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**RURAL ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION  
AND URBAN CONFLICT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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AND URBAN CONFLICT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Chris Carson

1997

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# RURAL ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND URBAN CONFLICT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Chris Eaton

## I. Introduction

Broad controls over the movement of people in South Africa have led to environmental degradation and rural crisis. These in turn have contributed to urban migration, the growth of squatter settlements and high levels of conflict in urban and peri-urban areas, as socioeconomic conditions have worsened and influx controls, limiting the urbanization and residential location of blacks, have broken down.

Unfortunately, urban violence and factional conflict, often resulting in large numbers of deaths, have become increasingly common in South Africa, even as apartheid is being dismantled, and explanations have been inadequate. Before the government's clamp-down on foreign news reporting in the mid-1980s, conflict in South Africa was often described in the western press as violent repression by a white state of the legitimate political claims of a disenfranchised black population. Since that time, conflict in South Africa has been depicted as political rivalry between anti-apartheid groups, and other explanations of conflict have highlighted its ethnic, racial or class character. But these explanations rarely account for the roots of violence in South Africa or its most immediate causes.

Violent conflict in South Africa takes many forms. Targeted individuals, or those suspected of collaborating with the South African government, have often been killed in street violence. Violence has erupted in single sex hostels inhabited by Zulu migrant labourers connected to the Inkatha political organization. There are allegations that the perpetrators of organized, premeditated and staged massacres on buses, trains and in some urban residential areas receive clandestine support from elements within the South African Defense Forces and/or South African Police.

The particular form of violent conflict addressed in this paper involves disputes between squatter communities and their more affluent township residents and frequently incorporates disputes over political turf between the Zulu based Inkatha organization and the pan-ethnic United Democratic Front, now dissolved and incorporated into the African

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National Congress. This kind of violence originated in the shanty-towns<sup>1</sup> surrounding Pietermaritzberg in Natal Province during the mid-1980s, and gained momentum with the effective abolition of influx control, following the President Council's Report on urbanization in 1986. Recently, it has spread to shanty-towns such as Phola Park outside of Soweto Township in Transvaal province.

This paper is divided into four parts. Part one highlights the environmental and socioeconomic context in which apartheid policies have developed. Part two maps the linkages between apartheid policy, environmental degradation, rural social crisis, and urban migration. Part three focuses on the urban context, linking urban migration to other forces within society that give rise to violence. Part four concludes this paper with a discussion of the types of conflict that can be expected from environmental change, drawing on the analysis of T. Homer-Dixon.<sup>2</sup>

## II. Background On South Africa's Apartheid Policy

South Africa has a predominantly arid and semi-arid climate. Its inland regions are dominated by dry steppe and tropical savanna zones that receive some moisture in the summer months and a desert zone that receives little moisture throughout the year. Moisture availability and the reliability of rainfall are important climatic constraints on agricultural potential in these regions. In addition, South Africa has a humid sub-tropical coastal region.<sup>3</sup>

Land ownership in South Africa is racially segregated. With the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, South Africa restricted the legal ownership of land by black people to 13% of the country's geographical area. These areas are generally called homelands or Bantustans and were previously known as reserves. The homelands are also administrative areas in which each black South African was assigned citizenship based on ethno-linguistic background. It was the South African government's intention, prior to the recent series of reforms, that black people would be allowed to exercise political rights only in these areas. The South African government encouraged the homelands to declare independence from South Africa, apparently to dampen demands by black people for political rights in the rest of the country.

A few homelands did achieve nominal independence, but their independence was not recognized by anyone outside South Africa. As illustrated in Figure 1, few of the homelands are territorially integrated. In the words of one author, "Borders [of the homelands] were

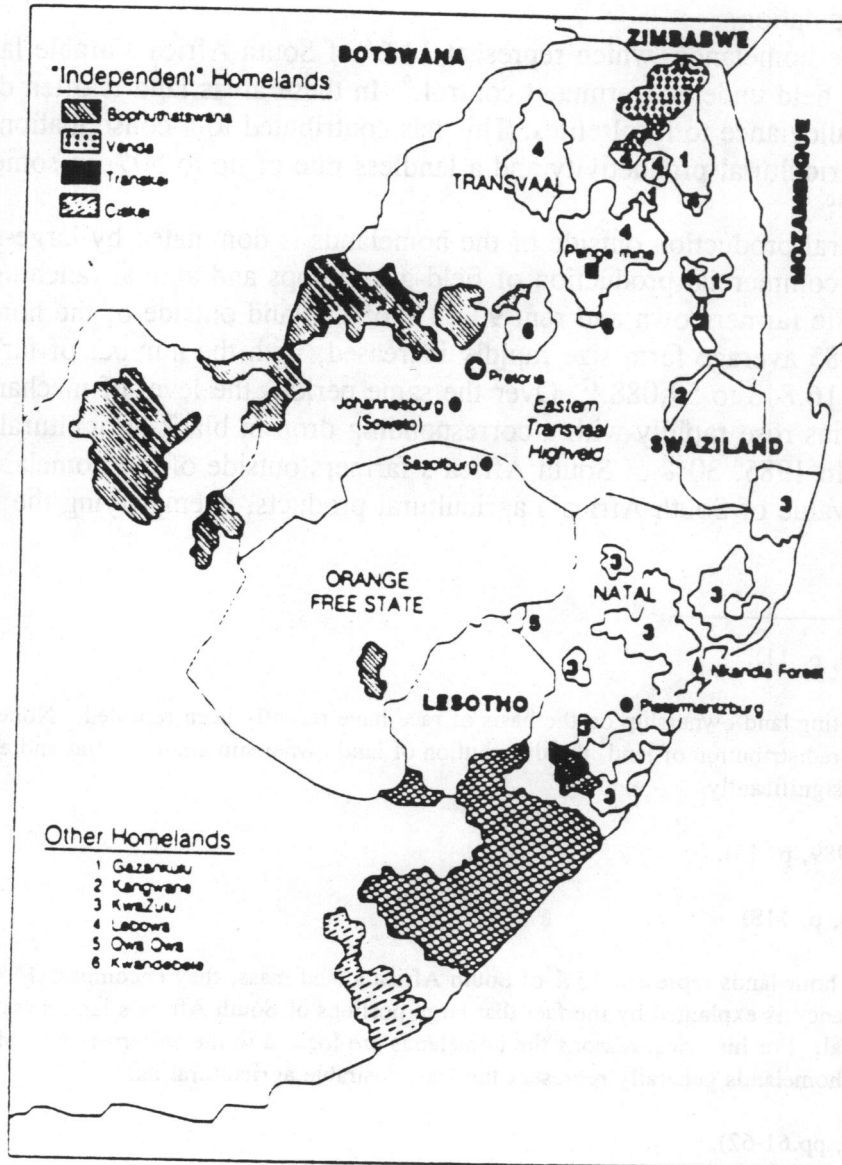
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<sup>1</sup> Townships are the legal black urban areas that the government has established outside of white controlled urban areas. Shanty-towns or squatter settlements are the illegal or semi-legal black urban areas that have been established by black people themselves. These settlements arise on vacant land within the townships themselves and in the peri-urban areas adjacent to townships and 'white' urban areas. As they have limited legal sanction, the government does not provide urban services for them. They are generally much poorer areas than the formal townships.

<sup>2</sup>Homer-Dixon (1991a). For a more detailed discussion, see Homer-Dixon (1991b).

<sup>3</sup>Mullerand and Oberlander (1974, p. 190).

FIGURE 1. SOUTH AFRICAN HOMELANDS



SOURCE: Durning (1990)



carefully drawn, and sometimes redrawn to exclude anything of value....[including] mineral resources, and fertile land".<sup>4</sup>

While 13% of South Africa's land mass was reserved for the black population, blacks comprised approximately 73% (or 30 million people) of South Africa's population in 1985.<sup>5</sup> Whites, on the other hand, comprised approximately 15% (or 5 million people) of South Africa's population in 1985.<sup>6</sup> The white population is also significantly more urbanized than the black population - 85% and 37% respectively in 1980<sup>7</sup> - indicating that the number of whites who farm South Africa's vast rural areas comprise a very small percentage of South Africa's total population.

