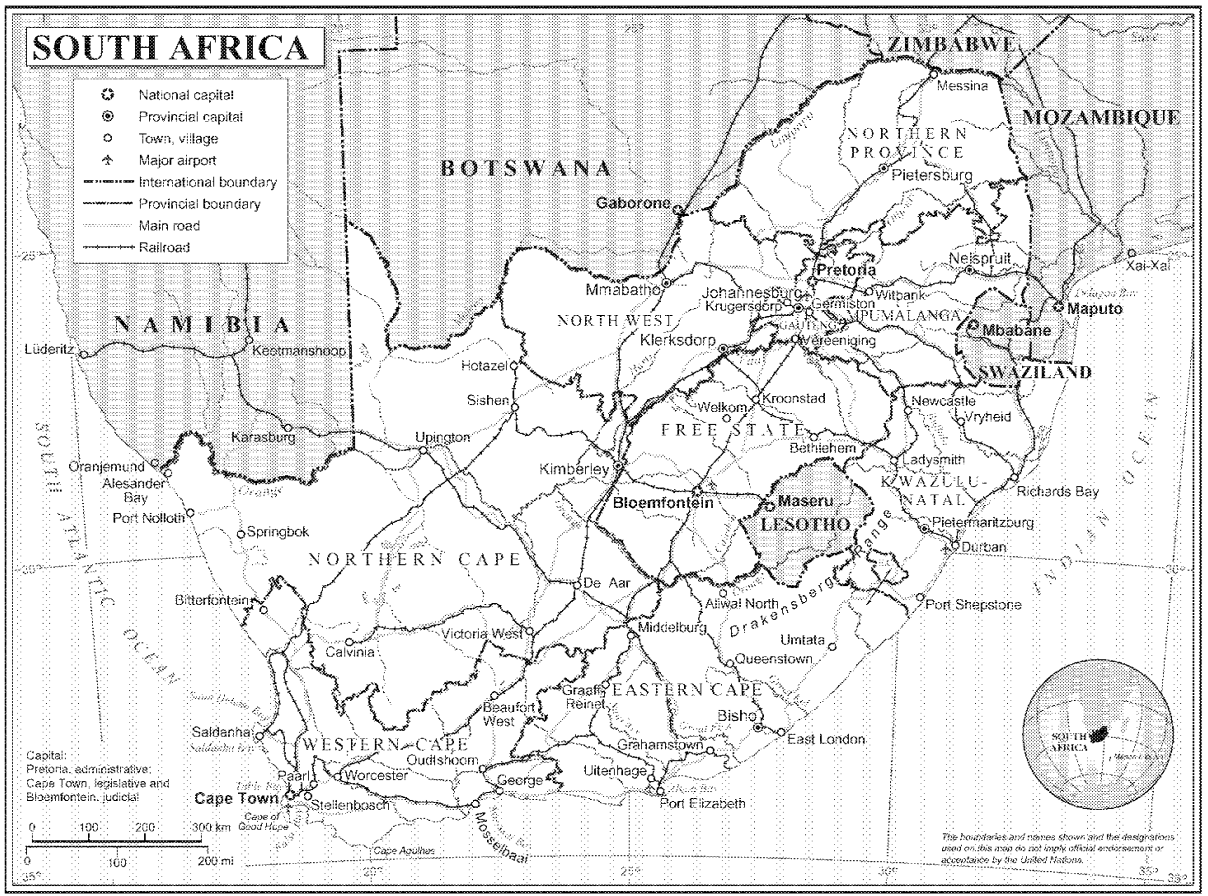
PART 3

SOUTH AFRICA



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9. The Legacy of White Rule

During the colonial period and under apartheid, native South Africans were subject to a level of dispossession unparalleled in the region. The right to own, rent or even sharecrop land in South Africa depended upon a person's race, and millions of blacks were forced from their ancestral lands and resettled in overcrowded and environmentally degraded reserves where they served as a source of cheap migrant labour for white-owned farms and mines. As one recent study concluded, "The extent of the impact of this policy on the whole social, economic and political fabric of South African society is impossible to measure; the resentment it caused is too deep to fathom, its scars too sensitive to touch".[363]

Colonial occupation, dispossession and racial discrimination lasted longer in South Africa than in Zimbabwe. More than 250 years of Dutch and British conquest and settlement deprived native South Africans of most of their original territory. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, indigenous farming responded to the increased demand for agricultural products generated by the mining towns. Family farms supplied the major towns of the colony of Natal with grain and exported the surplus to Cape Town. In 1860, over 83 per cent of the nearly half million hectares of white-owned land was farmed by black tenants. Black-owned and tenant farms proved as efficient as large-scale settler farms that utilised hired labour. Black farmers adopted new agricultural technologies, entered new industries and successfully competed with large-scale settler farming. In fact, settlers argued that because of labour shortages, they could not compete with their black counterparts, who had lower costs. White transporters also decried competition from their black counterparts.[364]

The accumulation of wealth by black farmers compelled the Native Affairs Commission to conclude that blacks were becoming wealthy, independent and difficult to govern. Consequently, the authorities made it difficult, then impossible, for blacks to use land outside the crowded reserves that had been set aside for them. A series of laws to this end culminated in the Natives Land Act of 1913. This restricted blacks to 7 per

[363] Bertus de Villiers, *Land Reform*, op. cit., p. 46.

