

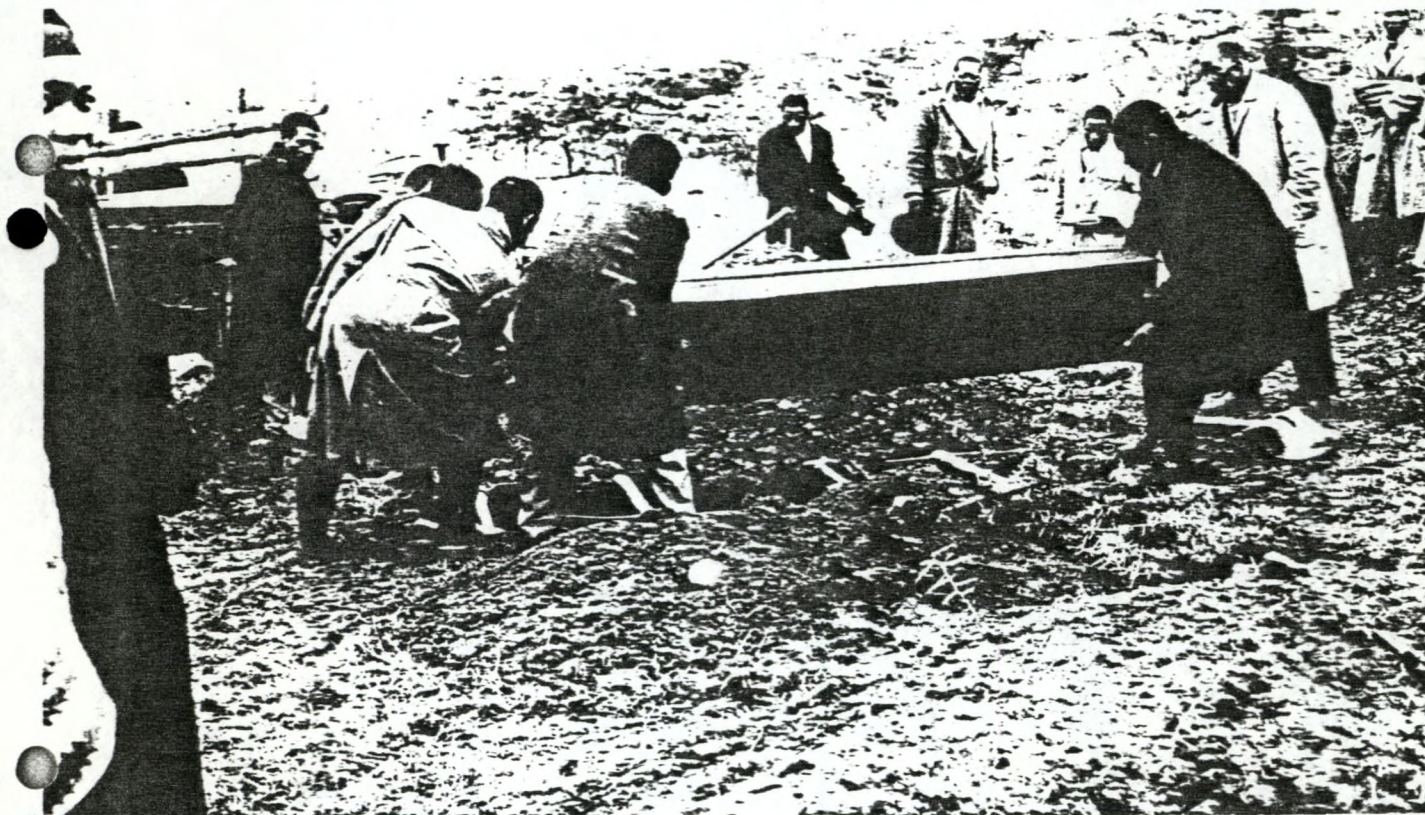
84% of the population in the 30-39 age group, and 75% of the population in the 40-49 age group.

In a major survey on the Ciskei it is pointed out that: 'The absence of these men further impoverishes the rural sector which is effectibely deprived not only of their manpower, but of their initiative, and of the stabilising effect they would have on the family and on the social system in a patriarchial society'. (")

Later on in the survey, it is again noted that: 'The family structure itself is weakened. Interest and enthusiasm are important determinants for the establishment and maintenance of associations in a community. In one composed mainly of aged and infirm males...

ing, and without a stable family background, love and secure ties with their parents. Children who grow up in harsh circumstances of privation and without true comfort and care will grow up to be the true products of their environment — they themselves will be unable to care.

