‘Not the Democracy We Struggled For’:
The Landless People’s Movement
and the Politicization of Urban-Rural Division in South Africa

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“The LPM is national, in nine provinces…. I think everywhere they are fighting for land. Some of the problems are the same. I think it differs, but the thing is that for the eviction, people are crying everywhere.”  

-- Maureen Mnisi, Landless People’s Movement, Protea South, Soweto

“We define landless as all people with land needs, and we do not make a distinction of whether people need land for housing or farming. However, it is clear to us that the majority of landless are people who want land for building livelihoods. What we have also discovered is that the ‘rural-urban divide’ is actually false. Many workers in the urban centers can no longer hope to find work in industry, so to feed themselves and their families are increasingly looking to produce on land. So you will find in our definition of ‘landless’ people who have made land claims, and those who have made requests for land through government processes. The concept ‘landless’ is also about what kind of society we desire. We understand that on land rest many processes that go deep in understanding how people live and relate to each other and to nature. So defining oneself as landless implies that you are calling for fundamental change in relations in the broader society.”

-- Andile Mngxitama, Landless People’s Movement & National Land Committee, Johannesburg

Over the course of the twentieth century, South Africa was transformed from a predominantly rural society into the most urbanized country on the African continent. The consolidation of white minority rule during the same period profoundly shaped the nature of urban and rural spaces and the relations between them; segregation and apartheid were realized through the entrenchment of a non-white landless majority and the manipulation of urban and rural spaces along racial lines. As land was concentrated in the hands of the white minority through a

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series of laws, accompanying political discourse established a notion of the South African city as modern, cosmopolitan – and white. Rural areas provided the foil and were reconceived as underdeveloped, tribalized, and black. With the arsenal of apartheid policies, the urban-rural “divide” was imbued with a racial significance it had not had earlier.

When the Nationalist Party (NP) came to power in 1948, people categorized as white, Indian, and colored were already becoming fundamentally urban, but white political power still resided in rural farming areas and small towns. At this time, approximately three-quarters of the black population dwelled in rural areas. As the NP implemented its apartheid policies in ensuing decades, urban populations of all races grew larger, and the urban-rural divide became increasingly sharp and politicized. The apartheid government propped up traditional authorities in many rural areas, and thus governed rural black populations indirectly through un-elected chiefs. With the creation of “homelands” by the Bantu Authorities Act in 1951, the Nationalist government scheduled the complete removal of blacks from South African territory and political life. Blacks were forcibly removed from urban centers and rural areas and relegated to these ethnically-based reserves intended for eventual disassociation as independent nations. Blacks were to become citizens of their respective homelands, thus losing their South African citizenship and all political rights, including voting and access to the South African parliament. In the interim, blacks were meant to occupy rural South Africa. Though the black population in

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3 According to the 1951 census, whites and Indians were 78 percent urban, coloreds 65 percent urban. William Beinart. *Twentieth Century South Africa*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 201.
urban centers increased from under 3.5 million to about 20 million between 1960 and 1990, their place in cities was not viewed as permanent. By 1990, the electoral base of the NP and the constituencies which most vehemently supported white dominance had moved to the cities.

But to begin the story of urban-rural division at the onset of apartheid is to pick up the tale midway through. After centuries of Dutch and British settlement reduced the amount of land available for black agricultural and pastoral livelihoods, segregationist policy stripped non-white populations of their land, beginning with the notorious 1913 Natives’ Land Act. This act partitioned South Africa into areas where blacks could own land (“reserves”) and the rest of the country, where they could not. Only seven percent of the country’s total land surface was set aside for “Native reserves,” leaving the white minority population with an area ten times larger than that of the black majority population. Full realization of the policy would have been a physical impossibility and, more significantly, the white minority’s dependence upon black labor rendered total separation an untenable goal. Though complete racial separation may be the apparent intention of segregationist policies, they actually ensured the entrenchment of a migrant black labor force in support of the growing white-owned economy of farms and mines. The “boundary” between urban and rural areas was thus constantly transgressed, most notably by migrant mine and domestic workers (largely male and female, respectively). Segregationist laws, undertaken during a period of continuous expansion of the mining industry and urban economies, were central in shaping the nature of South Africa’s urban-rural

divide. Yet such a division was far more alive in hegemonic discourse than in reality. Strict urban-rural division (especially along racial lines) never actually existed in twentieth-century South Africa, and yet the political, economic, social, and racial notions associated with the “divide” were sustained for the purpose of ruling-class gain. Through the power of law and political discourse, these associations came to be taken for granted.

Today, the effects of a hegemonic discourse that naturalized urban and rural division along racial lines remain strong. Debate over land reform strategy in South Africa has largely taken for granted a strict dichotomy between urban and rural areas and, in so doing, has reinforced such a division. Urban areas are considered to have “housing” – not land – issues. Rural land reform policies are therefore debated separately from urban housing policies. Development practitioners in governmental and non-governmental circles alike tend to separate themselves into two camps: those championing increased resources for urban renewal and industrialization and those demanding rural agricultural resources for peasants and small farmers. Both of these approaches ignore the realities of interstitial spaces (spaces neither urban nor completely rural) and multiple livelihoods which find poor people drawing income from many different sources, including urban work and rural small farming. As researcher Cecilia Tacoli writes, “The division between ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ policies is based on the assumption that the physical distinction between the two areas is self-explanatory.

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6 Ibid., 1.
and uncontroversial.”⁷ These assumptions cannot accurately be made in any context, and become especially troublesome in the South African case where physical distinctions were politically re-engineered.

A problem thus arises, as urban and rural populations similarly affected by the history of land dispossession now have different entitlements to land tenure. Blacks are entitled to land in rural areas; however, under the provisions of the recently passed Communal Land Rights Bill, land rights are likely to be held communally rather than individually. The problems of the urban poor are generally attributed to homelessness and unemployment, rather than to their lack of land rights. Notions of urban-rural division thus persist in contemporary approaches to land reform, perpetuating the idea that blacks have a right to land in rural areas (based on historical dispossession and the inequalities perpetuated by apartheid) but envisioning no similar entitlement should they choose to live in urban areas.

One group that has recognized and worked to deconstruct this divide is the Landless People’s Movement (LPM) of South Africa. This study will explore the LPM’s bridging of the urban-rural divide through their organizing tactics and demands for land. Founded in July 2001, the movement is still being formed, and thus its potential impact on land reform and South African politics cannot be fully assessed. Still, its demands signify an alternative to the ways in which land issues – and urban and rural division – have long been conceived. By defining “landless” as a population which knows no rural and urban bounds, the LPM is

challenging the constitution of the urban-rural divide, and is revealing the extent
to which current approaches to land reform rely upon and perpetuate apartheid-era
politics of division. Such a concept of landlessness draws upon both current
realities of poverty and historical dispossession. With this definition, the LPM
identifies persistent poverty as a result of both the economic policies of the
current African National Congress (ANC)-led government and apartheid-era
inequalities. As LPM activist Andile Mngxitama states, defining oneself as
landless in this manner implies that one is “calling for fundamental change in
relations in the broader society.”

A democracy which takes for granted a strict rural-urban division between its citizens, according to the lines carved by the
racialized distinctions of apartheid, will likely be unable to thrive, particularly from the vantage point of those immiserated by such politics of division. Through their organizing practices and demands, LPM members reveal that urban and rural spaces – and experiences of urban and rural poverty – are far more linked than a
politicized dichotomy will allow.

In subsequent chapters, I will explore the urban-rural divide as a political
structure, relating the story from above and below – that is, both from the level of
governmental policy and from the ranks of those who struggle against that policy. I will analyze the process by which politicized urban-rural distinctions have alienated the poor and landless from powerholders and, more relevant to the arena of struggle, have divided landless actors from themselves. By tracing the construction of the urban-rural divide through land-related policies and the
thoughts of political theorists and historians, I will examine the ability of this

8 Mngxitama. Interview with Sean Jacobs. Brasil de Fato.
construction to acquire power as a political threat to movement organizing. My treatment of the LPM will focus in part on the movement’s “No Land! No Vote!” campaign. With this campaign, the LPM is calling on landless populations to refrain from voting in the 2004 national elections. The LPM contends that this is not the democracy struggled for under apartheid, and is calling into question the prospects of a democracy with a landless majority. Its challenge to the urban-rural divide exposes the extent to which the divide persists in the ANC-led government’s approach to land reform, thus revealing the tenacity of this apartheid institution. The remainder of this introduction will outline the state of land distribution in post-apartheid South Africa, describing both the ANC-led government’s approach to land reform and the role of landless populations in shaping land policy, and will offer background on the Landless People’s Movement.

**Land Reform Post-Apartheid: An Overview**

The success of South Africa’s democratic transition, beginning with the first democratic election in 1994, has been limited both by economic pressures to develop according to the dictates of unprecedented globalization and the residual effects of apartheid policies. These constraints intersect in the case of land reform. A decade into the new democracy, racially-skewed patterns of land distribution remain virtually unchanged, as 86 percent of land is in the possession of 60,000 white farmers and the state. Approximately 34.9 million blacks – 75 percent of the population – hold the remaining 14 percent. The issue of land

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9These figures are widely used by government, NGOs, and the press, but the definitive statistical source is unclear. These figures refer to land apportionments according to apartheid legislation
maldistribution, and the racialized divisions which underpin it, must be addressed in order to give traction to South Africa’s democratic revolution. Prospects for the country’s political and economic development remain linked to the land, insofar as pervasive change will only be achieved by fundamentally altering the racialized property relations created by apartheid and segregation. As long as everyday life remains unchanged from the days of apartheid for South Africa’s poor majority, their faith in the democratic system may continue to wane.\(^{10}\)

When Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in 1994, land reform topped their agenda. The ANC had promised land reform, particularly in rural areas, ever since its 1955 Freedom Charter declaration that “the land shall be shared among those who work it.” However, the party took power at a time of unprecedented globalization, and the pressure to promote economic growth, ensure continued food self-sufficiency, and create an investor-friendly environment was overwhelming. Combined with the need to foster national racial reconciliation, adequately addressing the needs of the nation’s landless population would prove a formidable challenge.\(^{11}\) Nonetheless, when the final draft of the South African constitution was agreed upon in 1996, it allowed for rather comprehensive land reform through three channels: *redistribution* to ensure equitable distribution of land ownership, *restitution* to provide land or compensation to those who were dispossessed, and *tenure reform* (detailed in the next chapter), and the 2 percent that has been subsequently delivered to blacks through the land reform process.


to formalize land rights and provide security under various forms of locally-appropriate tenure.

