

KwaPitela is a black-owned farm in a 'white' district - a 'black spot' - in the foothills of the Drakensberg, some 8km from Himeville. It is a little over 323ha in area. The land is well-watered, with a river running through one end of the property, well-grassed and relatively free of erosion. It looks a peaceful, rural community - but it is currently facing the imminent threat of being forcibly resettled by the government.

History The farm was bought by Pitela Hlophe, grandfather of the present owners, on the 23rd August 1900, at a public auction in Pietermaritzburg. In 1904 the farm was subdivided into two parts, Part A (approximately 105ha) and Part B (approximately 219ha). On his death, P.Hlophe willed that Part B be divided among three heirs. The actual subdivision of the land was never carried out and this has complicated relationships among the heirs and their descendants ever since.

History of Resettlement Threat In 1969 the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner for Natal said that KwaPitela was a 'black spot' which, "in terms of departmental policy will have to be eliminated in due course". In September 1979 government officials visited KwaPitela to inform residents that the farm would be bought by the government, because it is in a 'white' area, and that they would be moved shortly. The officials apparently also said that as they would be moved soon, they should not plough and plant crops that season. Many families followed this advice. Almost a year later they are still at Kwapitela, having lost a whole growing season. Shortly after this visit, government agents numbered the buildings at KwaPitela. Then, on the 21st August 1980, representatives of the community were taken by government officials to view the place to which the government intends to move them - a newly-established resettlement site called, euphemistically, Compensation. Compensation is some 60 to 70 km from KwaPitela over dirt roads. The people of KwaPitela were shocked by the inadequacies of what they saw. (See AFRA Report No.6, Compensation - Portrait of a Resettlement Site)

Conditions at KwaPitela

The following information is based on a series of interviews of KwaPitela households, carried out by AFRA between May and July 1980.

Population KwaPitela is owned by the Hlophe family. There are a total of 67 households on the farm, most of them tenants of the Hlophes - about 500 people altogether. 52 out of 60 tenant households interviewed have lived at KwaPitela for over 5 years, over half of these for 20 years and more. 7 of them have lived there for more than 50 years. It is thus a well-established and stable community, with strong ties to the land.

Tenants Land Tenants have, on average, a quarter ha residential plot, just over 1ha for growing crops and access to common grazing land for their stock. Their rent ranges between R10 and R12,25 per year. No tenants are self-supporting on their land, but, with one exception (an old pensioner), their agricultural land provides a vital supplement to income derived from wage employment.

Improvements There is a mixture of concrete block and wattle and daub houses and huts as well as a stone church building. Most households have put in other improvements - fencing, chicken runs, toilets, cattle kraals. The value of improvements runs to many thousands of rands.

Livestock There is no limit to the number of cattle a family may keep. 24 households reported no cattle; for the rest, the average size herd was 5. Total numbers of stock are as follows: cattle 134, horses 8, goats 8, pigs 14, poultry 676. Only 3 households have neither livestock nor poultry. During 1979 and the first 6 months of 1980, the community sold 64 head of cattle - almost 50% of the present total of cattle on the farm. It appears that the large turnover of stock is related to the threat of resettlement. In the past, most people moved to Closer Settlements have been the victims of forced, hurried cattle sales at which their cattle have been bought up very cheaply by speculators and farmers. Loss of stock has been a large factor in the general impoverishment of resettled communities elsewhere, for instance in Msinga and Nkandla.

Crops Only 2 households reported that they do not grow any produce at all. The main crops are maize, potatoes and beans - many households grow all 3. A small number grow other vegetables as well - cabbage, turnips, onions, madumbe, gourds. Most households produce exclusively or mainly for domestic consumption, but nearly half claim to sell some surplus produce locally, on occasion. Whatever the proportion of consumption needs met by agricultural activities, it is undoubtedly a significant contribution towards the subsistence needs of residents at KwaPitela. Access to land is a valuable, valued advantage of living there. It is an advantage that will be taken away from these people if they are moved to Compensation.

Employment Out of a total of 104 people working, less than half (45) work outside the district. The remaining 59 are employed in the area. Many are farm labourers or waiters and domestic servants at the nearby Sani Pass Hotel. They commute to work daily, generally on foot. In addition, many of the women and young girls find casual or seasonal employment on neighbouring farms. Moving to Compensation will destroy these arrangements. Transport costs and lack of migrant accommodation in the Underberg area will make it impossible or very much more difficult for workers to hold onto these jobs once they are living 60km away. Few KwaPitela workers have special skills or high educational qualifications. They are therefore particularly vulnerable to unemployment should they lose their present jobs.

School The church doubles as a school during the week. There are 120 pupils, going up to Std 4, and three teachers. The community was raising money for a new school building. All donations stopped in 1979 because of the threatened move, however, and this building now stands incomplete.

Organisation The community has put up no concerted show of opposition to being resettled, primarily because they do not believe they have the resources or are in a position to challenge the government. There is also some friction between tenants and landlords. Until very recently, too, people were totally ignorant about what they could expect at Compensation.

Nobody can describe KwaPitela as an idyll - incomes are low, jobs hard to find, the infrastructure of transport, supermarkets, schools etc. that urban people take for granted, is lacking in this as in other rural areas. But it is a settled, rural community. Because KwaPitela is freehold land, residents have greater independence and control over their own lives than they would in a township or 'Closer Settlement' situation. Most important of all, people have an assured access to agricultural land and have built up a lifestyle that centres round this land over many years.

KwaPitela is one of approximately 150 'black spots' that, in terms of government policy, have to be eliminated in the next few years. A comparison with Compensation, the proposed resettlement site for KwaPitela, makes it apparent how much all 'black spot' residents have to lose by their enforced move.

"A more detailed report on KwaPitela is available from the AFRA office to anyone who is interested)