

uit uitenhage uitgeskop

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*Uitenhage's black townships, Langa and KwaNobuhle, have lived and suffered through the Langa Massacre, the removal of 40 000 people and the violence engendered by an unrestrained vigilante force. **Judy Chalmers** and **Lou-Ann Parsons** relate these facts to the implacable execution of apartheid policy and pinpoint the steps by which the state overrode the efforts of the Langa community to forestall removal and control its destiny.*

Uitenhage is an industrial town situated in the Eastern Cape some 20 km from Port Elizabeth. Its economic life is heavily dependent on the motor industry. For residents of the two black townships, Langa and KwaNobuhle, this has meant opportunities to perfect negotiating and organisational skills in the strong unions at their place of work; but it has also meant acute vulnerability, in a depressed economy, to retrenchments and poverty.

The small white community has shown itself to be a politically conservative group, nervous of the huge townships on its doorstep. The 'coloured' group has Allan Hendrickse as its member of Parliament and has not been seen to take a strong anti-government stand on crucial issues affecting blacks. The black community, on the other hand, like others in the Eastern Cape, is known to be both highly politicised and militant.

In some respects the experiences of Uitenhage's blacks during the past five years represent a microcosm of black experience under apartheid

throughout South Africa: rejection of Community Councils, school and consumer boycotts, the State of Emergency, and so on. The Langa massacre of 21 March 1985 has been reported in SASH (Vol 28, No. 1). The focus here is on the forced removal of Langa residents and on the violence and social dislocation which have ensued.