As these promises subsequently became policy initiatives, their momentum slowed. The ANC’s Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) committed the government to redistribute 30 percent of agricultural land between 1994 and 1999. As of the beginning of 2002, less than two percent of land had been redistributed through the land reform program.\(^{12}\) The government has chosen a market-based approach to land redistribution, largely based on “willing buyer-willing seller” principles. This approach has been rationalized on the basis of maintaining efficiency in the agricultural sector and retaining investor confidence. Critics argue that efficiency and equity are not – and cannot be – achieved simultaneously when it comes to land redistribution, and thus maintain that the landless poor are not finding redress through the market.\(^{13}\) In terms of restitution, action on claims has been slow due to bureaucratic constraints. Of the 68,878 restitution claims received by the Department of Land Affairs, only 12,678 were settled by the target date at the end of 2001. Less than 40,000 predominantly urban households have benefited from restitution, more than 40 percent of which received monetary compensation instead of land restoration.\(^{14}\) Long-awaited tenure security legislation was only passed in February 2004 and this final form of the Communal Land Rights Bill has been criticized by many in the land sector as

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 14.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 13.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 14.
being antithetical to rural democratization. The legislation would give chiefs in former apartheid “homelands” the responsibility of administering land communally, with the intended result of extending tenure security to a third of South Africans. Critics argue that it is undemocratic to give such power to unelected chiefs, since rural communities and individuals will have no choice over their land rights or land administration arrangements. Stark gender inequalities of most rural areas will also be exacerbated; land rights of rural women will be undermined by placing their administration in the hands of mostly male chiefs. The bill states that 30 percent of elected traditional councilors must be women, but there are no sanctions described for enforcing this percentage.

While the ANC-led government conceived its land policy, the landless simultaneously developed their own demands, attitudes and expectations. Most accounts of the early debates over land reform ignore the participation of landless people. Marginalized landless people gained access to policy debate through non-governmental organization (NGO)-sponsored events such as the 1993 “Back to the Land” Campaign and the 1994 Community Land Conference. Both of these events were organized by the National Land Committee (NLC), a Johannesburg-based national land rights NGO. The strength of the demands of landless people has led NLC researcher Wellington Thwala, among others, to predict that land distribution “will either be resolved through a fundamental restructuring of the

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government’s land reform program, or it will be resolved by a fundamental restructuring of property relations by the people themselves.”

Throughout the 1990s, most were optimistic that land reform could be achieved through governmental policy. The role of land sector NGOs quickly shifted from supporting opposition struggle to carrying out the technical work of information dissemination, capacity-building, legal support, research, mediation, and other forms of intervention aimed at identifying and closing the legal and bureaucratic gaps in the new land reform programs. After 1994, the role of the landless was merely to complete the necessary organizational and bureaucratic requirements to “place themselves in the relevant queue, and then wait for the promised land.”

Landless communities filed restitution claims with the Department of Land Affairs or made applications for land through new reform programs.

Optimism waned as the government proved slow to deliver and restitution claims were tangled in bureaucracy. The Landless People’s Movement is one of dozens of local, regional, and national social movements which have arisen in South Africa since the close of the 1990s. It is the only national-level land movement. And, as researcher Stephen Greenberg observes, among the re-emerging grassroots movements, it is “perhaps unique in its transcendence of the urban-rural divide.”

This aspect of the LPM lies at the heart of this study.

17 Thwala, 1.
18 Eveleth and Mngxitama, 18.
The Landless People’s Movement: Background

The LPM’s short history has been documented most thoroughly by the staff of the National Land Committee, and the present background section draws heavily upon the efforts of the NLC’s Ann Eveleth and Andile Mngxitama. The LPM receives a great deal of support and resources from the National Land Committee, including funding, informal use of office space, and media and legal assistance, but the movement is working towards greater autonomy. The LPM receives its funding from UK-based War On Want and Oxfam-Belgium. In a paper discussing the rise of the LPM as South Africa’s first national landless people’s movement since the 1920s, Mngxitama and Eveleth cite four central factors in the emergence of the LPM:

1) The failure of the post-apartheid land reform program.
2) The ANC-led government’s abandonment of its social democratic project in favor of neo-liberal policies, marked notably by the 1996 adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy.
3) The “Zimbabwe factor,” which gave both example and confidence to land-hungry South Africans, primarily by proving that it is possible for property to be alienated from the settler colonists.
4) Finally, the inspiration South African landless people and the NGO activists working with them have drawn from the rise of the anti-globalization movement and the resulting links made, particularly with Brazil’s Landless Worker’s Movement (MST). Not only has it become possible to envisage a movement for land reform based on landless people’s participation and ownership of their struggle, but the politics of anti-globalization demands the active involvement of the landless, and not just the NGOs and other activists claiming to speak on their behalf.\(^\text{20}\)

As Eveleth and Mngxitama observe, the significance of these factors can be seen from the formative documents of the LPM. The LPM’s founding statement, drafted and adopted in August 2001, outlines the movement’s disappointments

\(^\text{20}\) Eveleth and Mngxitama, 7.
with the speed of land delivery by the ANC. The statement also drew the link between the LPM’s burgeoning land occupation strategies and those underway in neighboring Zimbabwe, with a resolution to invite President Robert Mugabe to offer insight on his “fast-track” land reform program.21

The impetus for the Landless People’s Movement grew as the slow pace of land reform was combined with growing unemployment and rising food costs.22 These factors worsened socio-economic conditions for urban and rural poor. However, rural land restitution claimants and labor tenants on white-owned farms lost their patience most quickly; they were particularly frustrated by the worsening conditions on white commercial farms, on-going evictions from farms that the state was not acting upon, and continuing farm violence and human rights abuses by white farmers.23 In the months before the July 23-24, 2001 national meeting of landless people that led to the birth of the LPM, such frustrations increasingly took the form of land occupations by landless groups in various stages of self-organization. Disparate groups of labor tenants, loosely linked through the NLC’s national network, began to realize that they had common concerns. This led to a series of meetings in March and April 2001, and a realization that landless people might be able to give force to their demands by uniting at a national level.24

Though the LPM began as a rural-based movement, it spread rapidly into the urban center of Johannesburg, and then throughout Gauteng province, during

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22 Eveleth and Mngxitama, 3.
23 Ibid., 4.
24 Ibid., 4.
2002. Informal settlements surrounding Johannesburg were suddenly facing a new wave of forced removals. As rent levels rose, people faced increasing numbers of evictions, carried out by government-contracted private security forces in red overalls dubbed “red ants.” The urban and rural aspects of the LPM thus began as defenses against local threats. Indeed, when asked to compare the situations faced by urban and rural landless, LPM Gauteng regional chairperson Maureen Mnisi zeroed in on evictions: “I think everywhere they are fighting for land. Some of the problems are the same. It differs, but the thing is that for the eviction, people are crying everywhere.”

Though the LPM is calling for changes in national land policy, their daily efforts are largely defensive, and are focused on preventing evictions from rural farms and urban settlements and apartment complexes. The LPM now counts 100,000 members nationally, with roughly 90 percent of these in rural areas. Still, LPM leadership finds it difficult to draw distinct boundaries between urban and rural, since some rural land claimants are living in urban areas. In rural areas, there is a roughly even split between LPM members who are living on white-owned farms and in former homelands.

**Existing Empirical Studies of the LPM**

Besides the National Land Committee’s efforts to document the LPM’s history, very little has been written about the LPM. Altogether, three reports have studied various aspects of the movement. Bongani Mnisi, a young LPM

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26 Membership is only loosely defined at this stage within the LPM. It includes those with very high levels of involvement and those only sporadically involved who lend their support during marches and organized actions.
member from Protea South, Soweto, surveyed and interviewed 46 members of the
Gauteng branch after receiving training in formal research methodology from the
Centre for Civil Society at the University of Natal. His findings, compiled in
April 2003, offer insight on the political and socio-economic profile of this urban
membership base, members’ motivations and expectations for their involvement
in the movement, and their reflections on the LPM’s campaigns. I have cited his
data to add a quantitative complement to some of the findings of my own
interviews. Victor Thoka of the Rural Development Services Network in
Johannesburg conducted a review of three civil society organizations’ positions
on land reform, from which a draft report was completed in June 2003. His study
of the National Land Committee, Landless People’s Movement, and Land Access
Movement of South Africa consists in large part of a literature review on the
agrarian question and is weakened by his lack of any interviews with members of
the organizations under review. He relies heavily upon their official policy
documents, but admittedly cannot verify the organizations’ positions without
having spoken with their members. Still, his work raises valuable questions
pertaining to the class basis of land sector civil society, some of which I address
in my study. Finally, Stephen Greenberg, an independent researcher
commissioned by the Centre for Civil Society, has produced a report on urban-
rural linkages in the LPM.28 His report draws upon interviews with LPM
members in Gauteng and Mpumalanga provinces and focuses largely on the ways

28 Greenberg’s study was completed at the end of February 2004, and the specifics of his study
were unknown to me before its publication.
in which post-apartheid economic modernization has created an opening for organizing across urban and rural spaces. Our approaches to the issue of urban-rural linkages within the LPM are quite different, and he does not interrogate the urban-rural divide itself as a political construct as I do here.