Within the homelands, which represent 14%<sup>8</sup> of South Africa's arable land mass, land is generally held under government control.<sup>9</sup> In these areas land is often distributed to secure political allegiance to local elites. This has contributed to a consolidation of land holdings, low agricultural productivity and a landless rate of up to 50% in some rural homeland areas.<sup>10</sup>

Agricultural production outside of the homelands is dominated by large-scale, mechanized and commercial production of field-grain crops and animal ranching on private farmland.<sup>11</sup> White farmers own and rent 99.13% of the land outside of the homelands. from 1950 to 1985 average farm size rapidly increased, with the number of farming units dropping from 116,848 to 59,088.<sup>12</sup> Over the same period, the level of mechanization on white owned farms rose rapidly with a corresponding drop in black agricultural employment.<sup>13</sup> In 1985, 30% of South Africa's farmers outside of the homelands accounted for 75% of the value of South Africa's agricultural products, exemplifying the trend toward

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<sup>4</sup>Durning (1990, p. 11).

<sup>5</sup> The laws limiting land ownership on the basis of race have recently been repealed. Nonetheless, without a politically initiated redistribution of land, the distribution of land ownership among racial and ethnic groups is unlikely to change significantly.

<sup>6</sup>Steenkamp (1989, p. 13).

<sup>7</sup>Simkins (1983, p. 118).

<sup>8</sup> Although the homelands represent 13% of South Africa's land mass, they encompass 14% of its arable land. This discrepancy is explained by the fact that large portions of South Africa's land mass is of limited agricultural potential. For historical reasons the homelands are located in the eastern region of South Africa. In this region, the homelands generally represent the least desirable agricultural lands.

<sup>9</sup>Cooper (1988, pp.61-62).

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 51-52 and 57.

farm consolidation, mechanization, and the displacement of black farm labour from white agricultural areas.

The 1913 and 1936 Land Acts sought to segregate and limit land ownership by black people. This goal reflected the ideology of a white dominated state that sought to capture agricultural and mineral wealth for a Boer and Anglo constituency. Capturing this wealth necessitated the denial of black control over South Africa's land.

Furthermore, capitalist development in South Africa required a cheap labour force to exploit South Africa's mineral wealth,<sup>14</sup> and to ensure the profitability of the white farming, mining and manufacturing sectors.<sup>15</sup> A cheap and plentiful labour supply does not normally exist in agricultural economies with relatively abundant land, where the majority of people are employed on family farms. In such economies, capitalists would have to pay wages high enough to compensate for lost farm income in order to encourage voluntary participation in the labour market. Capitalist employers might also encounter socio-cultural resistance to labour market participation: resistance that might limit the supply, and potentially increase the price, of wage labour.<sup>16</sup>

In South Africa, on the other hand, the state has ensured a cheap and abundant labour supply by restricting access to land for certain categories of people. These people have had to depend upon the labour market, at least in part, to secure their livelihoods.

The cost of labour has been reduced further by the selective recruitment of male migrant labour, blocking the permanent urban migration of black labourers and their families, and relocating labourers to homelands when they are not employed in the white capitalist economy. The costs of housing and feeding black labourers have thus been minimized,<sup>17</sup> but the social and environmental costs have been high.

As early as the 1930s it became evident that agricultural production in the reserves was stagnating. In 1936 the South African government noted that the reserves were "...congested, denuded, overstocked, eroded, and for the most part, in a deplorable condition".<sup>18</sup> Growing landlessness and stagnating agricultural production in the reserves undermined the willingness of black labourers to return to the reserves or accept wages that were insufficient to support their entire family. With the growing opportunity for employment in the cities, there were strong incentives for black people to migrate to urban areas. Consequently some black urbanization did occur before the 1950s, prior to the full elaboration of apartheid policies. This urbanization partially resulted from the relative ineffectiveness of government controls over the movement of black people at that time.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>See Wolpe (1980), Hindson (1987) and Maylam (1990).

<sup>15</sup>Tomlinson (1987, p. xvi).

<sup>16</sup>Stitcher (1985, p. 15).

<sup>17</sup>Wolpe (1980).

<sup>18</sup>de Wet (1987, p. 86).

<sup>19</sup>Maylam (1990, p. 64).



These issues were addressed in the 1947 Sauer Report which laid the foundation for blocking and ultimately reversing black urbanization by settling blacks into the homelands.<sup>20</sup>

With the election of the Afrikaner dominated National Party in 1948, the Sauer report became the basis of the apartheid<sup>21</sup> policies that followed. These included the 1952 Native Urban Areas Act which assigned "pass books"<sup>22</sup> to all black adults and systematized the network of influx controls that regulated the movement and residential location of blacks. The Act also stipulated that no black person could reside in an urban area for more than 72 hours unless s/he had permission from the local labour bureau.<sup>23</sup> Such permission was normally given only to someone with a confirmed labour contract in an urban area.

These policies were designed to deal with the previous failure to prevent black urban migration: a process that could lead to higher wages and demands for enhanced political representation. These new policies also gave very tenuous residential rights to a small minority of blacks in urban areas: rights that aided in the differentiation of the black labour force by creating a small but more skilled and stabilized urban black labour force, required by growing town industries.<sup>24</sup> This growing differentiation between black labourers became one important feature of future urban conflict.

In 1954, the Tomlinson Report dealt with the issue of declining agricultural productivity in the homelands. It set out plans for the 'rational' use of agricultural land in the homelands through a scheme known as Betterment Planning. Betterment Planning recognized and attempted to deal with the fact that black agricultural areas had been previously administered in accordance with the political and ideological prerogatives of the white government and homeland elites, rather than with any consistent agricultural policy.<sup>25</sup> But the Tomlinson Report suffered from the fatal drawback that it could not address the fundamental issue of land inaccessibility for blacks.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Hindson (1987, p. 75).

<sup>21</sup> Apartheid is an Afrikaans word for separateness. It was a centerpiece of the ideology that justified the segregation of people on the basis of racial and ethnic origin. It encompassed a series of policies that categorized people at birth on the basis of race and ethnic background; restricted the electoral franchise, access to land, government services and urban migration; and forbade marriage and sexual relations between individuals of different racial categories.

<sup>22</sup> Pass books were issued by the government to all black people. They specified whether and where a black person was employed. This information defined the residential rights of urban blacks, and was central to the control over black urbanization.

<sup>23</sup>Hindson (1987, p. 75).

<sup>24</sup>Maylam (1990, p. 65).

<sup>25</sup>de Wet (1987, p. 102).

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

### III. From Rural Impoverishment to Urban Migration

Figure Two highlights the processes affecting black population movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and the increase of this movement in the early 1980s. Arrows on this diagram are both sequential and causal. In this diagram "blocked urban migration," "population relocation," "limited land area," and "limited capital and technology" are distinctly political phenomena, derived from government policy. For example, land on which blacks could reside and farm is not limited by absolute availability, but instead by government decisions to aid in the development of large-scale farms owned by white people and to restrict the access of black people to agricultural land.