And it is all very well for there to be sighs over a hearty breakfast when the morning newspaper features a picture and story about kids who look like an advert for Oxfam, and it is all very well for madam to tread the well worn path of cliches about 'these people' before doing the taxi run to school. For 'these people' are just people and share a common distaste for being cold, comfort-



— Picture by MARGARET NASH

Woolridge people, living in tents on a bare hillside, lay an old person to rest.

COST OF LIVING 15-18

45

# Rural Poverty

Judith Hawarden

**N**ATIVE Reserves, Bantustan, semi-independent Black States, independent Black States, homelands — whatever they are called — are the concern of this paper.

The desperately impoverished, heavily overcrowded rural areas of starvation and misery are far from the urban centres where too many Whites

still cherish the myth that all the Blacks have left behind them, 'back there' a lush small-holding which they have left only to secure more material advantage.

To quote from Merle Lipton's recent study on migrant labour, 'This moral argument for splitting up families (ie migrant labour), is based on a be-

ruption every now and then. Reporting on removals, resettlement areas, famine and starvation is episodic, and tends to mask the on-going and long-established problems of these areas of grinding poverty.

To present a true picture of the conditions in the Black rural areas would require a major project. This paper presents only a very superficial picture. There is no claim to be comprehensive. The object has been to draw attention to some of the problems, and to help counter some of the modern Southern African myths.

The Tomlinson Report came out in 1955. In it the Commission commented: 'The real income produced in the Reserves has remained almost unchanged since 1936 (apart from possible fluctuations caused by climatological factors), while the per capita income has even fallen'.

After quoting figures about land settlement in the betterment areas, the Report goes on: 'It is clear that the existing land settlement policy in the betterment areas of the Reserves, brings no alleviation of the agricultural poverty of the Bantu, and that it remains necessary for the family head and, possibly, for other members of the family as well, to sell their labour outside the Reserves in order to provide for the needs of the family'.

Again, 'In terms of the 1951-52 livestock census, 51 per cent of the total animal units in the Bantu areas, is in excess of the carrying capacity . . .'

So much for the myth, even thirty years ago.

The figures concerning population density are telling enough.

The population of the homelands grew from 4 million in 1960 to 6.9 million in 1970. In 1970 the average density of the homelands was 119 per square mile, while the density of the de facto population in the Transkei was 122 per square mile, in Bophuthatswana 61 per square mile, and in Venda 113 per square mile.<sup>(2)</sup> In 'White' South Africa the population density was 35 per square mile. The Quail Commission in its 1980 report<sup>(3)</sup> estimates the population density in the Ciskei (as it is at present) as 126 per square kilometre.

A square kilometre is a rather small area — and the Ciskei is, it must be remembered, supposed to be rural with lots of happy people on their life-supporting plots.

One result of massive overcrowding is landlessness, and, again, the picture is very different to the myth of lush little small holdings for everyone. A report published in 1971 shows that in two districts of the Ciskei one-third of the households has no arable land. These figures, and more, are quoted by Francis Wilson in 'Migrant Labour in South Africa', and show that the vast majority of the families in the two districts examined had neither the land nor the cattle even to subsist without sending some members off to work elsewhere.<sup>(5)</sup>

A later survey, also on the Ciskei, showed that in the two villages only 6% of the homesteads had plots even near to the size recommended in the Tomlinson Report, and that 90% of the homesteads had plots ranging from one-third to one-sixth of the size recommended — or no land at all.<sup>(6)</sup>

Overcrowding and landlessness have increased the significance of the migratory labour system — as C W de Kiewiet<sup>(7)</sup> noted even 40 years ago: 'The natives were the victims of too few acres'. Or, as Dr Verwoerd told the House of Assembly in 1959: 'The Bantu Homelands . . . may be areas which to a large extent (although the people live within their own areas and are governed there) are dependent on basic incomes earned in the adjoining White territory'.

