeared at the hearings to support the people in their refusal to move. At the Ladysmith hearing, Steven Sithebe, a local KwaZulu MP, spoke on behalf of about 300 people who represented several black spots in the area. In entering the hall, he led a mass demonstration which looked like "an Inkatha rally".<sup>31</sup> Growing influence of Inkatha over black spot communities threatened with removals was becoming a weary factor to AFRA, as I will discuss in the next section.

The Commission invited AFRA to present its opinions on the proposals, which took place in early 1986. Four members of the AFRA committee including Brown (chairperson) attended a meeting with 12 commissioners and a few members of the government in Durban. While they were explaining AFRA, they were frequently interrupted with questions from commissioners who wanted to know the racial composition of the AFRA committee, its main donors and amount of funding, and its relationship with other political and non-political organisations. Although representatives of the AFRA committee felt uneasy with these questions, to some extent they had anticipated them and therefore were prepared. However, a harder time for AFRA followed, when it presented evidence to support opposition to the removal of individual communities. What AFRA did not realise until then was the extent of the "knowledge of the commissioners and their understanding of local politics" among rural communities. This was particularly the case with Reserve Four whose people were under pressure to vacate its land for the expansion of Richard's Bay. The commissioners questioned and challenged AFRA's argument that people at Reserve Four did not want to move out their land. They demanded "the source, accuracy and representativeness of the evidence." In the end AFRA had to admit that its evidence dealt exclusively with one ward within Reserve Four and did not reflect the view of

---

<sup>31</sup> PC16/3. AFRA Report, No.29 (February 1986); PC16/3/3. Minutes, AFRA committee, 9 October 1985; 31 October 1985.

the entire community.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, to AFRA's surprise, it learned that the fundamental point – scrapping the policy of forced removals – was wholeheartedly accepted by the Commission. The Commission wanted to talk with AFRA about the alternatives, and about how to administer black spots in order to solve the problem of apparent over-crowding in these areas – a problem for which AFRA did not have a concrete answer. AFRA felt trapped by the Commission:

While they were looking for answers, they were also, of course, attempting to make us see things along their lines by pushing us into their predicaments. When we asked [for] more land for blacks, they were quick to suppose that we were in favour of the forced removal of white farmers. Or that the plight of evicted farmworkers could be improved if we could persuade KwaZulu to accept these people in the Reserves.<sup>33</sup>

The meeting with the Commission was a learning experience for AFRA about the changing policy direction of forced removals, or at least the Commission's recommendation on the matter. However, it was also a bitter experience, especially for new young members of the AFRA committee, as they thought that AFRA was not well-prepared to stand up against the cross-examination by the Commission. By this time, the members of the AFRA committee had increased and the character of the AFRA committee membership had begun to change from predominantly ex-Liberal Party personnel to include a new generation of white activists and professionals who favoured a more radical approach and began to challenge Brown's pragmatism as will be discussed in the next section. After this embarrassing experience, AFRA's engagement with the government came to its end, since the AFRA committee took a resolution not to engage with the Commission any further.<sup>34</sup>

## 5. The Political Nature of AFRA

While the government's policy of forced removals was becoming more and more blurred and confused, a move to form a national umbrella body opposing forced removals was consolidated. In early 1985, four regional organisations concerned with forced removals in South Africa — AFRA in Natal, the Grahamstown Rural Committee (GRC) in eastern Cape, SPP in western Cape, and the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC) in Transvaal – got together to form a

---

<sup>32</sup> PC16/3/3/1. [Dave Walwyn?], Before the Commission, 16 January 1986.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> PC 16/3/3/1. Minutes, AFRA committee, January 1986.



national organisation, the National Committee Against Removals (NCAR), in order to coordinate their activities.<sup>35</sup> It was later renamed to the National Land Committee (NLC). Laurine Platzky, who coordinated the SPP research project, became the national coordinator of the NCAR. The executive committee, consisting of one representative from each organisation plus the national coordinator, was to meet at least four times a year, and fieldworkers of the four founding organisations were to meet at least twice a year in order to exchange their regional reports. The NCAR was to produce national newsletters and issue press statements, whenever necessary. Oxfam became the initial donor for the NCAR.<sup>36</sup>

Although AFRA was part of the NCAR from the latter's inception, the formation of a national co-ordinating body gained mixed reactions within AFRA. Apparently AFRA fieldworkers mostly welcomed it, as they felt meetings and training workshops to share experiences and problems in each region were invaluable and very rewarding. However, Brown, the chairperson, felt that the political stance of the NCAR would pose a serious question to AFRA. He stated his concern at the AGM in 1986.