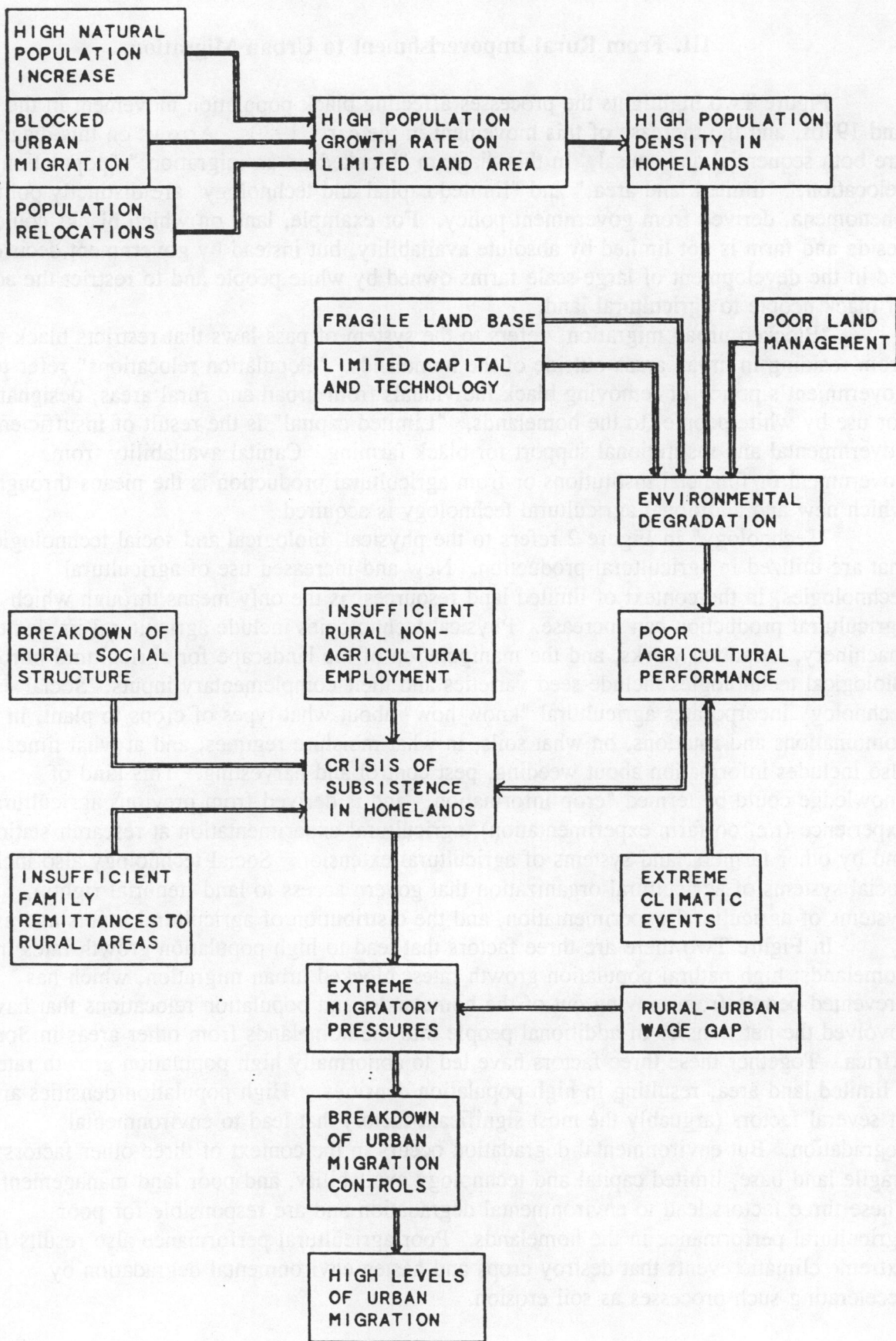
"Blocked urban migration" refers to the system of pass laws that restricts black people from residing in urban areas outside of the homelands. "Population relocations" refer to the government's policy of removing black individuals from urban and rural areas, designated for use by white people, to the homelands. "Limited capital" is the result of insufficient governmental and institutional support for black farming. Capital availability from government or financial institutions or from agricultural production is the means through which new and additional agricultural technology is acquired.

"Technology" in Figure 2 refers to the physical, biological and social technologies that are utilized in agricultural production. New and increased use of agricultural technologies, in the context of limited land resources, is the only means through which agricultural production can increase. Physical technologies include agricultural implements, machinery, irrigation works, and the manipulation of the landscape for agricultural purposes. Biological technologies include seed varieties and their complementary inputs. Social technology incorporates agricultural "know-how" about what types of crops to plant, in what combinations and rotations, on what soils, in what moisture regimes, and at what time. It also includes information about weeding, pest control and harvesting. This kind of knowledge could be termed "crop information," and is derived from previous agricultural experience (i.e. on-farm experimentation), agricultural experimentation at research stations and by other farmers, and systems of agricultural extension. Social technology also includes social systems of agricultural organization that govern access to land (tenurial rights), systems of agricultural experimentation, and the distribution of agricultural inputs and assets.

In Figure Two there are three factors that lead to high population growth rates in the homelands: high natural population growth rates; blocked urban migration, which has prevented people from moving out of the homelands; and population relocations that have involved the net transfer of additional people into the homelands from other areas in South Africa. Together these three factors have led to abnormally high population growth rates on a limited land area, resulting in high population densities. High population densities are one of several factors (arguably the most significant factor) that lead to environmental degradation. But environmental degradation occurs in the context of three other factors: a fragile land base, limited capital and technology availability, and poor land management. These three factors lead to environmental degradation and are responsible for poor agricultural performance in the homelands. Poor agricultural performance also results from extreme climatic events that destroy crops and hasten environmental degradation by accelerating such processes as soil erosion.



FIGURE 2. HOMELAND OUT-MIGRATION: PRIMARY LINKAGES





Poor agricultural performance is one of several factors that contribute to the crisis of subsistence in the homelands. A "crisis of subsistence" denotes an acute difficulty in sustaining a minimal livelihood. In this context, poor agricultural performance impacts negatively upon the nutritional status and income levels of rural families who have land. As well, poor agricultural performance inhibits the employment of rural labour for those families that have no access to land of their own.

The breakdown of rural social structures is largely a result of physically relocating individuals and communities to unfamiliar and precarious environments. The breakdown of pre-existing social structures and family networks can undermine a community's ability to cope with stressful circumstances. A community's impaired ability to organize itself and mobilize the necessary resources to successfully deal with an impending crisis partially explains the additional factor leading to a subsistence crisis: the inability to call upon the resources of family members living in urban areas (i.e. "insufficient family remittances to rural areas" in Figure 2). This factor can also result from declining incomes in the urban sector, which limit the amount of money that urban relatives can remit to their rural family members.

The supporting evidence for Figure 2 is presented below.

Beginning with population growth rates, it is obvious that South Africa's average overall growth rate, estimated at 2.5% per annum during 1970-1990, masks important features about its racial makeup and spatial distribution. While white population growth rates have dropped from 1.6% in 1970 to less than one percent in 1990, the black population continues to grow at approximately 2.9%<sup>27</sup> While the black population more than doubled over the 1950-1980 period, the black urban population grew only marginally.<sup>28</sup> Instead black population growth has been relegated to the homelands through influx control and the relocations of 'excess' black urban and rural populations back to the homelands. The relocation of blacks to the homelands occurred with the abolition of tenancy and squatting on white farmlands, the elimination of rural "blackspots" (land owned by blacks) from white rural areas, urban relocation and influx control, homeland consolidation (the redrawing of homeland boundaries), infrastructural development, the creation of conservation areas, and Betterment Planning which entailed the internal spatial reorganization of homeland areas.<sup>29</sup>

Significantly, the percentage of black people living in urban areas by 1990 was not expected to increase over the 1980s, and was expected to decline by the year two thousand. In addition, the percentage of the black population residing in white rural areas was expected to continue to decline over the 1980s.<sup>30</sup> The assumption that influx control would be effective

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<sup>27</sup>Steenkamp (1989, p. 14).

<sup>28</sup>Simkins (1983, p. 101).

<sup>29</sup>Grossman (1988, p. 42).

<sup>30</sup>Simkins (1983, p. 144). These projections were made at a time when influx control was already breaking down. In 1986, as stated above, pass laws were abandoned in favour of "orderly urbanization." Orderly urbanization has nonetheless incorporated attempts to restrict the development of informal settlements. These actions could weaken the ability of rural people to migrate to urban areas because of the high cost and low availability of formal housing in the townships. Simkins' projections are therefore only useful for estimating

at preventing black urbanization held true only partially in the early 1980s and hardly at all after 1986. The reasons for this will become evident.

Natural demographic growth, along with influx control and the relocation of black people, led to very high population growth rates and densities in the homelands. The population of Qwa Qwa, for example, grew at approximately 22.8% per annum from 1970 - 1978.<sup>31</sup> This phenomenal population growth rate may overstate the situation in other homelands, as Qwa Qwa is relatively small. Gandar and Grossman suggest that the population growth rate for Kwa Zulu over the 1970 - 1978 period was 3.8%, a rate considerably lower than that of Qwa Qwa. Nonetheless, Kwa Zulu's population growth rate over this period was over one percent higher than the Zulu natural population growth rate.<sup>32</sup> This increase above the natural population growth rate of the population can be explained in two ways: 1) as a result of population relocations; and 2) as a result of the reclassification of white peri-urban areas as Kwa Zulu territory. Although it is difficult to get a completely clear picture of the population densities in the homelands (specific figures are difficult to find), there are several pieces of evidence that suggest that they have reached an environmentally and socially detrimental level.