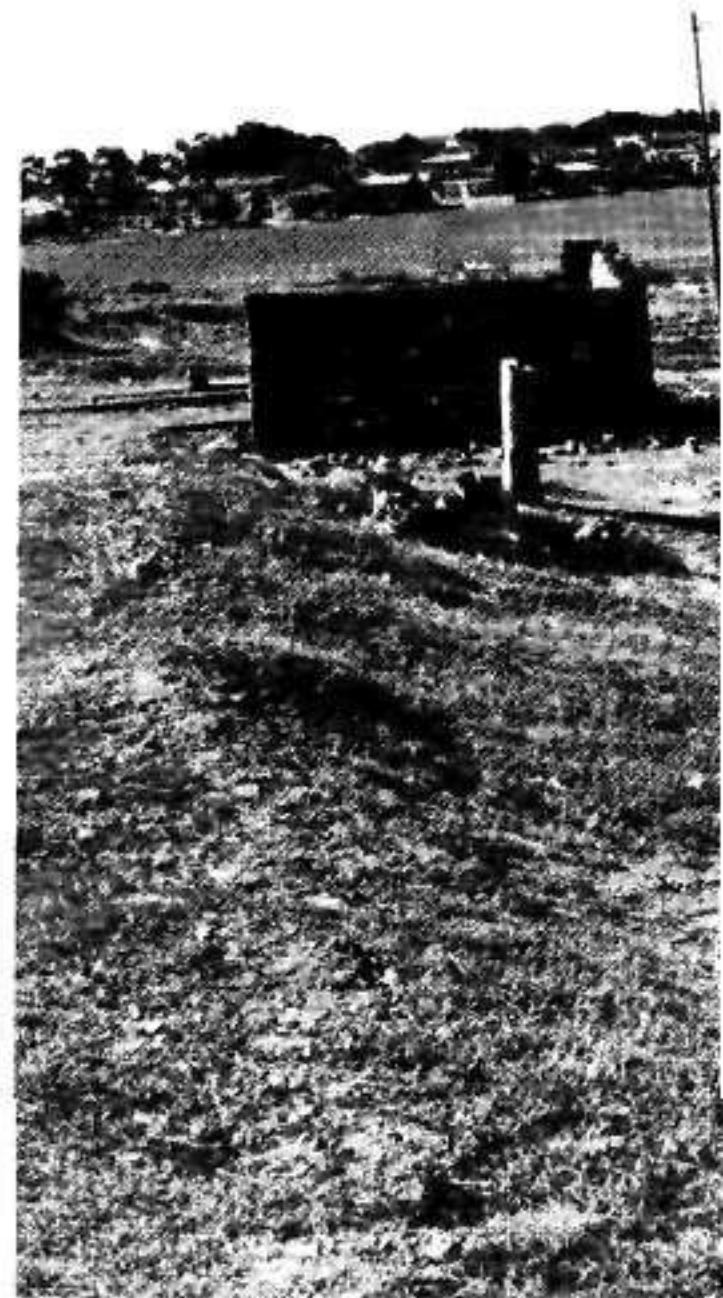
Langa Prior to the Removal

Kabah, the poorest section of Langa Township, lay closest to the white residential areas of Uitenhage. One reaction of the white community to the Langa massacre was to draw up a petition, signed by 350 residents of neighbouring Levysvale, calling for the removal of the Kabah shack dwellers. This matter came before the KwaNobuhle Town Council. In 1983 the KTC had assumed administrative control of both Langa and KwaNobuhle. Early in 1985, when the original 16-person Council was rejected by the community, the state had been obliged to appoint a white Town Clerk and Ad-

ministrator in its stead. These officials served eviction notices on 426 shack-owners - but actual removal required a court order, for which the KTC applied.

The community mobilised, electing the Langa Co-ordinating Committee to represent its interests in negotiations with the KTC. Protection of the Kabah residents was part of a broader goal: to prevent the relocation of the entire Langa community to KwaNobuhle. Further eviction notices were served while a battle to avert the court orders was waged.

The people of Kabah lived in conditions of extreme poverty, lacking adequate water, sewerage, clinics and so on, but their arguments for staying were the same as those of other Langa residents. As later surveys showed, they were united in feeling that KwaNobuhle was too far from town for work and work-seeking (transport costs are very high); rents were higher in KwaNobuhle and Langa was far more convenient to the hospital and existing schools. The LCC demanded the upgrade of Langa, the release of





Kabah: The remains of a once thriving community. The white suburb of Levyvale is visible in the background.

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detained leaders, the right to hold meetings and the right to live where they chose. (It must be borne in mind that throughout this period repression by the Security Forces was very severe: numerous affidavits alleging police brutality in Uitenhage had been sent to the authorities at the beginning of the year and a State of Emergency had been imposed.)

Before long, the LCC/KTC negotiations broke down. As Mark Swilling, an academic from the University of the Witwatersrand, put it in his paper (Langa: Protest, Urban Change and Defeat, 1986): 'for the KTC, negotiations were seen as useful only to the extent that they could implement their own pre-conceived plans.'

When this intention was thwarted by the LCC, that had no mandate to compromise the squatters' demands, the KTC officials used their power to terminate the negotiations'. At one stage they put pressure on the community by offering to investigate Langa's upgrade if the Kabah squatters would move voluntarily to KwaNobuhle. This offer was rejected and

the Langa community stood firm.

The LCC's upgrade project had been placed in the hands of Dr Michael Sutcliffe, a lecturer in the Department of Town and Regional Planning at the University of Natal. In his report, entitled 'Langa: the Case for Upgrade', Sutcliffe concluded that upgrade was possible, both technically and socially and that it had broad community support. It was followed by the Planact Report which proposed a two-stage plan requiring R3.5-million for emergency services and R12-million for full upgrading. Leaving aside the cost in human suffering, the policy which the government pursued was to prove infinitely more costly in purely monetary terms: R13-million for the forced removal process alone, before the provision of a permanent infrastructure at the new site had even begun.

Removal of Kabah and Langa

On the night of 14 July 1986 - two weeks before the court order - remo-

vals began in Kabah, the authorities employed the increased powers afforded them by the new State of Emergency virtually to seal off the township from the press and others. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that removals were proceeding throughout Langa Township. The KTC maintained that - apart from the two areas of Kabah and Kamesh Road, which were affected by court orders - people were moving voluntarily and were not being forced in any way.