The AFRA committee has had represented on it a wide range of political views. This is [a] strength as it creates variety and provides access to a wider range of avenues. The NCAR has a narrower range of political views. It is useful to AFRA to be affiliated because of the mutual benefit of sharing experience and research, but the incoming committee must insist that any proposals from NCAR are purely recommendations, and AFRA shouldn't be compromised by committing us to anything without the approval of the committee.<sup>37</sup>

The strong articulation by the chairperson of the importance of AFRA's independence grew partly from the unique political situation in Natal. The growing conflicts between the UDF supporters and Inkatha supporters in Natal were becoming a serious obstacle for AFRA to continue its work in rural areas and to maintain political neutrality.<sup>38</sup> At a NCAR meeting in mid-1985, AFRA's fieldworkers noted that many of their meetings with threatened communities were hijacked by Inkatha and became "Inkatha rallies". They explained the highly sensitive nature of the matter and AFRA's efforts "to tread very carefully between Inkatha and UDF." However, they continued, "it [was] problematic when fieldworkers encourage[d] people to unite and the people want[ed] to know how, under Inkatha, [or] UDF."<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> PC14/5/1/7. Circulation letter from NCAR, 10 September 1985.

<sup>36</sup> PC16/3/3/1. Minutes, NCAR, 17 & 18 May 1985.

<sup>37</sup> PC16/3/5. Minutes, AFRA AGM, 20 March 1986.

<sup>38</sup> PC16/3/2/3. [Ian Donald?], Organiser's report, May 1984.

<sup>39</sup> PC16/3/3/1. Minutes, NCAR, 17 & 18 May 1985.

Brown's position on how AFRA should deal with the situation was clear. In a letter to Cherryl Walker who was thinking of coming back to South Africa from the United States and of working for AFRA again, he explained his view:

Although most AFRA committee members are probably UDF sympathisers this conflict is one I am convinced AFRA must avoid any involvement at all in. In most of [the] threatened areas of rural Natal Inkatha is the only organisation of any significance and to be suspected of being hostile to it would I think be disastrous for our prospects of influencing any organised campaign against removals in those areas.<sup>40</sup>

In 1986 AFRA was also facing another internal problem, i.e., a shortage of fieldworkers. Although membership of the AFRA committee expanded, the lack of fieldworkers meant that AFRA's involvement in rural communities had to come to a standstill. By the AGM in March that year, Ngubane had left AFRA in order to go back to the university. Another black fieldworker had left too, to take up a post with the SACC. Another fieldworker (white female) resigned in mid-1986 after having been detained by police briefly.<sup>41</sup> It was only later in that year that these vacant posts were filled. Thus, for a large part of 1986 AFRA did not have experienced and effective fieldworkers. The hurried departure of fieldworkers also meant difficulty in maintaining key contacts with rural communities. While AFRA was occupied with internal difficulties and the resurgence of farm evictions in Weenen which started in that year, the NCAR began to criticise AFRA's lack of commitment to NCAR. The NCAR executive committee felt that AFRA was limiting attendance at meetings and its financial contribution to travel for them.<sup>42</sup>

Within the AFRA itself, the question of political commitment was becoming a divisive issue. Several new, younger members who joined AFRA in the mid-1980s were unhappy with AFRA's political neutrality.<sup>43</sup> Susan Mathieson who worked for AFRA as a secretary sent a formal resignation letter to the AFRA committee, criticising "a lack of clarity about AFRA's direction." Her frustration with AFRA was partly related to her personal ambition to work in rural areas in Natal as a researcher and her therefore not wanting to be confined to the daily office work as a secretary. According to her, she was confined to the latter job, exactly because of her critical attitudes towards some aspects of AFRA's work, in particular AFRA's support for rural

---

<sup>40</sup> PC16/3/3. Brown to Walker, 2 February 1986.

<sup>41</sup> PC16/3/5. [Peter Brown?], AFRA Report for January-June, 1986.

<sup>42</sup> PC16/3/5. Summary, NCAR executive meeting, 30 October 1986.

<sup>43</sup> APC: KZN-OHP, Interview transcript: Sheila Meintjes, 28 February 1988, pp. 11-12.

communities which had a close relationship with Inkatha. She argued:

When I started at AFRA, Pattie Henderson [AFRA fieldworker] was very unhappy with the increasing predominance of Inkatha in the areas where we work. Two of our major development plans were being dominated by major Inkatha members involved in vigilante activities, and the projects were running in a very undemocratic manner. The policy of AFRA at the time seemed to be to ignore the political reality, and carry on as if nothing had changed. ... This issue for me displayed the weakness of having such a wide range of political views represented, [and] it rendered us paralysed in the face of this swing to the right in the rural areas. It hampered us from actually looking clearly at the issues, and working out some way to move forward.<sup>44</sup>

