The Surplus People: 40 Years Ago

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SALDRU, UCT: Land Restitution Evaluation Study

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Why the Surplus People Project (SPP)?

SPP was inspired/ignited by Cosmos Desmond's "The Discarded People"(1970) study of forced removals during the 1960s

Not just discarded, but deliberately made redundant and surplus to the SA economy

Why the name?

"The government is determined to rid white South Africa of the unproductive, the unemployed, the disabled, and those too young (or too old) to work …thousands of people who will never gain access to employment in urban areas…unless they work for R1 per day on rural white-owned farms…they have *been made redundant*… These surplus people will never enter the wage labour market under the present economic system." (The Surplus People 1985: xxii)

Who comprised SPP? (52 over 1980-1983)

SPP participants include:

Saleem Badat
Seton Bailey
Guy Berger
Helen Bradford
Debbie Budlender
Jeanne Chunnett
Jacklyn Cock
Josette Cole
Carole Cooper
Cedric de Beer
Saul Dubow
Ross Duncan Brown
Tony Duncan Brown
Jeremy Grest
Jenny Grice
Priscilla Hall
Ron Hall
Kirk Helliker
Lindile Jela
Jenny Kirk
Marian Lacey
Ben Maclennan
Mondi Makiwane
Augustin Marapong
Gerhard Maré
Pat McCartan
Rob Meintjes
Sheila Meintjes
Raphael Mothe
Ray Moyikwa
Vuyani Mqingwana
Colin Murray
Jean Ngubane
Jeff Peires
Laurine Platzky (co-ordinator)
Andre Roux
Ina Roux
Garth Seneque
Thabe Shange
Janet Shapiro
Judith Shier
Charles Simkins
Janet Stanford
Pauline Stanford
Farouk Stemmet
Claire Stewart
Barry Streek
Auret van Heerden
Cherryl Walker
Nick Wellington
Joanne Yawitch
Helen Zille

When did it start and end? Research Outputs?

- **Late 1979 people approached to volunteer, then Feb 1980 Stutterheim seminar (23 participants)**
- **The SPP Reports 'Forced Removals in SA' published January 1983: 5 Volumes :**
  1. General Overview (incl. Black Sash map)
  2 The Eastern Cape
  3. The Western Cape, Northern Cape & Orange Free State
  4. Natal
  5. The Transvaal
- **Platzky & Walker 1985: THE SURPLUS PEOPLE (Braamfontein, Ravan Press)**
  - **SA Review**: chapters in 1983 and 1986 editions
  - Reviewed in first issue of the Weekly Mail 14 June, 1985; now more than 800 citations
- **SPP as a national project ended in 1985**; work to expose and organize against forced removals continued through regional NGOs coordinated by the National Committee Against Removals

Who paid for it? How did we work?

- SPP was meant to be a 1 year project; it became a 3 year treatise as more and more removals (past and threatened) were 'discovered' and documented
- ICCO, a Dutch NGO, contributed R25 000.00 to administration and running costs for 1 year. Fieldworkers and workshops were hosted by churches and contacts
- SPP members volunteered their time, expertise and petrol to interview community leaders and members, to delve into archives and press reports, to interrogate priests, farmers, farmworkers, government officials (on rare occasions), to document findings, to map and photograph, and then to meet to analyse, and later to share their findings particularly with those threatened with removal
- After 3 years it was clear that follow up community briefings, legal advice, strategic activist support and media coverage were critical to *on the ground organization*.

Categories of Forced Removals 1960-1982

Categories	Est. Numbers
Farm removals	1 129 000
Black Spots and Consolidation	614 000
Urban relocation	730 000
Informal Settlements	112 000 plus
Group Areas	834 400
Infrastructure and Strategic	23 500
Political (between bantustans)	50 000
Other (secondary removals)	30 000
TOTAL	3 522 900

Influx control was extremely difficult to quantify.
Few of those 'endorsed out' of urban areas actually left.

Strategy & Tactics: Divide & Rule vs Unity is Strength

State Signs and Tactics:

- Toilets in the veld, roads to nowhere…
- Govt Gazette notices (eg deproclamations)
- 'GG' vehicles, delays, divisions, suspensions, promises, reprieves, rumours
- Cynical renaming eg from 'influx control' to 'orderly urbanization', 'forced' to 'voluntary'

Community Responses:

- Fear, anger, distrust, internal misinformation, lies, leading to community divisions, confusion, leadership struggles, hunger strikes, sometimes to violence (eg KTC 'witdoeke' or necklacing ('black-on-black' violence), court interdicts, media exposé

Journey from Documentation to Media Publicity, to National and International Solidarity

Following the early 1980s with the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and increasing foreign media interest (censorship increased in SA media), grassroots evidence became critical (ie threatening to government). Collaboration between communities and NGOs (between States of Emergency, detentions, trials) focused attention.

National Committee Against Removals (NCAR) comprising

- AFRA (Association for Rural Advancement) in Natal
- SPP in W. Cape
- SCAR (South Cape Against Removals)
- TRAC (Transvaal Rural Action Committee)

Plus Black Sash, Grahamstown Rural Committee, Legal Resources Centres, SA Council of Churches, others widened the struggle against forced removals.

Reflections after 40 years…

Lessons learned

- Law is only part of the problem/solution
- ‘Community’ is seldom homogenous
- Vested & Conflicts of Interest obfuscate
- Context changes (so share strategies)
- Local to global connections/lessons
- Strategies and tactics with trusted leaders
- Poverty/desperation can undermine/compromise/corrupt/kill…
- Documentation and analysis are essential