**Empirical and Theoretical Methodologies**

Rather than attempting to scrutinize the structures and experiences of such a young movement, I have turned my eye towards understanding the significance of the LPM’s demands within South Africa’s broader democratic project. I initially intended to study regional variation in the LPM’s organizing tactics based upon how its members view their relationship with land. Interviews with LPM members quickly revealed the importance of urban-rural connections within the movement, and thus I chose to focus my study on this unique phenomenon. My theoretical framework similarly evolved into a study of the historical construction of the urban-rural divide and its political nature and significance. Drawing upon both historical and political scientific thought, I have constructed a theoretical framework that reveals the political nature of South Africa’s urban-rural divide and exposes its economic, social and racial significance.

The empirical component of this study consists of interviews conducted with 33 LPM members and organizers from Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces. Gauteng was chosen as the study’s urban element, as this province has by far the highest urban population, with 97 percent of its population considered urban. My interviews were conducted in Johannesburg and its surrounding townships, which together constitute Africa’s second largest city (after Cairo),

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29 Thwala, 7.
with a population of 11 million. The township of Soweto alone has a population of two million. I conducted interviews in areas where LPM activity is particularly intense, including the townships of Protea South in Soweto, Eikenhof, and Thembelihle, and in the township of Orange Farm, where it is less robust. In the inner-city, I interviewed LPM members in the neighborhoods of Hillbrow and Berea. For the rural component, I interviewed farm workers near the rural town of Ingogo in northern KwaZulu-Natal, located about 60 miles from Newcastle. Ingogo is home to the LPM’s national organizer, Mangaliso Kubheka, and so was selected as the rural basis for this study because of the budding level of LPM involvement and activity surrounding Kubheka’s presence. KwaZulu-Natal was further appropriate because it has the highest rural population in South Africa, with 57 percent of its people living in rural areas. Interviewees represented a range of age groups, from members in their late teens to those in their 60s. A relatively equal gender balance was achieved in urban areas, while rural interviewees were disproportionately male. Interviews were conducted both individually and in groups of two to four. About half of the interviews were conducted in English, when the interviewee was comfortably fluent and preferred to be interviewed in English. The rest of the interviews were conducted in Zulu through an interpreter. Zulu was the first language of those interviewed in KwaZulu-Natal, and was spoken fluently by interviewees in urban areas.

Given this introduction to the Landless People’s Movement, the status of land distribution in South Africa, and my methodology, the next chapter will integrate a history of land ownership under segregation and apartheid with a

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30 Thwala, 6.
review of political scientific and historical literature on the urban-rural divide in South Africa. This syncretistic narrative will reveal the nature of the urban-rural divide as a politicized institution.
CHAPTER TWO: 
THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE IN HISTORY AND THEORY

South Africa’s urban and rural spaces – and the boundary between them – have been constituted through centuries of power struggles, policies, and shifting theoretical justifications. This chapter will trace the political construction of the urban-rural divide through a unique combination of sources, and will provide both historical background and a review of historical and political science literature on land reform as it specifically relates to urban-rural interaction in South Africa. The urban-rural divide – and its hegemonic power – cannot be understood without an analysis of land policies, resistance against those policies, and the academic thought of political theorists and historians who examined (and often legitimated) the divide. Here, I will examine competing explanations in political theory and historical literature for South Africa’s urban-rural divide and the economic, political, and social reasons for its invention.

The history of land distribution in South Africa is very well-documented. I will examine some of the existing political and historical literature in two ways: that which is now part of the history in question and that which is currently being debated as theory. Historiography and political theory of the past was largely used to legitimate the urban-rural divide. Later theories began to interrogate the urban-rural divide itself and are currently in use and undergoing revision; these include the dual economy and Marxian cheap labor theses. A modified cheap labor thesis offers the most insight on the intersection of political and economic forces in creating the urban-rural divide. By emphasizing the role of migrant labor, this line
of argument further explains why the political boundary between urban and rural was constantly transgressed. My own rendering of the history of land distribution will thus rely most heavily upon this historical approach.

**Constructing the Urban-Rural Divide in 20th Century South Africa**

*Land and Segregation: 1913-1948*

**1913: The Natives’ Land Act**

Beginning with the Natives’ Land Act in 1913, a series of segregationist laws created a landless majority in South Africa. The South African Native National Congress (later the ANC) found its first political battle in the 1913 act. In response to the law, one of the party’s founding members, Sol Plaatje, penned *Native Life in South Africa*, a characterization of black, rural life preceding and following the 1913 act. In it he wrote: “Awakening on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth.”

His observation highlights the interlocked nature of the economic and political consequences of land restrictions upon blacks. While land laws increasingly entrenched blacks as laborers within the South African economy, blacks also became less and less citizens of South Africa. As parallel institutions were created to handle “native affairs,” the national government became one increasingly intended to serve only whites and their interests.

The Natives’ Land Act was the first legislative attempt to divide South Africa into separate areas for blacks and whites. As historian Colin Bundy

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31 See Appendix 1 for a timeline of land distribution and migrant labor up to 1913.

observes, “The 1913 Act had, of course, been preceded by a vast number of land laws in the British colonies and the Boer republics before 1910: laws controlling squatting, regulating tenancies, imposing taxes and rents, and escalating the penalties and punishments for their transgression. But the 1913 law – while it echoed details from earlier legislation – went much further.” The act partitioned South Africa into areas where blacks could own land (“reserves”) and the rest of the country, which was intended for white use. Only seven percent of the country’s total land surface was set aside for “Native reserves,” leaving the white minority with an area ten times larger than that of the black majority. The Natives’ Land Act also controlled who was allowed to live on white-owned farms, and under what circumstances, thus expelling “squatters” (at this time considered someone who owns livestock and, having no land of his own, hires a farm or grazing and ploughing rights from a landowner) from their homes.

Three main – largely economic – explanations for the passage of the Natives’ Land Act have been highlighted by Anne Harley and Romy Fotheringham: the principle of territorial segregation, the increase of the provision of cheap black labor, and the reduction of competition from black peasant farmers. The act was successful in achieving these objectives; still, in order to allow access to black labor, territorial segregation would not mean total separation. These economic reasons for racialized land distribution were intimately linked with the consolidation of the political order of white minority

34 Harley and Fotheringham, 13.
35 Sol Plaatje, 21.
36 Harley and Fotheringham, 14.
rule. Bundy writes of this relationship: “Fundamental to the construction of an unjust, inequitable, repressive and brutal social order is an unjust, punitive and untenable allocation of land and rights to land.”37 As blacks were denied access to land and land rights, their political rights, stability, and capacity for recourse and representation before the law were denied in the same move.

Blacks reacted to this massive curtailing of their remaining land rights with considerable resistance. The South African Native National Congress organized protest meetings against the act and sent a delegation to England to protest. Still, the blow against black rural farmers was not avoided, and the rural economy suffered from being denied a land base and access to resources.38 The rise and eventual rural shift of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in the 1920s marked a surge in the national land rights struggle. Eveleth and Mngxitama highlight the urban-rural dynamics of the ICU’s work: “The ICU’s emergence created a new dynamic and energy for liberation struggle politics, in particular for its clear links of the land question to the liberation of Africans, and its efforts to articulate the demands of the peasantry. While the ICU initially drew its membership from the urban ‘detribalised’ Africans, in later years it became a rural protest movement, focusing on the land question and the oppressive situation on farms and in industry.”39 Though peasant movements and localized resistance swelled throughout the 1920s, the ICU succumbed to ideological and leadership difficulties in 1929.

37 Colin Bundy in Harley and Fotheringham, 30.
39 Eveleth and Mngxitama, 6.
1927: The Native Administration Act

Near the time of the ICU’s demise, the Native Administration Act was passed. The major outcome of the act was the establishment of the Native Affairs Department, a set of institutions intended to deal solely with blacks. The act reestablished customary authorities and extended systems of customary courts and law, but under the control and direction of white officials of the Native Affairs Department. Leading paramount chiefs were supported by substantial stipends from the state; local headmen received smaller amounts, which were still two or three times the size of a migrant worker’s earnings. By creating a distinct department to handle the affairs of the black majority, it became even more apparent that the South African government as a whole was not intended to deal with black interests. The 1927 act has been seen as an attempt by segregationist politicians to “’retribalize’ African society in order to defuse national political organization.”

1936: The Native Trust and Land Act

In 1936, the Native Trust and Land Act “released” more land for occupation by blacks, potentially increasing the amount of land for blacks from 7 to 13 percent. The act ultimately placed an absolute limit on the amount of land that would be made available for black settlement. The 1936 act was the result of vigorous debate between government land commissioners and white landowners and pressure groups. Pressure groups succeeded in reducing various proposals that sought to increase land for black reserves to levels that they viewed as too

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40 Beinart, 112.
41 Ibid.
generous. Contention surrounding the law is generally viewed not as an issue of blacks having more land, but of white farmers losing black labor should blacks be afforded more land and independence.\textsuperscript{42} In its final form, the 1936 act also placed restrictions on blacks living and working on white-owned farms, and severely limited squatting and labor tenancy. In addition, the 1936 Land Act established the South African Native Trust, which was intended to acquire and develop land for black settlement, under the direction of the Native Affairs Department. The black tenants of these lands were subject to the department’s rules and regulations. Rules included limits on the amount of land each tenant could plough, and land allotments were generally considered too small for subsistence.\textsuperscript{43} Thus black wage labor was further encouraged.