The two development projects she mentioned in the letter would probably have been at Matiwane's Kop and Steincoalspruit, two black spot communities, in the Klipriver district. The title deeds of Matiwane's Kop were officially transferred to the government, but physical removal of its residents never took place. In Steincoalspruit tenants were moved to Ekuvukeni in 1978, but landowners remained on the land by not accepting compensatory land. As both areas were neglected by the government in terms of provision of services, their living conditions deteriorated considerably. During the mid-1980s AFRA facilitated outside organisations to conduct a survey of the area and to provide developmental projects such as the installation of clean water facilities and community gardens. However, the AFRA committee took a resolution not to get involved with Matiwane's Kop any further in 1986, because of apparent Inkatha predominance and the undemocratic behaviour of its leadership.<sup>45</sup>

Mathieson also criticised AFRA's lack of interest in and commitment to NCAR and other regional affiliates.

I have been up against a very deep rooted distrust of the work of other organisations, particularly of our affiliates. ... They are not dangerous ultra-leftist radicals as they are sometimes portrayed. ... They are not affiliated to the UDF and do not intend to be, although they are broadly committed to the struggle for a non-racial democratic future for South Africa. ... I do not see where we have reason to wish to distance ourselves from them. If AFRA has that attitude to the affiliates it must have a similar attitude

---

<sup>44</sup> PC16/3/5. Susan Mathieson, Letter of resignation to AFRA committee, n.d. [April 1987?].

<sup>45</sup> PC16/3/5. AFRA Chairman's report for 1986; Peter Brown, Some thoughts for the AFRA evaluation, 14 March 1987; Minutes, AFRA AGM, 26 March 1987.

towards me, because I don't have any problems with them.<sup>46</sup>

At the height of a growing crisis both within AFRA and in the Natal countryside, AFRA held an evaluation meeting at which Brown, the chairperson, reiterated his view that AFRA should maintain its political neutrality, as "AFRA has to try to pursue its objects, for the foreseeable future, within a very difficult and complex situation in rural Natal, not like that anywhere else, and not fully understood anywhere else."<sup>47</sup> Such a strong statement would be interpreted as a sign of his confidence and pride as a long-standing political activist in the province and his scepticism towards the emerging new generation of political activists in the country. Several members who advocated that AFRA should commit itself more clearly to the UDF line did not attend this meeting. The meeting resolved "that it was still possible and desirable for AFRA to remain independent in the Inkatha/UDF conflict." It also resolved to make efforts to dispel the misunderstandings between AFRA and NCAR.<sup>48</sup>

In retrospect, Brown's pragmatism might be seen as his lack of understanding of political dynamics centring around the UDF that was taking place nationwide (Seekings [2000]). However, it was also true that the Natal countryside was unique and different, exactly due to the presence of Inkatha (Aitchison [1989], Jeffery [1997]), and to the fact that Inkatha had not nominal but real influence over Zulu-speaking people in the countryside (Mare and Hamilton [1987: 71]). Nevertheless, fighting by Inkatha was becoming increasingly equal to defending the apartheid regime in the periphery. Moreover, the central government was beginning to change.

The Minister of Constitutional Development finally announced the KwaZulu consolidation plan in 1988 after a long delay. It did not mention the official reprieve for any of the black spots in the province, but several reserves including Reserve Four were re-incorporated in KwaZulu and thus they were effectively relieved of the threat of removal. Pretoria's policy concerning removals of black spots in Natal was still unclear and contradictory. While it reprieved two black spots in the province (Hopewell near Pietermaritzburg and Trust Feed in the New Hanover district) in 1988 and 1989, it carried on with the relocation of tenants from Cornfields, a black spot near Estcourt, to the South African Development Trust land near Wembezi township during the same period. Nonetheless AFRA expected that further black spots in the province would be reprieved soon (AFRA [1989: 11-12]).

---

<sup>46</sup> PC16/3/5. Mathieson, Letter of resignation....

<sup>47</sup> PC16/3/5. Brown, Some thoughts for the AFRA evaluation, 14 March 1987.

<sup>48</sup> PC16/3/5. Minutes, AFRA committee, 14 March 1987.

Changing political developments in South Africa demanded AFRA to re-organise itself. Richard Clacey, a fieldworker who prepared a position paper for reorganisation in 1989, argued that AFRA should transform itself to serve for not only supporting rural struggles, but also for the realisation of post-apartheid South Africa. Quoting the ANC's "constitutional guidelines" on the land issue, that envisaged the implementation of land reform in order to address the uneven distribution and utilization of the country's land, he argued that this was the area in which AFRA had been working and therefore should make a significant contribution.<sup>49</sup> Clacey was promoted to a co-ordinator and was to lead AFRA in the early 1990s during which AFRA's staff number dramatically increased. In December 1989, AFRA held a workshop with representatives of black spot communities, at which the possibility of launching a joint campaign to demand not only official reprieves but also the restoration of expropriated title deeds was explored (AFRA [1990: 4]). This workshop signalled the beginning of the new era in land struggles for both AFRA and rural communities.