The first evidence can be seen in Figure 3, which maps the spatial distribution of South Africa's rural and urban populations in 1970. From this map it is obvious that rural population density was significantly higher in homeland areas than elsewhere in South Africa. The population growth figures and relocations discussed above suggest that the population densities of homeland areas and the rest of South Africa were even more dissimilar in the 1980s.

It is important to recognize that neither high population growth rates nor high population densities necessarily lead to environmental degradation. The relationship between population density and environmental degradation is complex and partially dependent on the degree to which local populations can successfully adapt to a rapidly changing demographic situation.

In South Africa the relationship between population density and environmental degradation must be understood in the context of the following factors: 1) the need of local populations to derive a livelihood from their immediate environment; 2) fragile ecosystems that are not particularly suitable for high population settlement patterns and intensive resource exploitation; 3) limited capital and technology, whose availability might have ameliorated declining environmental productivity; 3) tenurial systems that allocate ecologically fragile land for agricultural and residential purposes; 4) social and political systems that fail to protect common property resources and consequently allow unsustainable resource exploitation. These factors have limited the extent to which homeland people can maintain their livelihoods and sustain their local environments.

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urban migration patterns over the longer term.

<sup>31</sup>Gandar and Grossman (1988, p. 41).

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 41.



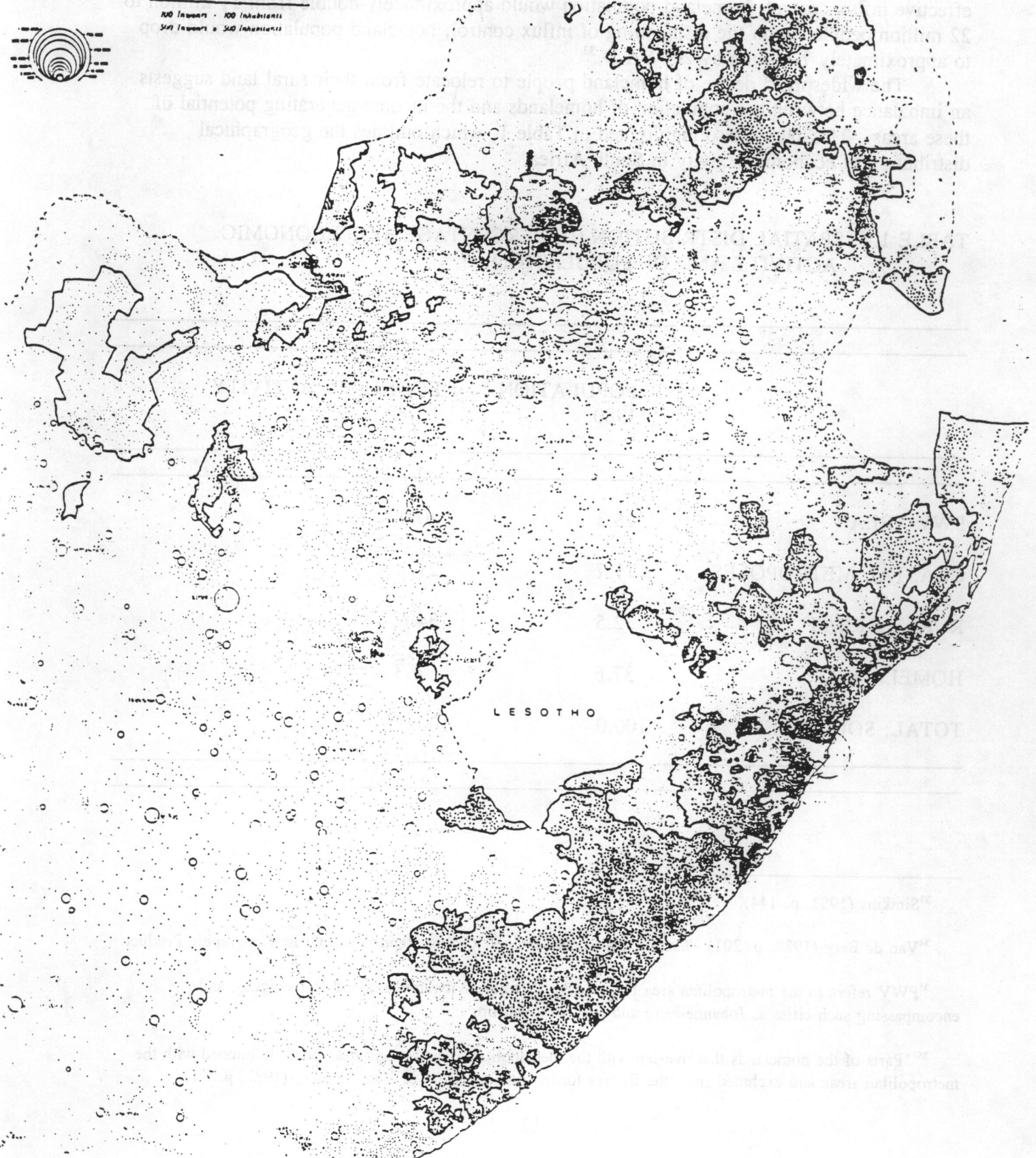
FIGURE 3. POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN THE  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

URBAN POPULATION



Rural Population

100 Inhabitants - 100 Inhabitants  
500 Inhabitants - 500 Inhabitants



SOURCE: Department of Geography, UNISA.



A second piece of evidence regarding the current imbalance between homeland populations and their biophysical environment comes from a demographer's estimates of South Africa's homeland population in 1980 and in 2000 A.D. Simkins estimated that with effective influx control, homeland population would approximately double from 11 million to 22 million people; with the dismantling of influx control, homeland population would drop to approximately 7 million by 2000 A.D.<sup>33</sup>

The widespread desire of homeland people to relocate from their rural land suggests an imbalance between the population of homelands and the income generating potential of these areas. This fact is also highlighted in Table 1, which outlines the geographical distribution of economic activity in South Africa.

TABLE 1.<sup>34</sup> SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION (IN PERCENTAGES) OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND OF POPULATION

	POPULATION 1980	ECONOMIC ACTIVITY 1978
PWV-AREA <sup>35</sup>	18.3	40.0
COASTAL METROPOLES	11.7	21.1
RURAL AREAS	32.5	34.6
HOMELANDS <sup>36</sup>	37.6	4.3
TOTAL: SOUTH AFRICA	100.0	100.0

<sup>33</sup>Simkins (1983, p. 144).

<sup>34</sup>Van de Berg (1989, p. 201). Central Statistical Services, Census Reports and Gross Geographic Product.

<sup>35</sup>PWV refers to the metropolitan area bounded by Pretoria, Witwatersrand and Vereeniging, and encompassing such cities as Johannesburg and Soweto township.

<sup>36</sup>"Parts of the homelands that overlap with the metropolitan areas are as far as possible lumped with the metropolitan areas and excluded from the figures for the homelands." See Van der Berg (1989, p.201).

From this table it is evident that there is a gross imbalance between the economic activity of homeland areas and their population. On an individual level, the ability to sustain one's livelihood in these circumstances is derived from two sources: 1) exploitation of the natural environment through such activities as herding, agriculture or forestry; or 2) other income generating activities that are not directly linked to the natural environment such as employment in commerce or industry. The figures cited in this table suggest that neither of these opportunities generally exists in homeland areas.

A third piece of evidence on the ecological conditions in homelands is drawn from a period just prior to the relocation of populations in one area of Kwa Zulu homeland (1970), and involves a preliminary survey conducted for the implementation of Betterment Planning.<sup>37</sup> This survey calculated that 125 full-time farming units, capable of supporting a family at a subsistence level, could be created in this area. Unfortunately 365 families were already living on this land, and subsequent land allocations were made on non-arable land and steep erodible slopes.<sup>38</sup>

A lack of arable land relative to the rapidly increasing populations of the homelands has resulted in over-crowding, reduced fallow periods, declining soil fertility and a growing landless class of people. According to D. Grossman, Betterment Planning had a barely positive impact on agricultural production and may have even undermined it.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately such schemes failed to address the gross imbalance between population and arable land, because of a governmentally determined land, capital and technological boundary.