The prevalence of blacks living and working on white-owned farms was ironically highlighted when such farms were released under the 1936 act. As Essy Letsoalo points out, the area of land occupied by blacks was not actually increased by the 1936 act, since many blacks were already living outside the bounds of the 1913 reserves, providing labor for white farmers. 68,000 blacks already lived on the white-owned farms released under the 1936 act in the Transvaal region (present-day Gauteng).\textsuperscript{44} Letsoalo also states, however, that the government did not complete the process of buying released land from white owners following the passage of the law, and so the intended 13 percent was never released to blacks. The challenge of actually enforcing segregationist policy meant that racialized territorial boundaries were not wholly achieved;

\textsuperscript{42} Letsoalo, 39.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 40.
nevertheless, the power dynamics and political ramifications of the laws firmly took root.

Throughout the segregationist period (1913-1948), many academic historians bolstered segregation and urban-rural division. Afrikaner historians dominated much of twentieth-century South African history, and they largely sought to explain and justify segregationist policies beginning with the passage of the Natives’ Land Act in 1913 and ending in 1948 when the apartheid regime came into power. Afrikaner historians justified racist commitments by bolstering their ethnic identity, particularly through the narrative of dominance over black slaves and the “Great Trek” eastward in the 1830s, marked by struggle against and defeat of blacks.45 “Manifest destiny” genre accounts gave Afrikaners a sense of possessing a God-given right to rule. Though blacks appeared as defeated natives in some stories, for the most part, they did not enter these Afrikaner historical narratives. Scholarship was largely about whites, for whites; academic Afrikaner history was constructed in opposition to the work of English-speaking historians who placed emphasis on the role of the British government and settler presence in South Africa.46

Land and Landlessness Under the Apartheid System: From 1948

The Nationalist Party came into power in 1948, transitioning segregationist policies into full apartheid. Apartheid era laws sought to bolster the divide between urban and rural areas, and, in the process, fabricated new

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definitions of what constituted urban and rural. The apartheid government’s power was strengthened by its control over definitions – by deciding who was “non-white” or “surplus” and who belonged in which “homeland.” As Letsoalo writes, apartheid laws sought to make blacks “foreigners in South Africa,” as the South African minority government “embarked on a policy of denationalizing its majority Black population and forcing them to be citizens of tribal homelands.”

Central to stripping blacks of their South African citizenship was the curtailment of their rights to occupy urban areas. Under the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act 52 of 1951, the Minister of Native Affairs acquired the power to remove blacks from public or privately owned land and into resettlement camps. Section 10 of the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952 limited the right of blacks to permanently reside in towns to those who either had been born in a town and lived there continuously for at least 15 years, had been employed there continuously for 15 years, or had worked continuously for the same employer for at least 10 years. Blacks’ presence in urban areas hinged upon their economic utility.

The Bantustan or “homeland” project relied on certain inventions of history. The homelands drawn up by the apartheid government were fragmented scraps of undesirable land, without any basis in indigenous history. The system of tribal authorities was distorted, as customary law was re-written to give powers to the chief which he had never before possessed. In 1959, the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act was passed, which provided for the eventual self-

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47 Ibid., 43.
government of the Bantustans. This was the ultimate move towards stripping blacks of their South African citizenship. The Nationalist government claimed that there were no black citizens of South Africa. Blacks were to be citizens of individual, ethnically-based Bantustans – or, rather, subjects of customary authority in those areas.

Between 1960 and 1983, over 3.5 million people were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated to Bantustans. According to historian William Beinart, “Millions of people found themselves in barely planned rural slums, which were urban in respect of their population density and lack of agricultural opportunity, but rural in relation to facilities, services, and employment.”

People were driven out of their homes, loaded onto trucks and transported to the homelands. Their homes were bulldozed; entire neighborhoods in urban areas were demolished and rebuilt for white occupation. Forced removals revealed the large extent to which blacks had created communities in urban areas, and dispelled any myths about blacks’ perpetual rural lifestyle which included only temporary trips into urban areas. Areas such as Sophiatown in Johannesburg were thriving cultural centers, completely destroyed by forced removals. Such communities were unable to rebuild elsewhere, as people were sent to disparate homelands. Through the terror of forced removals, apartheid South Africa became a country “artificially deurbanized.”

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49 Harley and Fotheringham, 36.
50 Beinart, 214.
place in cities, forced removals created rural reservoirs for labor and would ensure the predominance of migrant labor.

The Nature of South Africa’s Urban-Rural Linkages

Migrant Labor: Linking the Divide

The segregation intended by the series of land acts passed during the first half of the 20th century was never realized. Partly due to lax enforcement, partly the result of continuous dependence upon black labor on white-owned farms and, increasingly, in cities and mines, blacks were never contained within legislated bounds. When the Natives Land Act passed in 1913, over 200,000 black workers were working in gold mines in and around urban areas. Legal gestures toward total segregation were paralleled by a dependency upon black labor.

South Africa’s urban-rural divide was constantly transgressed by migrant labor. Historian William Beinart reminds us that migrant labor was not unique to South Africa, but instead was characteristic of many industrializing societies, particularly when industrialization took place in enclaves and there remained a large population engaged in subsistence farming. What was peculiar to southern Africa were the scale and longevity of labor migrancy. After the discovery of diamonds in 1867 (at present-day Kimberley) and gold in 1886 (on the Witwatersrand, at present-day Johannesburg), combined with increasing economic pressure upon black peasant families, black men were migrating to growing urban areas to work in the mines. (At this time, women largely remained

52 Beinart, 28.
53 Ibid., 30.
in rural areas to work the land, according to the dictates of a patriarchal division of labor). Ironically, what would come to be a very exploitative system of employment was initially viewed by many blacks as a relatively favorable arrangement. Many rural communities favored a labor system in which male migrants could work for a short period and return home with their wages. Many blacks were thus able to maintain a rural homestead, along with their familial and cultural connections, while participating in the urban labor market.

However, conditions of migrancy and labor in the mines became increasingly exploitative. Men were housed in male-only compounds at the diamond mines in Kimberley after 1885, and shortly thereafter in Johannesburg. Compounds were explicitly introduced to deter diamond theft by blacks, but were also expedient ways to prevent absenteeism, increase oversight, and reduce costs of feeding and housing workers. Contracts became longer, binding men to the mines for upwards of ten months out of the year. Employers were able to regulate all aspects of workers’ lives, imposing random searches and curfews, and punishing transgressions with public lashings and other forms of violence.

Further, compounds allowed employers to avoid paying wages that would support workers’ entire families, as families remained in rural areas and produced their own food.

In *Townsmen or Tribesmen*, a study of Xhosa migrancy to and from the town of East London during the 1950s, Philip and Iona Mayer detail the extent to which blacks’ presence in urban areas was contingent upon their labor: “The

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54 Ibid., 35.
55 Ibid., 30.
56 Ibid., 31.
migrant is not only permitted but compelled to participate in the White-dominated world. Under present regulations, if he fails to get himself employment in the East London area the authorities can return him from there to the country. But the limits of participation are narrow and rigid. In the White world the Black man can hardly act but as the employee of a White employer or the subject of White authorities…”\textsuperscript{57}\textsuperscript{57} Indeed, according to the stipulations of the 1952 Urban Areas Act, black men and women were not intended to put down roots or even have a purpose in the “white world” of urban areas outside of their service to whites. Blacks who were not migrants and had been living and working in urban areas for a decade or longer were able to legally establish themselves in cities, with access to housing and services. However, as Beinart asserts, this was part of the apartheid government’s increasingly explicit attempt “to divide urban African ‘insiders’ from rural migrant ‘outsiders.’”\textsuperscript{58}\textsuperscript{58} Migrants were considered perpetually “tribalized” and tied to rural areas and authority. This was the explicit desire of the 1948 Board of Trade and Industries, which warned that “the detribalization of large numbers of Natives [and the] accumulation of rootless masses concentrated in the large industrial centers is a matter which no government can sit back and watch.”\textsuperscript{59}\textsuperscript{59} Still, though their presence in urban areas was usually considered legally impermanent, blacks were an undeniable presence in urban areas throughout apartheid.

\textsuperscript{58} Beinart, 158.
\textsuperscript{59} Mamdani, 100.
Despite the prominence of migrant labor, it never replaced rural livelihoods. The interactions between urban and rural areas are far more complex than prevailing notions of the linear proletarianization of blacks will allow. In his discussion of the effects of migrant labor on contemporary land rights debates, sociologist Richard Levin highlights the ties which have been sustained between rural and urban areas. He writes that the flow of migration is by no means unidirectional and rural social differentiation “has created a diversity of needs characterized by a set of multifaceted land-use requirements as well as land-related aspirations.”60 Urban-rural division is not strict in the lived practice of migrants, and does not involve the flow from a life of rural peasantry to one of an urban “modern” lifestyle. This condescending notion of progress ignores the interrelated nature of urban and rural livelihoods in the experience of many migrant laborers.

**Beginning to Deconstruct the Urban-Rural Divide**

Beginning in the 1960s, liberal historians began to address the issue of race and systematic segregation more directly, and emphasized the economic and social impetus for segregation and apartheid. The prevailing view became one of South Africa as a “‘dual economy’ with two distinct societies: a white urban and capitalist agrarian system on the one hand and a rural impoverished and stagnating African sector on the other.”61 Interactions between the parallel economies were perceived to be minimal. The actual dependency of the “white

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61 Ibid., 2.
urban” sector upon the “rural black” sector was largely ignored, as was the reality of intermixing between the two “societies.” The dual economy thesis thus falls short when forced to confront the reality of the role of migrant laborers and the presence of blacks in urban areas.