## **6. AFRA's Relationship with Rural Communities**

In the final section of this paper, I would like to turn to critically examine AFRA's relationship with communities, in particular, the depth of AFRA's understandings of their internal dynamics. In fact this was a recurrent theme of debate in the AFRA committee. When Walker started undertaking fieldtrips in Natal rural areas in 1980, most of her initial contacts were with knowledgeable local observers rather than with members of affected communities. However, through these fieldtrips, AFRA gradually established contacts with the local leadership, whether self-proclaimed or members of the chief's council, or from whatever community organisation existed. The AFRA committee was fully aware that its contacts with communities were sometimes superficial and selective. At black spots AFRA's contacts tended to be with landowners, and in reserves they tended to be with members of chiefs' councils. Nonetheless, the AFRA committee took a pragmatic approach and was reluctant to get fully immersed in the life of any one community, as it did not believe that AFRA could profitably do this.<sup>50</sup> The high turnover of AFRA's fieldworkers, who on average stayed with AFRA for less than two years, was also an obstacle in establishing deeper relationships with communities.

One of the communities with which AFRA established a continuous and stronger contact was

---

<sup>49</sup> PC16/3/5. Richard Clacey, Proposals for the organisational development of AFRA, February 1989; PC126/1/1/1/2. Clacey, Position paper on the possible re-organisation of AFRA and its objectives, February 1989, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> PC16/3/5. Minutes, AFRA committee, 14 March 1987.

with the people in the Sokhulu ward of Reserve Four, near Richards' Bay in northern Natal. Reserve Four consisted of two wards – the Sokhulu ward in the north and the Mbonambi ward in the south, administered by different chiefs. About 20,000 people were living on land administered by chief Sokhulu in the early 1980s. Due to the development and planned expansion of Richards' Bay, the consolidation proposals in 1973 and 1975 stipulated Reserve Four to be excised from KwaZulu and incorporated into white Natal. This was quietly done by proclamation in 1981, but physical removal of people was not implemented immediately. On a fieldtrip in 1981 AFRA got a tip that people in Sokhulu ward were trying to organise themselves against the enforcement of removal by the government. Since then, AFRA maintained regular contact with the chief and his council. In late 1982, Anthony Mncadi, a member of the chief's council of Sokhulu ward was elected to the AFRA committee, in an attempt to involve communities in AFRA's policy making (SPP [1983b: 529-544]).<sup>51</sup>

The AFRA committee held one or two meetings in Reserve Four, and Mncadi attended several AGMs in Pietermaritzburg. Although the mere presence of Mncadi at the AFRA committee did not really mean enhanced involvement of communities in AFRA's decision making, his attendance at the meeting gave opportunities for committee members to hear the situation in Reserve Four first hand.<sup>52</sup> However, AFRA failed to establish contact with people living in the Mbonambi ward of Reserve Four. This not only hindered AFRA in facilitating a united opposition by two wards in Reserve Four against removals, but it also enabled the consolidation commissioners to question the representativeness of AFRA's presentation regarding Reserve Four, and caused it great embarrassment at the consolidation hearing as I already discussed above.

AFRA maintained a good relationship with local leaders of Reserve Four at least until mid-1986 when the influence of Inkatha grew in the area. An AFRA fieldworker noted the effect of a big meeting held by chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, prime minister of KwaZulu, in Reserve Four in October 1986, which they thought might have shifted the dynamics in the community.<sup>53</sup> The example of AFRA's relationship with the Sokhulu people of Reserve Four shows the clear limitation of AFRA's knowledge about local dynamics and AFRA's relationship with local African leaders. Not only that AFRA was not aware of the differences between the Sokhulu people and the Mbonambi people over the issue of removal. But also that AFRA's contact with the Sokhulu people almost vanished at once when Inkatha, which did not welcome the influence

---

<sup>51</sup> PC14/5/3/3. AFRA field report, April 1981; PC16/3/2/1. Walker, Organiser's report, June–December 1982, pp. 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> PC16/3/3/1. Minutes, AFRA AGM, 9 May 1985.

<sup>53</sup> PC16/3/5. AFRA, Regional report for NCAR, April 1987.

of other organisations among Zulu people, stepped in.