The gross imbalance between population and natural resources has been documented for fuelwood in the homelands. In describing the process through which this imbalance develops and its environmental consequences, Grossman and Gandar state:

As populations grow, and as the number of trees declines with hut building and clearing of fields, a point is reached at which the natural die-back of trees no longer meets the fuel demand. Live wood is then cut for fuel, thereby worsening the shortage and increasing further the reliance on live wood. The firewood gathering suddenly changes from being of little environmental consequence to being the main driving force in a drastic collapse of the tree component. ...Tree removal exacerbates the harmful effects of overgrazing and sheet, gully and wind erosion...(and) causes water yields in catchment areas to become less stable.<sup>40</sup>

This population-natural resource imbalance has contributed to poor agricultural performance in the homelands. In addition population relocations and family separations have increased social stress in rural communities, breaking down social networks and

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<sup>37</sup>Grossman and Gandar (1988, p. 42).

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 42.



undermining the adaptive capability of communities to deal with adverse ecological and economic circumstances.<sup>41</sup> Social networks are the means through which communities can organize their efforts to conserve natural resources or plan for their sustainable exploitation. With the breakdown of community social networks, and in the context of acute resource scarcity (financial and material), this becomes difficult to do. As well, in such circumstances intra-family transfers of financial resources from family members employed in urban areas, mines or on white owned farms, have become increasingly unreliable. Similarly, it becomes more difficult to borrow from neighbours and kin in times of hardship.<sup>42</sup> Intra-family transfers are also likely to be constrained by the overall economic crisis of the South African economy: a crisis that limits the employment opportunities and wage levels of family members who might otherwise send some of their income to their rural relatives.

Cumulatively, the factors discussed above have led to high levels of poverty and a crisis of subsistence in the homelands. Several authors have attempted to measure the extent of this poverty by using a "generously defined poverty level." Their calculations estimate that between 70 - 83% of all homeland households fall below this poverty line, while less than 30% of black households in the metropolitan areas fall below this line.<sup>43</sup>

Rural poverty of this nature creates strong incentives to move to urban areas where conditions may not be ideal, but which provide more opportunities than rural areas do. Urban migration in these circumstances may occur on a continual basis, but in addition can fluctuate in response to extreme climatic events. In one example, following devastating floods in Natal Province in 1987, there was a surge of migration to urban areas surrounding Durban and Pietermaritzberg.<sup>44</sup> Migration of this sort would seem, in part, to be based upon the tenuous nature of subsistence in South Africa's homelands: a way of living that climatic and ecological disruptions can easily undermine.

As a consequence of all these factors, the 1980s have seen a rise in urban migration, despite the continued application of influx controls until 1986. This has fuelled an acute housing deficit in established urban areas as the government has been reluctant for political reasons to provide more housing for urban blacks. Consequently, there has been a rise in illegal housing settlements within and around black townships.<sup>45</sup>

#### IV. From Urban Migration to Urban Conflict

With an urban population growth rate that does not differ significantly from other African or middle income countries (see Table 2), one must question the explanatory power that urban migration has for urban political conflict in South Africa.

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<sup>41</sup>de Wet (1988, p. 186).

<sup>42</sup>Sharp (1985, pp. 137 and 147).

<sup>43</sup>Savage (1987, p. 604).

<sup>44</sup>Sidler (1989, p. 32).

<sup>45</sup>Savage (1987, p. 615).



TABLE 2.<sup>46</sup> AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF URBAN POPULATION: 1980-1988

	Percent
Malawi	7.9
Zimbabwe	6.2
Kenya	8.2
Ivory Coast	6.6
Angola	5.8
Brazil	3.6
Zambia	6.7
Middle Income Countries (ave.)	3.3
South Africa	3.4

First, the percentages listed in Table 2 may underestimate the growth of South Africa's urban populations because of the restricted manner in which the South African government defines its urban areas. Simkins believes that government statistics underestimate the rate of urban migration because de facto black urban residential areas adjacent to "white" urban centres are often classified as rural homeland areas for political purposes.<sup>47</sup> As well, these percentages may require substantial revision as urban influx controls were only abolished in 1986: demographic developments within South Africa since 1986 may be masked. Indeed, the full impact of the abolition of influx control is, perhaps, yet to be seen.

Nonetheless, prior to the abolition of influx control, it was noted that:

By 1980 a saturation point had been reached...in respect of removal of Africans from 'white' urban areas, controls on influx and the like. Both immigration and the natural increase of urban African populations had the combined effect of increasing the growth rate [of urban areas] from 3.5 per annum before 1980 to approximately 5.5% per annum in the post-1980 period, a scale unprecedented in South Africa's history.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup>World Bank (1990, p. 238).

<sup>47</sup>Simkins (1983).

<sup>48</sup>Sutcliff et al. (1989, p. 4).

The contention here is that the rate of urban migration in South Africa since 1980 is unprecedented. It is possible that this powerful demographic force has fuelled urban upheaval and reform in the 1980s, as the government has attempted to deal with it. But high rates of urban migration do not in themselves breed the type of conflict seen in South Africa. Urban conflict is highly contextual, developing within a specific socio-political environment, and focussing on specific issues. For example, apartheid controls over black urban migration were highly political acts that required state violence in urban areas to enforce them. State violence has involved the demolition of squatter settlements and the forced removal of urban black people to rural homelands. In this context the opposition to apartheid has been focussed on urban laws and restrictions, resulting in urban political upheaval. This is but one route to urban violence, and particularly relevant to the township uprisings of the 1980s.

Figure 4 outlines the process leading to urban violence within the squatter settlements of Natal and Transvaal provinces. It begins in the top left-hand corner with the input of "high levels of urban migration" (the end product of the process outlined in Figure Two). The rest of this diagram situates urban migration within other social, political and economic factors that create conditions conducive to violence.

Factors such as "insufficient municipal financing," an "inadequate legal and regulative framework" and an "acute housing shortage" are distinctly political phenomena derived from apartheid policies: policies specifically related to other government policies designed to prevent urbanization of the black population. High levels of urban migration and the natural increase of the urban population exacerbate housing shortages and sustain the development of squatter settlements. No legal or regulative framework for these settlements has been established because doing so would legitimize this settlement pattern - something the South African government appears reluctant to do, possibly because of opposition from the white electorate or because of financial claims that a legalized squatter settlement might attempt to make on it.

But the rapid growth in squatter settlements surrounding townships since 1986 has also resulted from the deconcentration of formal township areas. Evidence of this process comes from the squatter settlements of Weiler's Farm and Vlakfontein south of Johannesburg.<sup>49</sup> Prior to the abolition of influx control in 1986, substantial informal housing had been built in the backyards of township residences, as a consequence of the acute housing shortage for urban blacks and the shortage of land allocated for black residential needs. These shortages were reflected in high housing densities and relatively high rents in the townships. With the abolition of influx control, there has been some relaxation on controls over urban squatting. Tenants of formal and informal housing within the townships have, in many instances, consequently moved to squatter settlements, seeking lower rents. This process has been intensified by growing unemployment in the townships for lower skilled individuals, constraining their ability to pay township rents.<sup>50</sup> Squatter settlements also house men who previously lived in single sex hostels in the townships, but