In the 1970s, apartheid-era historiography shifted away from social and cultural readings and towards increasingly economic ones. Historian Colin Bundy’s 1972 essay “The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry” explicitly sought to correct dubious economic historiography of the 1960s (specifically the dual economy thesis), which he deemed as “in need of a continuing re-examination.”62 He concludes his essay thus:

If I have adequately demonstrated that which I set out to, then the dualist model of the South African economy is a misleading one: the distance between the races in economic, cultural, and political spheres was not an original state lessened by capitalist development, but rather the outcome of that development; and explanations of the underdevelopment of the peasant sector which rest upon the inherited backwardness and inadequacy of that sector are incorrectly premised.63

Bundy fought prevailing notions of blacks’ historical inferiority by implicating the white government and white-run industry in the direct economic oppression of blacks. This marked a positive shift in historiography, and Marx-influenced historians and political scientists writing in the 1970s would take it a step further.

Neo-Marxists argued that, following the discovery of gold and diamonds (in 1867 and 1886 respectively), social and political systems were put in place to ensure a supply of cheap black labor. With what came to be known as the cheap

63 Ibid., 20.
labor thesis, largely attributable to Harold Wolpe, scholars explained apartheid “not by the irrational racism of a pre-industrial colonial frontier, but as the direct product of South Africa’s unique process of industrialization” (following the rapid rise of the mining industry and continuation of capitalist agriculture).64 Thiven Reddy describes the cheap labor thesis and its theoretical underpinnings:

Underlying much of this radical literature is the basic Marxist postulate that within the capitalist mode of production is the (necessary, structural) desire to lower the average cost of labor-power and thereby increase surplus value. In South Africa, African migrant labor from the rural reserves functioned to lower the labor costs and in this sense segregationist political organization complemented capitalist development.65

The cheap labor thesis was the first to acknowledge that people, namely blacks, were regularly and systematically moving between urban and rural areas, and that South Africa did not consist of two distinct societies. Furthermore, the divide was construed as inherently exploitative. The divide itself was finally being analyzed, and actors were implicated in its creation.

Criticisms of the cheap labor thesis follow the lines of most critiques of Marxist thought, as they highlight the weakness of a single factor explanation (capitalist expansion) for segregation and apartheid.66 Racism and other ideological components of separation are suppressed in the neo-Marxist reading, and appear only as outcomes of the capitalist system. When used in conjunction with other historical explanations, however, the cheap labor thesis contributes much to an understanding of the origins of the legislated urban-rural divide.

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64 Ibid., 3.
65 Reddy, 59.
66 Ibid., 58.
Though the cheap labor thesis goes far in explaining the cause of segregation and apartheid, theorists in this vein largely fail to recognize nuances of the urban-rural divide. Reddy critiques the cheap labor thesis and offers a reconceptualization of South African history. Reddy emphasizes not only the direct function of the state in creating and reproducing cheap labor, but also its indirect function of maintaining social control.67 He analyzes white supremacy as a dominant discourse on the “Other,” arguing that non-white inhabitants of South Africa were constructed by dominant whites as “the ‘savage Other,’ the ‘ethnic/tribal Other,’ whose utmost function was as a ‘source of labor.’”68 The differentiation of “the Other” became “the tradition” “in the enthusiastic hands of the National Party.”69 While the cheap labor thesis fails to explain the thoroughness of social control under apartheid (as legislation penetrated all aspects of daily and personal life), Reddy’s study of hegemony and the construction of identity addresses fears of miscegenation and the importance of protecting “civilization.”70 In light of Reddy’s analysis, it becomes clearer why the distinction between urban and rural came to symbolize more than the division between capitalists and a laborer class.

Mahmood Mamdani’s Citizen and Subject (1996) constitutes a methodological shift in the study of rural areas in Africa, and of the relationship between urban and rural spaces. Mamdani’s analysis de-emphasizes the mode of livelihood and focuses on the mode of rule in understanding distinctions between

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67 Ibid., 63.
68 Ibid., 1.
69 Ibid., 60.
70 Ibid. 63.
urban and rural spaces. In this view, South Africa is, as other African colonial
states were and are, a bifurcated state, organized differently in urban areas than in
rural ones.\textsuperscript{71} This state “contains a duality: two forms of power under a single
hegemonic authority.”\textsuperscript{72} The organization of the colonial state, according to
Mamdani, is a response to the central dilemma of the “native question,” which
essentially demands, “how can a tiny and foreign minority rule over an
indigenous majority?”\textsuperscript{73} Both direct and indirect rule were attempted in South
Africa, and became complementary. When forced to deal with the “native
question,” the apartheid government chose to prop up and rule through traditional
authorities, thus making blacks into subjects of tribal authority rather than citizens
of the South African nation. The ultimate move was the creation of “homelands,”
which were intended to completely remove blacks from South African territory
and political life. As a result, the urban and the rural became distinguishable as
the sites of urban citizens of democratic states and rural subjects of customary
authority.

A polarity between urban and rural thus emerged, supported by hegemonic
discourse. Historical accounts such as the dual economy and cheap labor theses
promoted a view of social reality as “a series of binary opposites.”\textsuperscript{74} “Premodern”
and “precapitalism” came to be seen as residual or deviant cases, each to be
understood “not in terms of what it was, but with reference to what it was not.”\textsuperscript{75}
The rural came to be associated with terms without analytical merit of their own –

\textsuperscript{71} Mamdani, 18.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 9.
premodernity, underdevelopment, precapitalism – and stood in contrast with the superior and more advanced urban. The rural has generally been seen as lacking in urban modes of livelihood or in institutions of civil society.

The distinction between urban and rural spaces was distorted and redefined under apartheid. “Urban” and “rural” took on new hegemonic meaning when employed to enforce segregation and apartheid. “Urban” was engineered to mean not only modern and cosmopolitan, but also white, while “rural” was the backwards and underdeveloped home of blacks. In this sense, the urban-rural divide was solidified through hegemonic discourse.

Urban-rural Linkages and Resistance

Any effective opposition in practice, and any theoretical analysis that would lead to one, must link the rural and the urban in ways that have not yet been done… In South Africa, though the home of the strongest and the most imaginative civil society-based resistance on the continent, reform has floundered on the walls of customary power.76

-- Mahmood Mamdani

Activists have long recognized the logistical challenges of organizing movements that straddle urban and rural areas. In urban settings, townships and hostels brought people together in close quarters, and hence provided for the sharing of ideas and resources. Organization and communication between more far-flung rural communities was significantly more difficult. Migrant workers often facilitated a link between these spaces, acting as conduits of resistance ideology. Still, through the end of the 1960s, most struggles were fought in rural settings, catalyzed by land dispossession and forced removals. With the growth of

76 Mamdani, 297.
the manufacturing industry during the 1970s, industrial trade unions emerged in urban areas and the focus of resistance began to de-emphasize land and agricultural issues. In other African countries, including Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia, land rights formed an increasingly prominent foundation for rural struggles against colonial rule. Such struggles often directly challenged traditional rural hierarchies; they attempted to cast off the authority of both traditional leaders and colonial administrations, largely because chiefs and peasants had come into direct conflict over land rights. Still, since national resistance movements were increasingly organized from urban areas in South Africa, challenging structures of rural authority was not a central factor of democratization and liberation struggles.

Due to the greater ease of organizing sustained struggle in urban areas, these sites came to dominate and shape resistance discourse and objectives. Urban-based movements centered around the informal settlements on the fringes of cities, where increasing numbers of blacks had access to work, but no housing. Resistance remains strongest in these township areas today. The predominance of the urban within social movements meant that movement demands were often weighted in favor of urban needs, or that rural demands were the first to be sacrificed. In 1955, the ANC’s Freedom Charter, produced at the Congress of the People, including many demands focused on rural areas:

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77 Thoka, 25.
79 Ibid., 99.
80 Mamdani, 97-8.
The land shall be shared among those who work it!

- Restrictions on land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided among those who work it to banish famine and land hunger;
- The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers;
- Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work the land;
- All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose;
- People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labor and farm prisons shall be abolished.

Socialist elements of the ANC charter that called for land to be shared among those who work it and for an end to famine and land hunger were among those demands which were compromised early in their post-apartheid administration. The redistribution of land had been a key part of the ANC platform since its inception, even though the party was urban-based. Though individual ANC activists made contact with rural African farmers in the reserves around issues of tenure security, cattle ownership, and ending racial restrictions on the purchase and sale of land, ANC leadership was only weakly organized in the reserves.81

The only connection that continued to be made between the land question and the urban concerns by traditional liberation movements (such as the ANC, Pan Africanist Congress and the South African Communist Party) was on the issue of housing, as forced removals affected rural constituencies and those living within and around cities. Victor Thoka considers the urban-rural division within these movements to be one of their major weaknesses: “The inability to successfully articulate the concerns of the rural proletariat and the peasantry on

81 Harley and Fotheringham, 60.
the one hand, and those of the urban proletariat on the other, thereby narrowing the gap between the rural-urban divide, represented a major weakness of the liberation movement."\textsuperscript{82}

The dangers of perpetuating the urban-rural divide and thus excluding millions of South Africans from basic resources and political participation are many. Levin and Weiner argue that the rapid transformation of South Africa’s political terrain from the popular liberation politics of the anti-apartheid struggle to current top-down politics focusing on economic growth and development has the potential to alienate millions of South Africans from political participation.\textsuperscript{83} Bundy writes, “Political power – real power, the capacity of people to play a part in shaping their own lives – will only be attained in a new South Africa. In that South Africa, land, the law and power will all be distributed on fundamentally different terms.”\textsuperscript{84}

Throughout the twentieth century, popular resistance worked around and against the urban-rural divide, but did not reveal or attack it as a fundamental myth generated by apartheid. Having traced the construction of the urban-rural divide through land policies, resistance, and historical and political thought, the next chapter will situate the Landless People’s Movement within the context of contemporary resistance movements. This discussion will focus on how these movements continue to be shaped by the urban-rural divide.