The growing influence of Inkatha among rural communities made it very difficult for AFRA to work with several communities. Although Buthelezi and the KwaZulu government publicly denounced removals, they were not happy with other organisations like AFRA gaining stronger influence over rural communities. On the other hand, AFRA was concerned with the repressive attitude of the Inkatha-dominated local organisation, especially after the formation of the UDF. The case that best illustrates these developments was Matiwane's Kop, one of many black spots in the Klipriver district where Africans bought land in the nineteenth century.

Originally Matiwane's Kop was purchased by a syndicate consisting of 120 members of the Shabalala group between 1870 and 1880. The property was later subdivided and the titles vested in individuals. During the course of the twentieth century, a large number of tenants came to live in the area either being attracted by its relative proximity to Ladysmith or because they were evicted from surrounding white farms, or because African landowners rented land to them. Similar to dozens of other black spots in the district, it had been under constant pressure of removal due to the strong lobbying activities by local white farmers since the 1940s. However, until the necessary land for their resettlement had been acquired, the removal of black spots could not get under way. It was only in late 1978 that the first serious warning of removals was brought to the Matiwane's Kop community by an official from Pretoria. As was often the case with black spot communities in the district, Matiwane's Kop had its own organisation, which consisted of a chief and councillors. From the start, they made it very clear that they did not want to move. They drew up a memorandum in which they explained the history of their relationship to the land and their objection to the proposed removal. They sent it to Piet Koornhof, the Minister of Cooperation and Development, through the office of the KwaZulu Minister of the Interior at Ulundi. In spite of this active opposition from local leadership, the state went ahead to expropriate land in 1980 (SPP [1983b: 441-442, 453-463]).

When AFRA got in touch with people at Matiwane's Kop, the initial contact made by Walker was with the head of the high school called Percy Hlophe, who was a "sort of tribal secretary or advisor to the chief."<sup>54</sup> Although AFRA acknowledged the achievement of its leadership in voicing opposition to removals and mobilising the community as a whole, it also had slight reservations in working with them. Walker described the leadership of Matiwane's Kop in the SPP report:

---

<sup>54</sup> APC: KZN-OHP. Interview transcript: Peter Brown, Tape7: 3 November 1995, p. 2.

It appears ... that within the community, opposition has been organised along very traditional lines, with popular involvement relegated largely to attendance at mass meetings and the traditional leaders – councillors and landowners – making the crucial decisions. .... Most of the leaders are members of Inkatha and some of them have very strong personal ties with members of the KwaZulu government. They are members of the same relatively privileged rural elite. This has encouraged a dependency on Ulundi which may, in the long term, serve to undermine rather than enhance the community's campaign (SPP [1983b: 457]).

Due to the active opposition against removals by the leadership of Matiwane's Kop, it enjoyed greater publicity in both local and overseas media. This brought money from overseas organisations for development projects at Matiwane's Kop. In 1984 AFRA was given R9,000 from an outside organisation to facilitate development projects at Matiwane's Kop. The Matiwane's Kop Development Committee was formed by outside supporting organisations in Pietermaritzburg, which established a spring protection project, community garden, and tree nursery in cooperation with the local community.<sup>55</sup> However, the AFRA committee took the resolution to stop working with the leadership at Matiwane's Kop in 1986 when it discovered that some of them were reported to have taken part in attacks on the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) members.<sup>56</sup> Sheila Meintjes, an AFRA committee member at that time, remembered the incident.

[AFRA's main contact person was Hlope, who was] one of the key organisers in Matiwane's Kop with UWUSA [United Workers Union of South Africa: Inkatha-created trade union], and as a member of Inkatha. He assisted in gathering together the members of UWUSA and I think it was the Dunlop strike in Ladysmith – busloads of Inkatha and UWUSA supporters went in to break the strike and there was a real stand-off between the FOSATU members and UWUSA. ... in effect what one began to see was the emergence of warring factions, violence, guns, etc. They formed themselves into these sort of *impis*... they would pitch up at rallies with all their assegais.... And these leaders with whom we had been working, many of them, turned into warlords.<sup>57</sup>

Then, the dynamics within the Matiwane's Kop community changed with the death of Chief Shabalala who was apparently shot by an opposing faction. AFRA was not aware of the

---

<sup>55</sup> PC16/3/2/3. [Ian Donald?], Organiser's report, May 1984; PC16/3/5. Chairman's report for 1986.

<sup>56</sup> PC16/3/5. Brown, Some thoughts for the AFRA evaluation, 14 March 1987.