Dr O Martiny notes that: 'The population explosion coupled with diminishing productivity of the soil has reversed this pattern of migratory labour to one of total dependency of the bread winners on continuous or semi-permanent work, away from their homes and families, for the most part of their working lives. This means that the non-productive family members, namely wives, children and grandparents are left at home. As they are non-productive, they are dependent on remittances, which they tend to spend on imported necessities, such as food and clothing, produced in the developed areas. The income therefore contributes very little to the development in the home areas. Unless earnings can be invested in the homelands, it can only lead to more dependency on migratory labour'.<sup>(8)</sup>

Migratory labour is selective on the basis of sex. In 1970, the ratio of black males to females in the 20-49 age group was, in the white areas, 160:100. In the homelands, it was 40:100. In Venda, according to a report in *The Star*, in 1974, women formed

84% of the population in the 30-39 age group, and 75% of the population in the 40-49 age group.

In a major survey on the Ciskei it is pointed out that: 'The absence of these men further impoverishes the rural sector which is effectibely deprived not only of their manpower, but of their initiative, and of the stabilising effect they would have on the family and on the social system in a patriarchial society'.<sup>(9)</sup>

Later on in the survey, it is again noted that: 'The family structure itself is weakened. Interest and enthusiasm are important determinants for the establishment and maintenance of associations in a community. In one composed mainly of aged and infirm males, women and children, can we expect to find sufficient interest and enthusiasm to support the associational life of the village?' Earlier in the study it was noted that in a sample of approximately 206 working males, 185 (nearly 90%) were away from home at work.<sup>(10)</sup>

Migrant labour has another, related, harrowing effect. Dr Trudi Thomas has noted: 'Practically all malnourished children came from broken homes — and it is migrant labour which is breaking up their homes with the increasing number of illegitimate children born under conditions of constant migration and the breakdown of traditional authority being the most affected by acute deprivation.

Often remittances from the migrant head of the family gradually diminish, and even cease, as the breakdown of the family and traditional bonds become complete. The man may take on new dependents in the urban area which has become more home than the area from which he migrated — leaving his family in the homelands destitute. Even when this does not happen his remittances are barely adequate.

For instance, the October 1980 Household Subsistence Level (a bare minimum for a bleak and almost comfortless existence) was estimated by the Institute of Planning Research at the University of Port Elizabeth<sup>(11)</sup> to be R178,86 a month in Umtata and R170,66 in Peddie. These figures in Umtata and R170,66 in Peddie. These figures A migrant worker in an urban area may not even earn as much as the HSL for the rural area, let alone be able to send much home after supporting himself, even in the most spartan manner. It has been calculated that migrants send home no more than 20-40% of their earnings.

Often the mother must also leave the rural area in order to earn money to support her children. She has no choice but to leave her children in the care of a grandparent, or an aunt or uncle, or even of a teenage brother or sister. The grandparents who must now reassume the responsibilities of parenthood may themselves be old and infirm, scarcely able to care for themselves, let alone young and demanding children. The money sent back will probably be enough to cover only the bare essentials of existence — if that. Thus the children so often grow up in deprivation, with inadequate nourishment and care, little or no school-

ing, and without a stable family background, love and secure ties with their parents. Children who grow up in harsh circumstances of privation and without true comfort and care will grow up to be the true products of their environment — they themselves will be unable to care.

And it is all very well for there to be sighs over a hearty breakfast when the morning newspaper features a picture and story about kids who look like an advert for Oxfam, and it is all very well for madam to tread the well worn path of cliches about 'these people' before doing the taxi run to school. For 'these people' are just people and share a common distaste for being cold, comfortless, miserable, ill and hungry. And they are ALL victims of the system that provides Elsie to make the breakfast at 6.00 a.m., and has all the rough work done by someone else. In fact, the existence of desperately poor rural areas makes it all possible, at a price that you, too, can afford . . . just like a new kitchen gadget. But what about the others, back there, landless and hungry, trying to survive on what a migrant worker can afford to send back, or what Elsie can manage to send from her miserable wages?