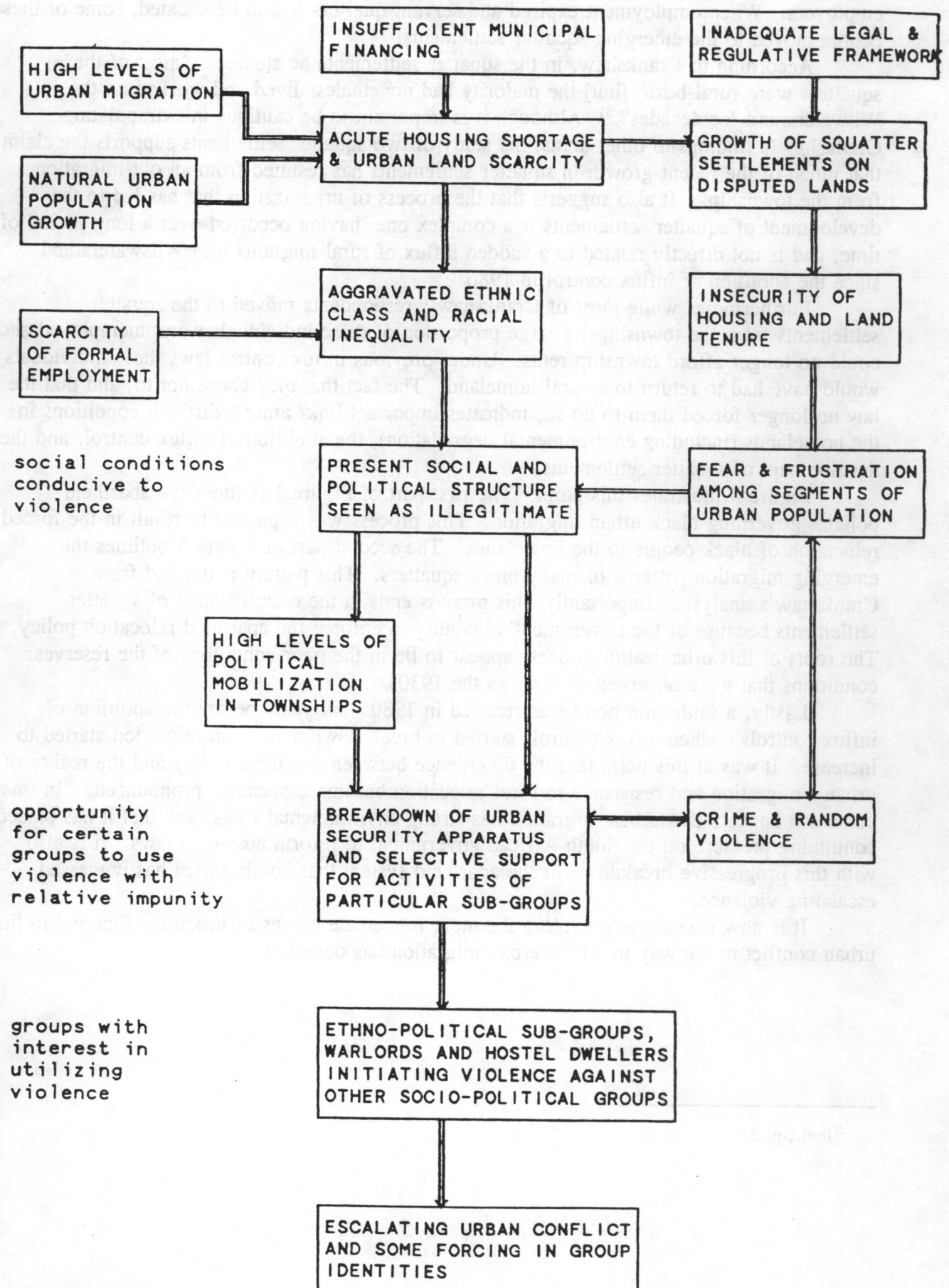
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<sup>49</sup>See Crankshaw (1991).

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 10.



FIGURE 4. URBAN VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA





have chosen to reside with their families in the squatter settlements. Lastly, Crankshaw found a significant number of individuals who had been employed as domestic servants in the townships and white residential areas and had lived in the domestic quarters of their employers. When employment expired and servant quarters had to be vacated, some of these people moved to the emerging squatter settlements.

According to Crankshaw, in the squatter settlements he studied, "most of the squatters were rural-born, [but] the majority had nonetheless lived and worked on the Witwatersrand for decades".<sup>51</sup> Although it is important to be cautious in extrapolating Crankshaw's findings to other areas, his study of two squatter settlements supports the claim that much of the recent growth in squatter settlements has resulted from an out-migration from the townships. It also suggests that the process of urbanization that has led to the development of squatter settlements is a complex one, having occurred over a long period of time, and is not directly related to a sudden influx of rural migrants into Witwatersrand since the abolition of influx control in 1986.

Furthermore, while most of Crankshaw's respondents moved to the squatter settlements from the townships, a large proportion of these individuals were unemployed and could no longer afford township rents. Under previous influx control laws these individuals would have had to return to a rural homeland. The fact that they chose not to, and that the law no longer forced them to do so, indicates important links among difficult conditions in the homelands (including environmental degradation), the abolition of influx control, and the development of squatter settlements.

Figure 5 illustrates this point. The first part of Figure 5 outlines the apartheid policies governing black urban migration. This process was supposed to result in the forced relocation of black people to the homelands. The second part of Figure 5 outlines the emerging migration patterns of many black squatters. This pattern is derived from Crankshaw's analysis. Importantly, this process ends in the establishment of squatter settlements because of the government's inability to enforce the apartheid relocation policy. The roots of this urbanization process appear to lie in the poor conditions of the reserves: conditions that were observed as early as the 1930s.

Lastly, a saturation point was reached in 1980 - six years before the abolition of influx controls - when influx controls started to break down and urban migration started to increase. It was at this point that the divergence between apartheid policy and the reality of urban migration and resistance to rural relocation became especially pronounced. In this context it appears that urban migration has strong environmental roots, and that it has placed continuing pressure on the South African government to reform apartheid laws. It is also with this progressive breakdown of the apartheid system that South Africa has witnessed escalating violence.

It is now necessary to explore the more immediate causes of urban conflict and to link urban conflict to the way in which urban migration has occurred.

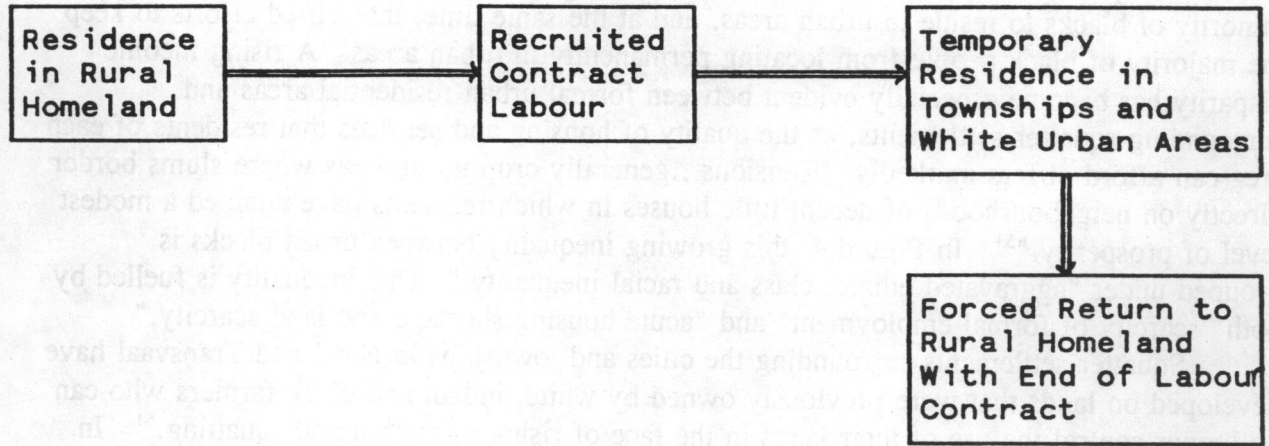
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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