<sup>57</sup> APC: KZN-OHP. Interview transcript: Sheila Meintjes, 28 February 1998, pp. 14-15.



existence of this opposing faction until the death of the chief.<sup>58</sup> Steven Sithebe, a prominent local Inkatha MP, tried to intervene in the community politics in Matiwane's Kop, but this new group of leaders was sceptical about Inkatha's intention of supporting their struggle against removal. Instead, they approached AFRA in 1987 and requested that it assist them in setting aside the expropriation order and restoring the freehold rights. It seemed to AFRA that this new committee represented "a variety of political persuasions" and was "bona fide". Therefore AFRA decided to resume working with the people of Matiwane's Kop.<sup>59</sup> For AFRA, working with community leaders was always a learning experience, filled with unexpected errors and surprises well beyond their control.

## **Conclusion**

This paper discussed the foundations and strategies of AFRA, the key land NGO in Natal. It started as a small group of activists advocating opposition to forced removals on behalf of affected rural communities. It was formed by former Liberal Party members, academics at a local university, and church leaders who were concerned with grave injustice implemented by the apartheid government. Among this group of people whom we can broadly categorize as liberals, the prominence of the leadership by Peter Brown should be noted. This was clearly illustrated by the fact that everyone wanted him to be chairperson of the organisation, when it was formed in 1979. For Brown, the work of AFRA was to continue the unfinished business which he started in the 1950s as a part of the Liberal Party activities. He maintained this stance publicly and repeatedly reminded people of it at the AFRA meetings. He committed himself until the era of forced removals finally came to an end in 1990. He resigned from AFRA's chairmanship in that year.

Another key figure in determining the course of AFRA's development was its first fieldworker, Cheryl Walker. Although she did not stay at AFRA for long, she was the one who determined the job description of subsequent fieldworkers of AFRA and who set a higher standard for their responsibilities. She became a far more well-known figure nationally as well as internationally in the literature on forced removals in South Africa due to her involvement in the SPP project. After 1994 she was appointed as the first land commissioner for KwaZulu-Natal and became responsible for rectifying the injustice done by forced removals through a post-apartheid policy programme of land restitution. She was and still is an authority on land, forced removals and restitution.

---

<sup>58</sup> APC: KZN-OHP. Interview transcript: Peter Brown, Tape 7: 3 November 1995, pp. 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> PC16/3/5. AFRA, Regional report for NCAR, November 1987.

In the course of time, AFRA absorbed new people into the committee. Compared with the founding members, they were young graduates from university, some with academic and activist backgrounds, and were more politically radical. For new members who joined AFRA in the early and mid 1980s, their involvement was more directly connected with political transformation in South Africa. Therefore, when political tension between the ANC-aligned UDF and Inkatha flared up in the province in mid-1980s, they were not happy when AFRA decided not to take sides with either faction and maintained its political neutrality. Moreover, AFRA maintained pragmatic approach in its relationship with rural communities which were more or less influenced by Inkatha. It alienated the new, younger generation of white activists who joined AFRA in the mid-1980s. They did not succeed in taking over AFRA's leadership and left the organisation.

AFRA certainly enhanced publicity about the issue of forced removals in both domestic and overseas media, which in turn had some impact on Pretoria's determination in implementing its policy. After AFRA was formed in 1979, only one black spot, KwaPitela, was relocated in Natal. On the other hand, AFRA was not effective in deterring the eviction of farm dwellers in Weenen and other white farming districts of the province. Whether it was resistance by communities supported by organisations like AFRA that delayed the implementation of forced removals is difficult to argue. The financial implications of removals for the state were an increasingly important factor which restricted the government in implementing the policy of mass removals. Still, AFRA may claim a certain credit on this issue in general as one organisation that provided embarrassing publicity concerning threatened communities. Certainly AFRA provided groundwork for nationwide land restoration movements by black spot communities, which emerged in the early 1990s.

Although right from the beginning there was a discussion within AFRA on the possibility of facilitating local organisation within rural communities, it never adopted this as its policy. Walker was more radical on this matter, and argued for AFRA taking this line of responsibility. However, founding members of the AFRA committee felt themselves under-equipped to effectively achieve this. Brown was reluctant to undertake action that could lead to the victimising of their black rural constituency. He knew from his own experience in the 1960s that it was them, not those in the city who would be brutally repressed. Another reason for AFRA's reluctance in taking a mass mobilisation approach lay in its racial composition. Although it employed African staff from quite an early stage, the AFRA committee was dominated by whites until the early 1990s and this made Brown and his colleagues cautious about political leadership. The problem of representation and rural mobilisation by white liberals would be

seen as the most significant limitation of AFRA.

## **Bibliography**

### *Archival material*

Private Papers at the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives (APC), University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

- John Aitchison Papers (PC14/5 Black spot collection)
- Peter Brown Papers (PC16/3 AFRA collection)
- Gerhard Mare Papers (PC126)
- KwaZulu-Natal Oral History Project (KZN-OHP) Transcripts.