The facts about poverty and malnutrition in the rural homelands are hideous. In 'Women Without Men', the authors, Clarke and Ngobese,<sup>(12)</sup> describe the following: 'The 150 families investigated in Nqutu are barely subsisting on an average income in cash and kind of R14,87 per month . . . They exist without the security of family or the comfort of religion and ritual. They cannot conceivably express any semblance of social graces or 'ubuntu'. Materially they are underclothed, and undernourished; they cannot hope to achieve any meaningful educational standards or indulge in any luxuries often of the smallest kinds. Like making a trip into town or purchasing a box of cigarettes, or a drink, without seriously impairing their rudimentary diet of starches'. The authors go on: 'Little wonder then that a study of malnutrition in the Nqutu district of Kwa Zulu sounds the warning that poverty and malnutrition are so rife that the traditional Zulu physique is changing: the amaZulu in the area are becoming a puny, stunted and mentally enfeebled people'.

In a survey on the Ciskei quoted earlier it is reported that 64% of school children (in two villages) ate only once a day — the one meal usually consisting of porridge or bread or samp and beans. No lunch tin for school break, no peanut butter sandwiches, no fruit juice.

In a survey conducted by doctors for the Ciskei government in 1978, it was found that half of all two- and three-year-old children in the Ciskei were malnourished. Results from this survey were presented to the Ciskei Malnutrition Symposium in Mdantsane, Ciskei, during 1980. Dr Trudi Thomas described the children: 'Most were just stunted like mealie plants in a drought-stricken field, but one in ten in the towns and one in six in the country were actually suffering from sickness forms of malnutrition, kwashiokor and marasmus'. Dr Tho-

mas pointed out that the survey included only the children who had survived — while it was well known that many children in the Ciskei did not reach the age of one: 'In Mdantsane, probably the 'best' health area, more than one in ten die in their first year'. At the same symposium, the acting assistant Secretary for Welfare in the Ciskei, Mr N Nduna, said that in one district 33% of the adult population suffered from pellagra, while 50% of the children suffered from marasmus.<sup>(1)</sup>

Last year, the year of grace 1980, 50,000 children were expected to die of malnutrition in the rural areas, with another 100,000 children's lives at risk. Not in the land of some crumbling dictatorship many miles from here, not in the aftermath of war, but here in South Africa, in wealthy Johannesburg's and wealthy white South Africa's own back yard. These figures were announced by Doctors Browde and Motlana in May 1980 and quoted in the December issue of Race Relations News. Other figures just in one area in the issue are equally soul destroying. In the Pietermaritzburg area, 40 children die every month from kwashiorkor or marasmus.

Nutritional diseases such as kwashiorkor are no longer notifiable, and so it is not easy to estimate the enormity of this high and tragic situation. The facts quoted above are stark enough. And, again, in a survey conducted in a rural Transkei village of children under the age of five, it was found that '36% of the children were below the Boston third degree percentile. This included 57% of the children between the age of 18 and 32 months. Nearly 30% of children died before the age of two years'.<sup>(14)</sup>

Dr Jack Penn, one of the world's leading plastic surgeons, has stated: 'Even in South Africa where hospitalisation and medical care is as advanced as any in the world, and where free treatment is given to all deserving cases, even if they come from countries outside the boundaries of the Republic, the battle against malnutrition is becoming climacteric. For example, children who are burned and require skin grafts, must have their surgical

treatments delayed until their nutrition has been brought to a suitable standard. In cases where malnutrition has been a feature since birth this may be almost impossible and the risk of infection and slow healing is always a problem. Moreover, even though the child may make good progress while well cared for and fed, on returning to his 'home' environment, the lack of adequate nutrition may cause a breakdown of his wounds.<sup>(15)</sup>

It is not easy to sum up the situation that has been sketched in the previous pages. Words such as poverty, misery, and starvation are clichés, and even though they hint at the truth, they are inadequate. **Perhaps the most terrifying thing is that children are dying in their thousands and that even though these facts are known, they are still allowed to die.**

It is often said that a society can be judged by the way it treats its dogs and cats, its criminals or its handicapped. I know of no words which can justly describe a society which condemns (and purposefully, even if many do not or will not understand) millions of fellow-citizens to abject poverty and misery, and which allows thousands of children to die from lack of food, while well-fed crowds at rugby matches cheer all the better for popcorn, chips, meatpies and oranges, sandwiches and beer.

But that, of course, is not nutrition — just part of the entertainment.

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**Poverty and nutrition are so rife that . . . the AmaZulu in the area are becoming a puny, stunted and mentally infeeblled people.**

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**Collection Number: AK2117**

**DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* **Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand**

*Location:* **Johannesburg**

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