\textsuperscript{82} Thoka, 29.
\textsuperscript{83} Levin and Weiner, 3.
\textsuperscript{84} Bundy \textit{No Place}, 12.
Contemporary land reform politics have fallen into the path etched by historical urban-rural division. The foregoing chapters have illustrated the centrality of the urban-rural divide within South Africa’s interlocked political and economic history. Though the relationship between urban and rural areas is now the subject of academic inquiry, the divide is overwhelmingly taken for granted in post-apartheid policy discourse and resistance alike. This chapter will explore the ways in which the urban-rural divide continues to shape the direction of resistance and policy change.

**National-level policy**

Housing and service delivery policies received renewed scrutiny following a wave of urban land occupations around July 2001. Of these, the “Bredell invasion” was the most highly publicized; in this case, thousands of individuals moved onto the unoccupied Bredell farm on the outskirts of Johannesburg. National and international press carried images of desperate land occupants braving the winter cold to maintain their illicit stakes. Over 100 people were arrested over the course of the occupation. An editorial in the *Sunday Independent* lamented an “all-too-quick reversion to the *kragdadigheid* (oppressive power) of the past.”

Still, not all of the invaders were landless; rather, some entrepreneurs and political interest groups saw this as an opportunity for gain. The Bredell invasion was triggered by a local Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) ward councillor,

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Daniel Ngwenya, who sold land illegally at R25 per lot. (The roughly R150,000 collected was never returned or accounted for). Though some of the land was bought by entrepreneurs who wanted to start small businesses, the neediest were township tenants unable to pay rents of R200 to R300 per month for a small room. Some owned homes in townships, but wanted to raise their children in a quieter environment with less crime. Others recognized an opportunity to jump the bureaucratic queue of the housing waiting list.

The Bredell invasion and similar occupations near Cape Town and Port Elizabeth were construed as outcomes of failed housing and basic services delivery. Though the ANC government had provided roughly one million homes in seven years (80 percent of these given away free-of-charge), there remained a backlog of over one million other homes. Speculation over the possibility of Zimbabwe-style land expropriation in South Africa’s future had government officials scrambling to dispel fears. In this vein, President Mbeki pronounced that “the problem in South Africa is homelessness, not land.”86 The urban poor were portrayed as homeless, not landless, actors. As Patrick Laurence points out, Minister of Housing Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele echoed this sentiment, as she stated, “the Bredell invasion, like earlier illegal occupations of urban land by ‘squatters,’ has to be seen as part of the quest for homes, and land on which to build them, by the poor people who are squeezing into every nook and cranny of South Africa's urban areas.”87 The urban poor were acknowledged as having land needs insofar as they needed land for building homes, but not necessarily for other

87 Ibid, 1.
purposes. Their relationship with urban land was thus mediated through a right to housing, but did not consist of a direct right to land. Any land reform for urban areas is thus conceived as means to an end (in this case, housing), rather than as righting the past historical injustice of land dispossession. In a September 2003 report, South Africa’s Urban Sector Network concluded that a re-envisioning of urban land tenure will be necessary in order to benefit urban poor households. Their situations will not improve, the report argues, without access to formal, documented property rights that can be defended in court, that are exchangeable on the property market, and that can be used for collateral for credit.88

The distinction between housing and land rights is a deeply substantive one rooted in long-standing, politicized urban-rural division. This division was highlighted by the replacement of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act 52 of 1951 by the Prevention of Illegal Evictions and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act (PIE) in 1998. Under the former act, blacks in urban areas had no formal housing or land rights, and the government was allowed to evict them arbitrarily from urban (and rural) areas to settler camps. Though the act was applied infrequently in the years immediately following the democratic transition, it was not repealed and replaced with PIE until 1998. Rather than focusing solely on “illegal squatting,” the new act sought to protect the property of landowners and protect illegal occupants from eviction without due notice and a court order. However, the slow repeal of the 1951 act indicates, as Andre van der Walt writes, that:

the legal system’s largely negative attitude towards informal housing rights has not changed yet: informal housing is still regarded as something extraordinary and unnatural, which is at most tolerated temporarily, without creating real rights to land. Even though the moral and social justification of informal housing rights has become an important topic of juristic discourse these rights are not allowed to actually compete with the inviolable right of a landowner. This attitude illustrates the supremacy of landownership vis-à-vis informal housing rights in terms of the dominant theory of land rights.\(^{89}\)

Even when housing is provided in urban areas today, the rights and privileges are not congruent with those of owning land. Land rights carry with them a certain inviolability that housing (particularly the shacks of township areas and informal settlements) do not. As Enoch Zulu, a 63-year-old LPM member living in Orange Farm states, “Now if I say that I’m staying here, they can just say ‘no.’ That’s something not good. You cannot call this your own. It was always just like that, even until today. I haven’t got nothing. No permit, no title deed, I haven’t got my own place. What I mean—my own yard. Where I can say, ‘it is my yard.’ Where I can say it is my land. With a yard, you are so free. You can do what you like in your yard, and you can make a garden or something like that.”\(^{90}\) The critical distinction between having a house and possessing rights to land was also emphasized by Buti Ngonelo, an LPM member from Orange Farm. He had moved to Orange Farm from Everton, a township about a kilometer away, and gave the following explanation for the move: “Actually, what made us to move from Everton to here is that at Everton you don’t own a piece of land. We had to pay the rent for the landlords, so we didn’t have money since we’re unemployed. So


my mom decided that we came over [to Orange Farm] whereby we can have our own piece of land, even if it’s not enough land so that you can grow things.\textsuperscript{91}

Land and housing in townships is either government or privately-owned and tenants usually pay rent to landlords. In formal settlements, residents buy a plot of land and erect small homes and shacks; informal settlements are home to poor residents who cannot afford to pay rent or buy a plot of land elsewhere and who build their shacks on land which they have not paid for.

Besides reinforcing the distinction between urban and rural rights to land, PIE has also created “a framework for evictions rather than an end to evictions.”\textsuperscript{92}

If the state considers it necessary in some way for the public good, then those living in informal settlements can be evicted through a legal process. In January 2002, thousands of residents had their shacks demolished during their removal from Mandelaville in Diepkloof, Soweto. They were moved to the Roodepoort Durban Deep hostel to make way for a multimillion-rand development plan.\textsuperscript{93}

Other communities have been evicted to make way for new cultural districts, such as Newtowne in Johannesburg, to promote new tourist areas, or to push shacks further from major highways and thus out of sight. Communities are often moved from informal settlements or townships onto state-owned land left over from apartheid zoning. These sites are usually remote areas, further from health facilities, jobs, schools, and transport than families’ current homes. As Stephen Greenberg writes, “The implementation of housing policy… is precisely where the ghost of apartheid returns to haunt spatial planning, since existing land

\textsuperscript{91} Buti Ngonelo. Personal interview. Orange Farm. 14 Aug 2003.
\textsuperscript{92} Greenberg, 19.
ownership by the state makes it much easier and cheaper to simply continue with the process of resettling people in areas that were already designated for resettlement under apartheid, where land is already owned by the local state.\textsuperscript{94} The government is further permitted to demolish shacks without upgrading their former residents to housing. The justification is that shack residents are not losing anything because their housing situation is the same as it was before, and yet their removal from existing community networks is often devastating. Sisi Zulu, an LPM organizer from Orange Farm observes the impact of evictions on settlement communities and underscores the importance of tenure security and a sense of permanence:

It’s a problem for the eviction because if maybe you are staying in the street, and the evictions come to your area, you’ll be evicted and be moved 15 kilometers from here to that place. You are going to start to try to introduce yourself to your neighbor, and you don’t know your neighbor. You don’t know her attitude. How is she going to assist you with sugar, or if maybe you are having a problem? So it’s like you are where you know people, and then you’ll be moved to another place. And after that you try to reconcile with those people or maybe try to do some housebreak to know those people more. You are being evicted again to go to another place and by that time you are unemployed. It’s a play-game because it’s like we are fools. We are being moved from places to places and we don’t want the government to say you are going to move from here and go to stay to this place for now, for time being. We don’t want time-being places, we want permanent places where we know there will be title deeds…. We know that we are entitled to electricity, water, and the title deeds to have your own place.\textsuperscript{95}

Damza, an LPM member in his early twenties, echoes the problems that come with frequent moves. He has not been forcibly removed, yet his landlessness has forced him to move around between staying with his friends and mother in

\textsuperscript{94} Greenberg, 14.
\textsuperscript{95} Sisi Zulu. Personal interview. Orange Farm. 14 Aug 2003.
Orange Farm and nearby townships. He is unemployed and does not attend school. He explains the effects of constant moving on himself and larger communities:

“I have no place to stay, but when I visit with people it is crowded and I can’t stay in one place too long. The thing is, I’m always the first suspect. If somebody broke a bed or took something, I’m always the first suspect. Everybody will say ‘he’s just staying there, he doesn’t work, he doesn’t go to school. How does he live as a youth who doesn’t work, he must have stolen something from us.’ It’s like the community is not there. So, because of landless, I have to move around, pay a visit to somebody just to run away from being pointed at, to have someone saying, ‘I suspect you.’ Sometimes you feel ‘why?’ Why me…”

Urban development strategies have emphasized tourism and re-zoning which do not necessarily take into account the needs of poor families who lose their economic and social bases when they are moved from one area to another. Finally, there seem to be fair protections and provisions for all parties under PIE, and yet evictions take place outside of these rules; such illegal eviction is facilitated by the tenure insecurity that prevails for the poor in urban areas.