### *Secondary sources*

Aitchison, John [1989] "The Civil War in Natal", in Glenn Moss and Ingrid Obery eds., *South African Review* 5, Ravan Press: Johannesburg.

Alcock, N.L. [1977] "Thoughts on Kwa-Zulu's Agricultural Future", *Africa Perspective*, No.5, pp.18-36.

Anon [1961] *A Dream Comes True: The Story of The Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital*, The Church of the Province of South Africa: Nqutu.

AFRA (Association for Rural Advancement) [various years] *Annual Reports*, AFRA: Pietermaritzburg.

Barker, Anthony [1959] *Giving and Receiving: An Adventure in African Medical Service*, The Faith Press: London.

Beinart, William [1988] "Agrarian Historiography and Agrarian Reconstruction", in John Lonsdale ed., *South Africa in Question*, University of Cambridge African Studies Centre: Cambridge.

---- [1994] *Twentieth-century South Africa*, Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Beinart, William and Colin Bundy [1980] "State Intervention and Rural Resistance: The Transkei, 1900-1965", in Martin A. Klein, ed., *Peasants in Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Sage Publications: London.

---- [1987] *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930*, James Currey: London.

Beinart, William and Peter Delius [1986] "Introduction", in William Beinart, Peter Delius and Stanley Trapido eds., *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg.

Bonner, Philip, Peter Delius and Deborah Posel [1993] "The Shaping of Apartheid:

- Contradiction, Continuity and Popular Struggle”, in Philip Bonner et al eds., *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg.
- Bradford, Helen [1987] *A Taste of Freedom: the ICU in Rural South Africa, 1920-1930*, Yale University Press: New Heaven.
- Brown, Marj, et al. [1998] *Land Restitution in South Africa: A Long Way Home*, IDASA: Cape Town.
- Brown, Peter [2002] “Forced Removals, AFRA, and the Dependants’ Conference”, in Lou Levine ed., *Hope Beyond Apartheid: The Peter Kerchhoff Years of PACSA, 1979-1999*, PACSA: Pietermaritzburg.
- [n.d.] “A History of the Liberal Party of SA, 1953-1966”, unpublished manuscript, held at the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Bundy, Colin [1979] *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*, Heinemann: London.
- [1987] “Land and Liberation: Popular Rural Protest and the National Liberation Movements in South Africa, 1920-1960”, in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido eds., *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-century South Africa*, Longman: London.
- Claassens, Aninka [1990] “Rural Land Struggles in the Transvaal in the 1980s”, in Christina Murray and Catherine O’Regan eds., *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, Oxford University Press: Cape Town.
- Clacey, Richard [1989] *The Weenen Evictions*, AFRA: Pietermaritzburg.
- Davis, Rob, et al. [1988] *The Struggle for South Africa: A Reference Guide, Vol.2*, Red Books: London, New Edition.
- Delius, Peter [1996] *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg.
- Desmond, Cosmas [1976] *The Discarded People: An Account of African Resettlement*, The Christian Institute of South Africa: Braamfontein.
- Harley, Anne, and Romy Fotheringham [1999] *AFRA: 20 Years in the Land Rights Struggle, 1979-1999*, AFRA: Pietermaritzburg.
- Hart, Gillian [2002] *Disabling Globalization. Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, University of Natal Press: Pietermaritzburg.
- Henderson, Patricia [1986] *Waaihoek*, AFRA: Pietermaritzburg.
- James, Deborah [2000] “‘After Years in the Wilderness’: the Discourse of Land Claims in the New South Africa”, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol.27, No.3, pp.142-161.
- Jaster, Robert Scott and Shirley Kew Jaster [1993] *South Africa's Other Whites: Voices for Change*, Macmillan: London.
- Jeffery, Anthea [1997] *The Natal Story: Sixteen Years of Conflict*, South African Institute of