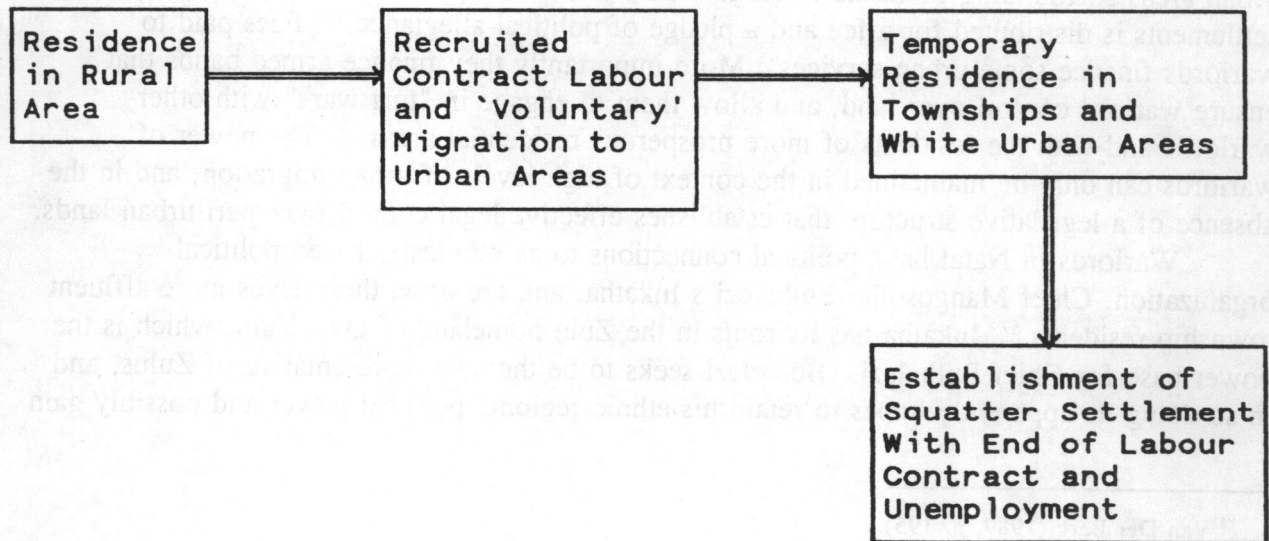
FIGURE 5. URBAN MIGRATION

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1. Apartheid Policy Governing Black Migration



2. Emerging Migration Pattern





During the 1980s, income differentials between blacks grew. Since the mid-1970s, black wage levels have risen sharply in the formal sector of the economy, while formal sector employment has become more scarce.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that important income differentials exist between longer term residents of urban areas who have gained higher skill levels and their more recent urban and peri-urban counterparts. This would appear to be a direct consequence of apartheid policies which, as noted above, gave tenuous rights to a minority of blacks to reside in urban areas, and at the same time, intensified efforts to keep the majority of black people from locating permanently in urban areas. A rising income disparity has become especially evident between formal urban residential areas and surrounding squatter settlements, as the quality of housing and services that residents of each area can afford differs markedly. "Tensions...generally crop up in areas where slums border directly on neighbourhoods of decent little houses in which residents have attained a modest level of prosperity."<sup>53</sup> In Figure 4, this growing inequality between urban blacks is grouped under "aggravated ethnic, class and racial inequality." This inequality is fuelled by both "scarcity of formal employment" and "acute housing shortage and land scarcity."

Squatter settlements surrounding the cities and townships in Natal and Transvaal have developed on lands that were previously owned by white, indian and black farmers who can no longer control the use of their lands in the face of rising migration and squatting.<sup>54</sup> In Natal, with the absence of a strong legal structure in the squatter settlements, the inability or unwillingness of the state's security forces to enforce ownership rights on land now occupied by squatters, and a growing sense of deprivation by squatter residents, there has developed a network of "warlords" or "squatter kings" who control access to squatter land in the peri-urban areas surrounding Pietermaritzburg. The right to occupy urban land in these settlements is distributed for a fee and a pledge of political allegiance.<sup>55</sup> Fees paid to warlords finance some urban services. More importantly they finance armed bands that ensure warlord control over land, and allow them to engage in "turf wars" with other warlords and with the residents of more prosperous residential areas.<sup>56</sup> The power of warlords can only be maintained in the context of high levels of urban migration, and in the absence of a legislative structure that establishes effective legal control over peri-urban lands.

Warlords in Natal have political connections to an ethnically based political organization, Chief Mangosotho Buthelezi's Inkatha, and are often themselves more affluent township residents.<sup>57</sup> Inkatha has its roots in the Zulu homeland of Qwa Zulu, which is the power base for Chief Buthelezi. Buthelezi seeks to be the sole representative of Zulus, and in so doing he apparently hopes to retain his ethnic-regional political power and possibly gain

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<sup>52</sup>Van Der Berg (1989, p. 195).

<sup>53</sup>Sidler (1989, p. 32).

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>57</sup>ICT (1990, p. 5).

some national political power in post-apartheid South Africa. Migrants who want land in warlord controlled squatter settlements must join the Inkatha organization,<sup>58</sup> which consequently strengthens Buthelezi's political claims to be the sole representative of Zulu people. Buthelezi's resulting political clout ensures that the government and other anti-apartheid political organizations ignore him at their own peril when discussing national political issues. A failure to address Buthelezi's political demands has resulted in violent confrontations between Inkatha and other political groups.

Longer-term residents working in the formal sector in Natal have commonly been members of the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions and its anti-apartheid affiliate, the United Democratic Front (UDF).<sup>59</sup> These two organizations have played a prominent role in vocalizing opposition to apartheid, adopting positions similar to that of the previously banned African National Congress (ANC). With the release of Nelson Mandela from jail and the un-banning of the ANC, the UDF has recently been dissolved. Importantly, the ANC and the UDF have taken a less conciliatory stance against the South African government than Inkatha. In particular, the UDF and ANC have stood opposed to political structures and organizations based on ethnic and racial identity. In doing so they have gained considerable support among many black people for their strong stance against apartheid, while at the same time placing themselves in a political position that is difficult to reconcile with Buthelezi's ambitions, which are sustained by his control of a large segment of the Zulu political constituency and his claim as their preeminent leader.

The political violence in Natal has often been described as a rivalry between Inkatha, the UDF, and their respective constituencies. In these portrayals of the violence, the UDF has been described as a Xhosa dominated organization fighting the Zulu Inkatha. In this manner, violence in Natal is described in ethnic political terms while its socio-economic character is ignored, even though the latter appears to have important explanatory value. An ethnic characterization of the violence supports the claims of those who, like Buthelezi, wish to segment political power along ethnic lines. But the majority of attackers and victims in the Natal violence have been Zulus themselves: a fact that undermines both Buthelezi's claim of being the sole representative of Zulus and the ethnic depictions of the violence.<sup>60</sup> This explains the political dimension of violence in Natal: Buthelezi does not want rival organizations representing Zulus of any social class. He is especially antagonistic toward organizations that are opposed to racial and ethnic based politics, which are the source of Inkatha power.

This also highlights the socio-economic tensions underlying the violence in Natal: namely the disparity between township and squatter residents. Figure 4 shows how this disparity results in violence in the context of an illegitimate social and political structure that promotes high levels of political mobilization, and of an absence of an effective and neutral urban security apparatus. Fear and frustration in the townships heighten the sense of illegitimacy of the present political order. But significantly, the fact that many prominent

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<sup>58</sup>Sidler (1989, p. 32).

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>60</sup>ICT (1990, p. 5).



warlords come from a more affluent township background suggests that the destructive political upheaval of the squatter settlements is not organized or led by the poorest people in South Africa, even though they are its main participants and victims. Frustration also fuels crime and random violence by individuals who can commit crimes without the fear of legal retribution, because of the ineffectiveness of the urban security apparatus. This in itself increases the sense of fear in the squatter settlements and townships.

There are some similarities and some important differences in comparing violence in the Transvaal to violence in Natal. First of all, much of the violence in Transvaal has been instigated by Zulu migrant workers who reside in single sex hostels in the townships.<sup>61</sup> These hostel residents are apparently politically aligned with Buthelezi's Inkatha organization. While more 'class-based' violence has been evidenced in the past between radicalized residents of the townships and more affluent residents who have been willing to collaborate with the South African government, recent victims of violence have been non-Zulu residents of both squatter settlements and more formal urban areas.<sup>62</sup>

The involvement of the South African Police (SAP) in conflict situations has not been wholly neutral or stabilizing. There are many reports, and there is some judicial evidence, that elements within the SAP have sided with Inkatha in allowing or facilitating their acts of violence.<sup>63</sup> There have also been instances when the SAP have played a stabilizing role in conflict situations, which suggests that there is disagreement within the SAP itself, especially among lower ranking officers, about how to respond to the Government initiated reform process.<sup>64</sup> In Figure 4, this crisis within the SAP is described as "selective support for activities of particular sub-groups," namely Inkatha. For example, elements within this officer corp may not like the policy directions of the current government which will undermine the white monopoly on political power and could potentially lead to black majority rule. Certain officers see it as in their interest to preserve the ethnic and racial character of the state: an interest they share with Buthelezi and Inkatha.<sup>65</sup> That the government of South Africa does not acknowledge, condemn and rectify instances of police involvement in violence suggests a degree of crisis within the state itself and/or some collusion between elements within the government and the SAP over township violence. The neutral and stabilizing involvement of the SAP would appear to be an important factor in quelling urban violence.