[364] Masiphula Mbongwa, Rogier van den Brink and Johan van Zyl, "Evolution of the Agrarian Structure in South Africa", in Johan van Zyl, Johann Kirsten and Hans Binswanger (eds.), *Agricultural Land Reform in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1996).

cent of the national area, where the principal mode of tenure was "customary" and administered by chiefs. While retaining the appearances of indigenous authority, many chiefs were effectively coerced into becoming agents of the state. With the stroke of a pen, the government had eliminated competition from black farmers and created a wealth of inexpensive black labour for white farms and mines.

In 1916, the Beaumont Commission reported that the reserves could support only half the black population.[365] Eventually, the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act expanded the total reserve area to about 13.8 per cent of the country and made provision for small additional areas to be added under the auspices of the South African Native Trust. This laid the foundations for the process of "homeland" consolidation that continued into the 1980s.[366] Under the law, blacks lost the right to purchase land even in the reserves and were forced to use land administered by tribal authorities appointed by the white government.

The process of dispossession did not end with creation of the reserves. Between 1950 and 1980, an additional 1.4 million blacks were evicted from white farms. The Surplus People Project estimates that 1.3 million were evicted from the white farming areas, and 614,000 blacks were resettled during the abolition of "black spots" and homeland consolidation processes that took place between 1960 and 1983.[367] Between 1960 and 1980, the population of the native reserves rose from 4.5 to 11 million.[368] The population of these areas, about 13 per cent of the land area of the country, is now estimated at 12.7 million, or about 32 per cent of the total population.[369] This land is often agriculturally marginal and has grown increasingly so as a result of over-cultivation and over-stocking.

The twentieth century rural experience led to different kinds of poverty for blacks. In white farming districts, covering most of rural South Africa, blacks were largely unable to farm for themselves but stayed on in

[365] The Beaumont Commission emerged from the 1913 Native Land Act. Sir William Beaumont assembled advisors to determine the needs of indigenous communities and how much land should be given to them.

[366] The expression "homelands" is used to describe the eleven former "independent and self-governing" states, otherwise known as "Bantustans".

[367] The Surplus People Project, originally established to fight forced removals, continues to be engaged in land reform efforts.

[368] Francis Wilson, "A Land Out of Balance", in Mamphela Ramphele and Chris McDowell (eds.), *Restoring the Land: Environment and Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (London: Panos, 1991), pp. 27-38.

[369] Martin Adams, Ben Cousins and Siyabu Manona, "Land Tenure and Economic Development in Rural South Africa: Constraints and Opportunities", in Ben Cousins (ed.), *At the Crossroads. Land and Agrarian Reform in South Africa into the 21st Century* (Cape Town/Johannesburg: Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape/National Land Committee, 2000), pp. 129-142

substantial numbers as poorly paid farm workers. In the homelands, a dwindling proportion of the overall population scratched out a living through marginal farming despite lacking access to the market opportunities, credit facilities, infrastructure and other services regularly available to white farmers.

As democracy emerged in the 1990s, the challenge of bringing development to these areas became increasingly complex. White farmers evicted growing numbers of farm dwellers in response to market conditions, increasingly capital-intensive production methods and in anticipation of legislation to improve security and working conditions for farm workers. As the role of agriculture in the homeland economy continued to shrink, people sought to earn income in small towns and shantytown settlements. Marijuana cultivation and livestock theft became more common in some areas, and the fabric of rural homeland governance continued to deteriorate. By 2000, the former homelands were suffering South Africa's most serious poverty while desperately requiring major agrarian reform. The severe loss of rural employment opportunities across the region – in Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland in particular – was becoming a crisis to which industrial employment and urban migration could no longer provide a solution, especially as declining gold prices and more capital-intensive methods meant fewer mining jobs.[370]

Research conducted in the late 1990s indicated that 72 per cent of the poor were living in rural areas and that poverty was most severe in the provinces containing the former homelands. These studies also found that 61 per cent of South Africa's black population was poor (compared to only 1 per cent of whites). The poor in South Africa were largely black, rural and women.[371] Land shortages also fed urban unemployment, with many of the poorest splitting their time between the former homelands and urban shantytowns. As one land activist observed, "The history of land dispossession is the driving factor" in the growth of urban shanty settlements.[372] In short, the land crisis in South Africa today is both urban and rural.[373]

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[370] Edward Lahiff, "The Regional Implications of the Crisis in Zimbabwe", op. cit.

[371] Julian May, "The Structure and Composition of Rural Poverty and Livelihoods in South Africa", in Adams et al. (eds.), *At the Crossroads*, op. cit., pp. 21-34.

[372] ICG interview, South Africa, May 2003. See also National Land Committee, *South Africa's Land Reform Quagmire: What is to be Done?*, February 2003. Available at www.nlc.co.za.

[373] Demand for urban housing far outstrips supply, which is another factor fuelling land occupations. The numbers applying for housing are increasing faster than delivery of new housing, COSATU, *Ways to Take Land Reform Forward*, op. cit., p. 6.