- Race Relations: Johannesburg.
- Kockott, Fred, AFRA and CAP [1993] *The Fields of Wrath: Cattle Impounding in Weenen*, Special Report No.8, AFRA and CAP: Pietermaritzburg.
- Levine, Lou, ed. [2002] *Hope Beyond Apartheid: The Peter Kerchhoff Years of PACSA*, PACSA: Pietermaritzburg.
- Lodge, Tom [1990] "Perception of Agrarian Issues in Black Politics", *Development Southern Africa*, Vol.7 (October), pp.483-494.
- [1993] *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Longman: London.
- Lodge, Tom, Bill Nasson et al. [1991] *All, Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, David Philip: Cape Town.
- Malan, Rian [1990] *My Traitor's Heart*, Vintage: London.
- Mare, Gerhard and Georgina Hamilton [1987] *An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and the Politics of 'Loyal Resistance'*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg.
- Mbeki, Govan [1984] *South Africa: the Peasant's Revolt*, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (This book was first published by Penguin Africa Library in 1964).
- McClendon, Thomas [2002] *Gender and Generations Apart: Labor Tenant and Customary Law in Segregation-Era South Africa, 1920 to 1940s*, James Currey: Oxford.
- Minnaar, A de V [1994] "The Dynamics of Land in Rural Areas: 1990 and Onwards", in Anthony Minnaar ed., *Access to and Affordability of Land in South Africa: The Challenges of Land Reform in the 1990s*, HSRC: Pretoria.
- Mngadi, Elliot [1981] *The Removal of Roosboom*, AFRA Special report No.2, AFRA: Pietermaritzburg.
- Moyo, Sam [2002] "Peasant Organisations and Rural Civil Society in Africa: An Introduction", in Mahmoud Ben Ramdhane and Sam Moyo, eds., *Peasant Organisations and the Democratisation Process in Africa*, CODESRIA: Dakar.
- Moyo, Sam and Paris Yeros, eds. [2005] *Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Zed Books: London.
- Murray, Christina and Catherine O'Regan, eds. [1990] *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, Oxford University Press: Cape Town.
- Murray, Colin [1995] "Displaced Urbanisation; South Africa's Rural Slums", in William Beinart and Saul Dubow eds., *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Routledge: London.
- NLC (National Land Committee) [1993] "Back to the Land", Campaign Info Pack, NLC: Johannesburg.
- [1994] *Report from the Community Land Conference, 12 & 13 February 1994*, NLC: Johannesburg.
- Nauta, Wiebe [2004] *The Implications of Freedom: The Changing Role of Land Sector NGOs in*

- a Transforming South Africa*, Lit Verlag: Munster.
- Paton, Alan [1981] *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, Penguin: London.
- Platzky, Laurine and Cherryl Walker, eds. [1985] *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg.
- Posel, Deborah [1991] *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961, Conflict and Compromise*, Clarendon Press: Oxford.
- Rich, Paul, P. [1993] *Hope and Despair: English-speaking Intellectuals and South African Politics 1896-1976*, British Academic Press: London.
- Sato, Chizuko [2006] "Forced Removals, Land NGOs and Community Politics in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 1953-2002", D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford.
- [2007] "Liberal Opposition to Forced Removals and Non-Racialism in South Africa", *Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies*, Vol.6, pp. 79-102.
- [2010a] "Land Restitution and Community Politics: The Case of Roosboom in KwaZulu-Natal", in Cherryl Walker, Anna Bohlin, Ruth Hal and Thembele Kepe, eds., *Land, Memory, Reconstruction and Justice: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa*, Ohio University Press: Athens.
- [2010b] "From Removals to Reform: Land Struggles in Weenen in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa", in William Beinart and Marcelle C. Dawson, eds., *Popular Politics and Resistance Movements in South Africa*, Wits University Press: Johannesburg.
- Saunders, Christopher [1988] *The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class*, David Philip: Cape Town.
- Seekings, Jeremy [2000] *The UDF: A History of United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*, David Philip: Cape Town.
- Steinberg, Jonny [2002] *Midlands*, Jonathan Ball Publishers: Johannesburg.
- SPP (Surplus People Project) [1983a], *Forced Removals in South Africa, Volume I, General Overview*, SPP: Cape Town.
- [1983b] *Forced Removals in South Africa, Volume IV, Natal*, SPP: Cape Town.
- TRAC (Transvaal Rural Action Committee) [1988] "Kwandebele: The Struggle Against 'Independence'", in William Cobbett and Robin Cohen, eds., *Popular Struggles in South Africa*, James Currey: London.
- Van Kessel, Ineke [2000] *"Beyond Our Wildest Dreams": the United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa*, University Press of Virginia: Charlottesville.
- Vigne, Randolph [1997] *Liberals against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68*, Palgrave: Basingstoke.
- Walker, Cherryl [1991], *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, Second Edition, David Philip: Cape Town (First edition was published in 1982).
- [2000] "Relocating Restitution", *Transformation*, No.44, pp.1-16.

----- [2008] *Landmarked: Land Claims and Land Restitution in South Africa*, Ohio University Press: Athens.

Walsh, Peter [1977] "Church versus State in South Africa: The Christian Institute and the Resurgence of African Nationalism", *Journal of Church and State*, Vol.19, No.3, pp.457-479.

Wolpe, Harold [1972] "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid", *Economy and Society*, Vol.1, No.4, pp.425-456.