Once violence has been initiated, attacked groups organize for protection and call for retribution. Recently, the ANC has threatened to call off pending negotiations with the South African government and engage in armed resistance to repel attacks upon its supporters. The potential for escalating conflict therefore exists. The fact that Mandela, de Klerk and Buthelezi have signed a peace accord in an effort to quell township and squatter settlement

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<sup>61</sup>Africa Information Afrique (1990, p. 2).

<sup>62</sup>Weekly Mail, Dec. 7, 1990.

<sup>63</sup>Weekly Mail, Dec. 7, 1990; ICT (1990, p. 8); Southern African Chronicle, Dec. 10, 1990.

<sup>64</sup>Baynham (1990).

<sup>65</sup>South African Chronicle, Dec. 10, 1990.

violence would seem to lessen the chances of escalating violence, dependent upon each signatory's sincerity in pursuing an end to violence. What such an accord does not achieve is any change to the underlying tensions fuelling squatter settlement violence, or any reform within the SAP.

As noted above, the fact that the majority of both attackers and victims in Natal have been Zulus undermines explanations of violence that focus on ethnicity, pitting rival ethnic groups against one another (i.e. the Xhosas and the Zulus). A more powerful (but not the only useful) depiction of the conflict is as one between groups with a non-ethnic\racial vision of South Africa's future and those with a racial\ethnic one. This latter interpretation would seem to reflect closely the political dimensions of violence in Transvaal province.

## V. Environmental Change and Conflict

This paper has mapped the process through which social engineering has led to rural environmental degradation, urban migration, and the development of squatter settlements. It has attempted to show that urban migration in itself does not necessarily erupt in violence, but that there are specific factors and pathways that make violence more likely. The fact that warlords are outsiders suggests that the type of conflict they instigate is not a 'natural' outgrowth of squatter grievances. The nature and intent of warlord leadership would therefore seem to be an important factor governing the potential for violent conflict within the squatter settlements. Another factor is the lack of police control over warlord actions. This lack of control gives warlords an opportunity to pursue their political goals through violent means. If warlords mobilized squatter communities for different purposes, and through less coercive means, the situation in the squatter settlements might evolve very differently.

On the other hand, high rates of urban migration can fuel social tensions when the housing and employment needs and expectations of urban migrants are not met. An underlying potential for urban violence can be created by such conditions.

It is now important to draw conclusions from the South African experience about the types of conflict that we might expect from environmental change. T. Homer-Dixon, in his study, "On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict," develops a typology of conflicts that he believes will likely arise from environmental change. Two types of conflict are relevant for discussion here: group-identity conflict and relative-deprivation conflict. The first arises from the large-scale movement of people seeking to escape the environmental degradation of their homeland. Conflicts result when "different ethnic and cultural groups are propelled together under circumstances of deprivation and stress."<sup>66</sup> In this model, population migration, deprivation and stress can all result from environmental degradation.

Relative deprivation conflicts, on the other hand, focus on the un-met expectations of people in the context of economic and environmental decline. In this model, as the wealth producing capacity of a society declines, the gap between higher and lower income groups

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<sup>66</sup>Homer-Dixon (1991a).



widens, since typically only the wealthy are capable of protecting their economic status. This leads to a growing sense of frustration and injustice among poorer groups as they are confronted with fewer economic opportunities for themselves, while also encountering the wealth of others within society.

Homer-Dixon usefully notes the theoretical connection between relative deprivation theories and structural theories that highlight those changes in the 'opportunity structure' within a society that open up new possibilities for aggrieved groups to challenge the established social and economic order.<sup>67</sup> This suggests, as Homer-Dixon notes, that there is no single theoretical model that can explain a situation of environmentally induced social or political conflict. Instead it is probably necessary to combine several theoretical perspectives to explain any particular situation.

In South Africa, rural environmental degradation has led to the large-scale migration of people to urban and peri-urban areas. When violence has erupted in urban areas, the potential for group based conflict characterized along ethnic lines exists, since the violence often involves more than one ethnic group. But an ethnic characterization of the violence describes only one of the possible ways in which violence can be manifested in these circumstances. The examples from South Africa clearly show the possibility for 'class' based violence between different socioeconomic groupings. Nonetheless social class can overlap with ethnic identity. Where socioeconomic groups do overlap ethnic groups, and where ethnic political mobilization exists, the ethnic character of the violence likely becomes especially apparent. Even in such circumstances the ethnic description of the violence must be qualified by these other factors. In South Africa the limits of a group-identity description of urban conflict are evident, as many of the victims of Inkatha violence have been Zulus themselves. Furthermore, social class seems to be a greater determining factor of urban violence in the areas of South Africa explored above.

All this suggests that a relative deprivation model of violence more aptly describes urban conflict in South Africa because this model allows for the exploration of the relative social and economic disparity between different groups, their resulting grievances, and the manner in which these grievances and frustrations are articulated. Interestingly, such an analysis does not deny the group-identity nature of urban conflict, where it exists. But it suggests that conflict, when it arises between different groups, has other important underlying features that are not fully captured in a group-identity analysis.

In South Africa the full potential for violence between socioeconomic groupings may be realized only in the future. The extent of the violence might depend on whether the reform process achieves a significant redistribution of resources in South Africa and addresses the demands of the mobilized and most deprived segments of the black populace. Without this, violence between squatters and more formal township residents could intensify in both Natal and Transvaal. Inter-ethnic violence in the Transvaal would seem to depend more on the continued existence of single sex hostels housing Zulus in that region. Inter-ethnic violence might also erupt if the redistribution of resources in South Africa occurs through an ethnically politicized reform process. Unfortunately, the ambition of Buthelezi,

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<sup>67</sup>Homer-Dixon (1991a).

and the willingness of Inkatha to use violence to achieve its political ends, suggests some potential for this to occur.

There are other important ways in which urban violence could be addressed. Most importantly, in Natal, would be the establishment of some legal framework within squatter settlements that destroys warlord control over land. Such a framework would need to legitimize the existence of squatter settlements, permanently allocate land to its current residents, and involve the SAP in the enforcement of those land claims.

Poverty in the homelands will also need to be addressed, as this creates strong incentives to migrate to urban areas, despite the incapacity of urban areas to successfully integrate migrants into the formal housing and labour markets. This in turn fuels political, criminal and random violence as migrants express their frustration at not achieving higher levels of social and economic status in urban areas. Over the longer term, urban migration is probably inevitable if the experience of other countries holds for South Africa. Nonetheless reducing homeland poverty, while worthwhile in itself, will also help to ease the current rate of urban migration, and possibly ensure that rural-urban migration involves a less impoverished mass of people.

Reducing homeland poverty involves questions of land redistribution, governmental support for black farming, and the extent to which ecological thresholds have been passed in debilitated farming areas. There is some debate as to whether the homelands have passed ecological thresholds as well as purely economic ones.<sup>68</sup> The more costly aspects of ecological rehabilitation might be better spent supporting the activities of black farmers on better lands outside of the homelands. A redistribution of white farmlands has the added advantage of relieving some of the population pressures within the homelands themselves. This does not preclude increased support for black farming within the homelands on some of the less degraded lands. Experience from Zimbabwe indicates that black farmers performed very well when supported by the government, on both previously degraded communal reserve areas, and on higher potential lands in the former white highlands.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, given the size of South Africa's homeland population, and the scale of land degradation in the homelands, the extent of land redistribution will probably need to be greater than in Zimbabwe.

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<sup>68</sup>Grossman (1990, p. 44).

<sup>69</sup>Vink (1990, p. 85).



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