The realities of the situation were that the Municipal Police (newly formed and supported by the SAP and SADF) were busy nightly from 11 pm, waking the people earmarked for removal. Large floodlights were installed and loudhailers were used to order people to break down their shacks. Huge trucks roared through the night, carrying the belongings of those who had broken down their homes. Intimidation strategies such as knocking holes in walls, breaking down doors, foul and abusive language and drunken behaviour were alleged by frightened and desperate residents. On one day, 30 July, more than 150 people came to the Uitenhage Advice Office to give statements which, it was hoped, their lawyer could use to halt the removals.

The lawyer went to see Mr Coetzee, Town Clerk of the KTC, and was assured that people would not be forced to move against their will. Printed statements to this effect were issued by the lawyer to the crowd awaiting the outcome of this interview. However, before they had even reached home, police had confiscated many of the papers, laughing and tearing them up. Many people were arrested for questioning. The intimidation continued and fear was everywhere.

By November, Langa was almost empty (all that remains is a section of brick houses, called McNaughton, whose occupants are also earmarked for removal). In its place a tent town of almost 50 000 people - 40 000 from Langa and another 10 000 from Despatch - had grown up in KwaNobuhle. It is called Tyoksville (derived from the word 'Shacksville').

The Tent Town

The tents issued to families at Tyoksville were small. Many saw

their furniture ruined as it stood out in the rain. Water was provided in rubber containers which were open at the top and meant to serve at least ten families. Sanitation facilities consisted of plastic bucket toilets - too few in number, so flimsy that they blew over in the wind, and so irregularly emptied that residents often had to empty them in the bush. There was no drainage system. As feared, the bus fare from KwaNobuhle to Uitenhage (R1.60 return) was more than most people could afford. It was reported that 'many, many people are sick here' and many, due to sickness and other causes, lost their jobs.

The KTC Administrator, Barry Erasmus, promised that improvements would be made. With clinics, ambulance and telephone services, sanitary and drainage systems and so on, the tent town would become a model

township. On a visit to Tyoksville in November 1987, we found no evidence of any significant change in the conditions there. Some work was going on: bulldozers were digging trenches for water pipes, four satellite clinics had been erected and a few streets were tarred. But the hillside was enveloped in red dust and everyone we spoke to longed for Langa.