Economics, modes of governance, and the urban-rural divide were so linked under apartheid that it is exceedingly difficult to tease them apart or make substantive change in one area alone. As economics and politics relied upon the subjugation of the rural to the urban, a shift that does not directly challenge urban-rural division will be hard-pressed to amount to a significant democratic shift. This point will be taken up further in subsequent chapters, but is worth highlighting here in a discussion of the ANC’s economic policies. Patrick Bond and others have described the “elite transition” which ensured that a market-led

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economic approach carried over from apartheid into the new democratic project.\textsuperscript{97} In E. Wood’s discussion of South Africa’s transition, he notes, “The dominant fractions of capital were finally prepared to concede to majority rule if there was only limited economic redistribution, and if the political framework allowed for renewed accumulation.”\textsuperscript{98} The ANC came to power with high hopes for a redistributive economic approach, as envisioned in the policies of its Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). However, the ANC switched to the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) policy in 1996. Since then, the government has placed its hopes in attracting factories and foreign investment to the nation (largely to urban industry), and has emphasized the building of a class of commercial black farmers rather than focusing on small-scale farming. Indeed, the rural land reform which has occurred has focused on transferring larger tracts of land to black commercial farmers rather than smaller holdings for individuals and families for subsistence and small-scale farming. The government has changed life substantially for rural areas, through policies which have extended electrification and expanded and improved schools, but has not attempted to jumpstart rural economies directly. Proposals such as a Basic Income Grant which would inject capital (and thus buying power) into rural economies have not been pursued. Thus small businesses are not viable in these areas, since few people have the money to buy their goods. Neither do rural residents own rights to land for production, and so the rural economy remains caught in a stagnate loop.


\textsuperscript{98} In Greenberg, 4.
In terms of land redistribution, the Property Act has favored the market-led “willing buyer-willing seller” approach. Though subsidies have often been provided for poor, landless people to purchase land, the program has served to sustain apartheid-era landholdings. As LPM Gauteng regional chair Maureen Mnisi states: “The government in 1994, it promised people about a land reform and the land redistribution. But in his constitution, he put the Property Act in which there’s a ‘willing buyer-willing seller’ clause. And he made the people to lose their rights because they can’t pay. Most of the people they are unemployed… instead of making a land reform they say you must buy. So you can even see the freedom charter when they say the land shall belong to those people who work for it, but now it’s not that. The land shall belong to the people who buy it. And because we don’t have the money to buy the land, we are getting more suffering about that.”

The market-based approach has not fundamentally shifted the economic order, and leaves the redress of historical dispossession out of the equation. Further, GEAR has facilitated the privatization of land, water, education, and other basic services, and has thus put these essentials out-of-reach for the poor who are unwilling to pay. With the combined effects of its policies, GEAR has also been responsible for giving new purpose to civil society organization, as social movements of the (overwhelmingly urban) poor have sprung up in response to this economic framework. Before a discussion of these urban movements, I will turn now to rural land sector civil society.

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Rural social movement and NGO activity

In post-apartheid South Africa, civil society remains divided along rural-urban lines, with the majority of rural social movement and NGO activity centering around land and agrarian issues. The National Land Committee’s network of affiliates includes most rural land organizations, including the Association for Rural Advancement (KwaZulu-Natal province), the Rural Action Committee (Mpumalanga and North-West), and the Land Access Movement of South Africa (Gauteng). Some organizations are oriented around gender equity and rural development more broadly, but the underlying issue is, as the National Land Committee states, “to achieve transformation of the present state of land inequity and rural marginalisation to that of a nationally recognized rural sector able to develop sustainable communities and livelihoods of their people.”100 As the needs of the rural sector have historically received second priority to those of urban areas, rural-based NGOs have long reacted in order to reassert the rural sector. However, links between urban and rural poverty and landlessness are rarely emphasized.

NGOs form a complicated link between civil society actors and the state in post-apartheid South Africa. The government, in agreement with some of its foreign donors, has relied on the expertise of NGOs to carry out many development plans, and has given governmental funding to these organizations accordingly. Many NGOs have thus become partners of the government, which inevitably affects their relationships with their constituencies. Throughout this

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process, NGOs have struggled to maintain their independence and foremost accountability to their communities, but have largely shifted closer to a bureaucratic, service-delivery role.\textsuperscript{101} This has had the outcome of tempering the activity of social movements which are closely allied to such NGOs, fostering gradualism over more radical courses of action. The effects of the NLC’s close proximity to and support of the LPM are one such example.

Victor Thoka, a researcher with the Rural Development Services Network, has criticized the National Land Committee’s general approach as favoring the dichotomy between what he deems “the city (industry) and the countryside (agriculture).” He writes, “The NLC’s approach at the moment favors this dichotomy between the city (industry) and the countryside (agriculture).” According to the NLC, the government’s developmental path favors the city at the expense of the countryside. Thus this led the NLC to argue for the creation of the Ministry of Rural Development. The fact that the contradictions of capital accumulation affects both the city and the countryside in the same way, albeit, to varying degrees, is not entertained.”\textsuperscript{102} The NLC’s rural emphasis resonates in the preamble to the LPM constitution: “Poverty remains greatest in the rural and peri-urban areas (informal settlements), where more than 70% of South Africa’s poor live, including a disproportionate number of women, children and elderly people, yet rural development receives lower priority than urban development.”\textsuperscript{103} Thoka further argues that the singular emphasis upon the land issue has prevented the NLC (and, by extension, the LPM) from linking up “with broader macroeconomic

\textsuperscript{101} Thoka, 39.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 5.
issues taken up by urban social movements, such as privatization of the provision of social services.”104 Though the NLC and LPM recognize the effects of macroeconomic policies to a greater degree than Thoka acknowledges, their singular focus on the land issue has indeed presented difficulties for the LPM in partnering with urban movements, as described below.

The LPM could have gone the route of a completely rural social movement given its beginnings in the rural bases of NLC affiliates. However, the movement spread to an urban constituency when the connection between urban and rural evictions (based on the insecurity of tenure in both spaces) was recognized. Urban land issues (portrayed by the government as problems of housing shortages) were highlighted by the Bredell invasion and other urban invasions of its kind. In this vein, the burgeoning LPM was able to make the link between the sources of urban and rural poverty as shared outcomes of historical dispossession of land. The terms by which the LPM links urban and rural constituencies has caused its approach to be quite different from that of the new urban-based social movements.

**Urban social movements**

A wave of urban-based social movements has emerged in the last few years as a result of persistent marginalization and poverty under the ANC government. Following South Africa’s democratic transition, social movements were suddenly seen by some as redundant, given that the new political order afforded many more opportunities for democratic engagement and the new ANC-led government seemed poised to address the poverty, extreme stratification, and

104 Thoka, 39.
other hardships created by apartheid. However, the majority of South Africans remain economically and socially marginalized – unemployment for blacks is as high as 50 percent, while life expectancy, morbidity, and access to food and water have worsened for the poor of all races.\textsuperscript{105} Thus social movements are now asserting themselves, arguing that the government is not sufficiently confronting the historical and present structures which produce marginalization. Collectively, they are fighting against the privatization of basic services and resources, including water, electricity, land, healthcare, and education as part of the ANC’s neo-liberal economic policy adopted with GEAR.\textsuperscript{106}

In Cape Town, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign is fighting evictions, water cut-offs, poor health services, expensive utilities and police brutality. The Anti-Privatisation Forum of Johannesburg is fighting for electricity, water, housing, and education to be made available to all South African citizens, regardless of their ability to pay prohibitive fees. The Concerned Citizens’ Forum of Durban similarly arose in response to the ANC’s shift towards privatization of basic services. The LPM is closely allied with these movements. Privatization has led to the inability to pay for rent and services, which has led to evictions from urban apartments and housing. Evictions take place for many reasons which are not easily or readily distinguishable at their root. However, as a movement focused foremost on land, the LPM has reason to fear that the issue of land rights and historical dispossession may be lost within the other demands and foci of the

\textsuperscript{105} Desai, 10.
\textsuperscript{106} For more on the emergence of post-apartheid social movements see Ashwin Desai, \textit{We are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa} (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002) or the Centre for Civil Society, University of Natal-Durban, www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs.
new urban movements. This tension is highlighted in the disagreement between the LPM and urban-based movements such as the Anti-Privatization Forum over Robert Mugabe’s policies. Whereas the LPM may concede that there are many reasons to disagree with Mugabe’s actions, they support him on the one all-important issue of land.

Thoka and Greenberg have argued that the LPM’s lack of a class position may be its largest hindrance to building stronger alliances with urban movements. The LPM in rural areas is a mix of different class and social forces, ranging from labor tenants and farm workers to chiefs and local elites. This lack of a class base is in part explained by the constituencies the NLC has worked with historically to promote the rural sector. Chiefs and rural authorities have often been viewed as partners in reaching the broad goal of rural development. Still, land reform in rural areas faces internal class-based challenges – especially now that rural power structures have been promoted by the Communal Land Rights Bill. The lack of an explicitly class-based character may contribute to the ideological positioning of the LPM. Thoka argues that the NLC element has encouraged the LPM towards more reactionary positions on the land and agrarian question. According to Thoka, as urban movements seek to organize and lead the working class, their strong class ideology may not resonate as strongly with the demands of the LPM.

Other studies (including my own) show that the LPM is making the links between land and other sources of poverty stemming from macro-economic policies, especially in urban areas. According to a study conducted by Bongani Mnisi, an LPM member from Protea South, the vast majority of Gauteng
members interviewed (87 percent of 46) clearly understand that the LPM’s primary aim is to struggle for land, but at least 50 percent of respondents also understand that the LPM is fighting for other basic needs for the landless. Almost all respondents (96 percent) believe that the LPM will still need to struggle after getting land, “indicating a widespread understanding of the links between land and other struggles for basic needs.”¹⁰⁷ Though Thoka’s concern over the potential weakness of class bonds between urban and rural areas is relevant given the disconnect promoted by the urban-rural divide, this is not exactly the case within the LPM. Though they have not developed a class-based ideology rooted in structural analysis, their demands indicate at least a populist agenda which explicitly addresses the plight of urban and rural poor. The LPM has largely waged defensive battles against evictions, and so far has not had the capacity or time to develop coherent and thorough ideologies. Still, their action around the Communal Land Rights Bill represents a direct promotion of rural democratization and a critique of the urban-rural divide, as I will now discuss.