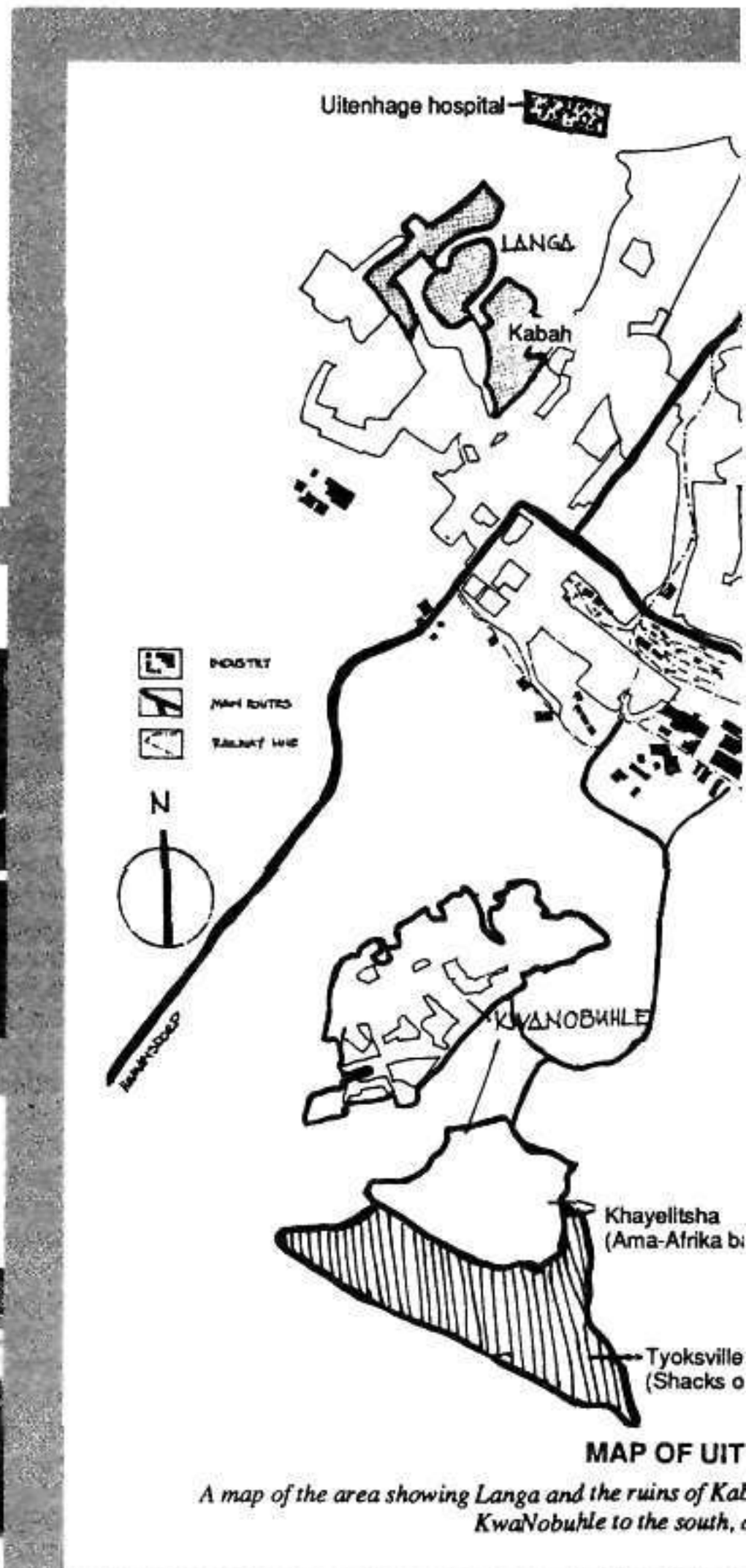
Vigilante Action in KwaNobuhle

The factors contributing to the growth of Ama-Afrika in KwaNobuhle are extremely complex. The

conditions under which people live create social pressures within communities that foster conflict and encourage opportunism. The state is quick to take advantage of divisions which, in a normal society, could be resolved by public debate and meetings between dissenting groups.

Divisions were present in the trade union movement organising the local

The ruins that remain of the Despatch community, and (below) Despatch residents trying to erect new homes.



A map of the area showing Langa and the ruins of Kabah, KwaNobuhle to the south, and Tyoksville to the north.

motor industry. Rivalries became more pronounced in civic structures after the UDF was formed: its success seems to have caused anxiety to those who adhered to the Africanist tradition and the seeds of Ama-Afrika were apparently sown. In 1985, ideological differences surfaced in the 'Save the Starving' committee which unionists and churchmen had formed. Some

members joined the Africanist movement led by Ebenezer Maqina in Port Elizabeth and a youth section of the movement, calling itself AZANYU (Azanian Youth Unity), was organised. They formed the core of Ama-Afrika and moved to Khayelitsha in KwaNobuhle, despite countervailing pressure in the community not to move.

maimings at the hands of Ama-Afrika. Some of those attacked have responded in kind, and many UDF activists have left KwaNobuhle and sought safety in Port Elizabeth. Towards the end of the year it was reported that a split in the movement had occurred. Maqina has publicly dissociated himself from 'criminal elements' and those whom he feels are not really Africanists. The atmosphere of extreme tension and fear in KwaNobuhle has now, in early 1988, lessened somewhat but the problems within the community are far from solved.

After the forced removals to Tyoksville, it is reported that the inhabitants of the tent town began to be harassed and driven into joining Ama-Afrika. Criminal involvement has also been alleged. Since January 1987, the press has repeatedly reported deaths and

Apartheid breeds complex responses which include dissension, mistrust and hatred. These emotions, we have found, abound in Uitenhage. But there is also an amazing ability to survive and the hope for peace and justice does not die. □

The remains of a house in Kabah a year after the removal. Note the religious paintings on the wall. And (below) Langa residents who are now tent dwellers.