The Communal Land Rights Bill and Rural Democratization

The passage of the Communal Land Rights Bill in February 2004 exemplified for many in the LPM the growing distance between the ANC and landless poor populations. Passed just months before the April 2004 general election, the CLRB bolstered the ANC’s position with rural traditional authorities, but was the final straw for many rural landless. Because of the ANC’s urban organizational bias, the party’s rural vote has been guaranteed in the past through

coalitions with local chiefs. Such political alliances were critical during the ANC’s campaigning for the 1994 election. The Communal Land Rights Bill is the legacy of these coalitions. Mamdani’s description of the ANC’s relationship with tribal authorities leading up to the 1994 election offers an explanation for the persistent role of native authorities within the ANC’s land reform program:

The ANC was unable to arrive at a program to democratize Native Authority; instead, it turned to embracing those in the Native Authority who were willing to join it in an electoral alliance…. Without a presence in either the reserve or the hostel – and without a program for democratizing customary rule in either – the ANC could reach the rural only from above, through Native Authorities.108

By continuing the apartheid strategy of maintaining non-elected traditional authorities to govern in rural areas, the ANC did not reverse the political function of the urban-rural divide of preventing rural blacks from being citizens of South Africa. As Mamdani shows, this division is an inherently undemocratic one.

The legacy of the urban-rural divide persists in a paradoxical way here. The ANC’s own organizational tactics under apartheid were constrained by the urban-rural divide, as it maintained a strong base in urban townships throughout the apartheid struggle, but could not organize with the same ease in rural areas. The party’s urban bias, in turn, would force it to reach rural constituencies through traditional authorities. Democratizing rural land ownership and governance now proves difficult, given the electoral alliances between the ANC and traditional authorities. Rural landless people lose out in this arrangement, as rural power is not democratized and land rights are administered by traditional authorities. The ANC is perpetuating the view of rural areas as home to

108 Mamdani. Citizen & Subject, 293-4.
“tribalized” blacks, and further embedding notions of their non-citizenship. Rural citizens have the potential to gain tenure security on an individualized basis, and yet this is not guaranteed, as their communities (heavily influenced by the local chief) may opt for communal ownership and administration. The ANC is leaving unchallenged assumptions of rural people as not full, individual citizens of South Africa’s democracy. These conceptions are political, economic, social and racialist and are the residue of apartheid urban-rural division.

The LPM waged a progressive campaign against the CLRB prior to its adoption. The movement criticized the lack of consultation with rural communities throughout the years of the government’s drafting process. The bill was not widely disseminated to those communities which will be most affected by its provisions; instead, consultative workshops held by the government were targeted at organizations of rural traditional authorities. In a November 2003 submission to parliament, the LPM complained: “From our perspective only traditional leaders were consulted. The people invited to consultation meetings were the National House of Traditional Leaders, the Provincial Houses of Traditional Leaders, the Coalition of Traditional Leaders, Contralesa and the Ingonyama Trust Board.” The movement went on to detail the principles of land tenure reform policy they deem essential:

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110 Ibid., 1.
(i) it must be the product of a thorough consultation with the affected communities
(ii) it must provide for democratic institutions to allocate, administer, and control communal land
(iii) ‘democratic’ means that institutions must be elected by both men and women of the affected community and must be accountable and transparent
(iv) it must redistribute land beyond the 13 percent allocated to black people by the previous regime
(v) land allocation and access must be equal for both men and women
(vi) it must address the institutions of traditional leadership created by apartheid.  

The LPM concluded their submission in no uncertain terms: “The LPM cannot endorse the bill. In fact we reject the current bill outrightly.” Such an explicit call for rural democratization is a radical departure from the previous course of national social movements in South Africa.

The LPM’s criticism of the CLRB and the failure of the government to democratize rural space is just one element of the LPM’s more fundamental critique of South Africa’s post-apartheid democratic project. I will outline this critique, as espoused by the movement’s No Land! No Vote! Campaign, and its implications for South African politics and society in chapter five. In the next chapter, I will discuss in more detail the ways in which the LPM is bridging urban and rural constituencies.

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111 Ibid., 1.
112 Ibid., 1.
CHAPTER FOUR:  
THE LPM’S BRIDGING OF URBAN AND RURAL: POVERTY AND TENURE INSECURITY

We fought for the end of colonialism and apartheid, and welcomed the birth of a new South Africa. But for us there is nothing new because there is still no land, no services and no growth in our areas. We will no longer sit back and watch as the wealth builds up in the hands of a tiny urban elite, while on the edges of the cities, in the small towns and in the countryside, we continue to suffer and starve.\(^{113}\)

-- LPM charter

By using a definition of landlessness that includes both urban and rural individuals, the LPM is invalidating many of the political, social and economic notions which have bolstered South Africa’s urban-rural divide. Though it may seem intuitive that urban areas would be included just as rural areas in a movement for land (since, frankly, there is land everywhere), the political constitution of South Africa’s urban-rural divide has denied that landlessness could be a concern in urban areas. This chapter will focus on the economic linkages that the LPM is making in order to connect urban and rural demands. In order to include a constituency of urban landless, the LPM has shown that rural and urban experiences of poverty are far more linked than a strict urban-rural dichotomy allows.

The LPM creates space for the diverse experiences of individuals occupying over-crowded apartments in downtown Johannesburg, living in informal settlements surrounding the city, working on rural farms, and commuting between urban and rural areas. The definition of “landless” is dissociated from the strict view of only rural, black peasants who need land for small farming. This chapter will highlight the cases of one urban settlement (Protea South in Soweto)

and a set of rural farms (at the town of Ingogo in Kwazulu-Natal). I will then
examine the links that the LPM draws between urban and rural areas, focusing on
the ways in which economics bridge urban and rural spaces.

*Protea South, Soweto*

It is not the green of the spinach gardens that one notices most
immediately upon entering Protea South for the first time. In this informal
settlement in Soweto, one- or two-room shacks are pieced together from
corrugated iron in varying stages of rust, along with wood panels, cardboard
boxes, and sheets of weathered material. Flat metal roofs are held down against
the wind by heavy rocks. Each shack is surrounded by a fence which serves little
function besides marking a boundary. Sticks held in a row by barbed or chicken
wire with an opening for a gate, the fences allow dogs easy passage through their
gaps and holes. In the small space enclosed by a fence (about 30 square feet at
most), some residents have planted spinach in meticulous rows. Plastic water
bottles stand at the end of the rows, filled with water fetched from several streets
away. Despite the rocky soil, the plants’ leaves are a lush, healthy green, fanning
up and out. The women of Protea South speak with pride, but not satisfaction,
about their gardens. The plots are room enough to grow one vegetable to eat with
porridge, but are too small. The shacks are crowded too closely together.

Near the shacks stand rows of larger houses which indicate something of
the history of Protea South. The houses were built by colored families, who were
subsequently removed by the apartheid government to another area within
When the houses were occupied, people began building shacks. Most people came from other parts of Soweto, others came from the nearby township of Lenz. Residents describe various reasons for moving here.\textsuperscript{114} Many people lost their jobs and, no longer able to pay their rent, moved to the shacks. Some middle-aged women had suddenly found themselves too young to receive a pension and too old to work, as the job market was increasingly catered towards youth who had recently passed their matric exams. Others grew up on farms in rural areas or in locations, and are receiving financial support from their families who still live there. For many, location housing is reminiscent of matchboxes and tins of sardines; when people could no longer stand to live crowded together with their extended families in four small rooms, some moved to places such as Protea South.

Today, Protea South is one of the most destitute areas of Soweto, as nearly all its residents are unemployed. As Ellie Madondo of Protea South described, “The people are not working. And when we must get some food or what else, we must go and pander, there by Lenz. To go and ask, house to house, to get something. Maybe when we go house to house there by Lenz they give us a bread, even in the shops they give us bones (you know, they are like the food, you know). The rest of people here are not working. That’s why now we are going right round and getting some food.”\textsuperscript{115} The situation worsened in 2000 when they received notice from the city council that they would be evicted as a result of over-crowding. People complain that they have not been told where they will be

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\textsuperscript{114} Personal interviews. Protea South. 11 Aug 2003.
\textsuperscript{115} Ellie Madondo (name changed upon request). Personal interview. Protea South. 11 Aug 2003.
\end{flushright}
forced to move, and that such a move would destroy their community and disconnect them from their basic services including schools and clinics. As Protea South resident Phyllis Mavimbela states: “Our ANC, our government, they mustn’t force the people with the red ants. And then when they come they take your things on the ground, your shacks, with full force. And then they take you out – you don’t know where you’re going. Where they are going to take you there is no water, there is nothing.”116 Residents feel connected to Protea South, many having lived here almost two decades, and hope that the government will renovate and develop the area, improving conditions for them. Serafina Molukane talked about her desire to stay in an up-graded Protea South: “We just came here because we were stranded. You see, we want the right place. We want them to renovate this place, because we want to stay here.”117

Shortly after the eviction notice came in 2000, Maureen Mnisi was sweeping the street outside her home and found a flyer which promised assistance in eviction cases. Mnisi called the contact number and was soon in the Johannesburg office of the National Land Committee. Mnisi would later be elected LPM Gauteng regional chair. Protea South is now a stronghold of the movement. 3,025 residents are scheduled for removal, and many of them are active in the LPM. They each have a different story to tell about how they came to live in Protea South, but all consider themselves landless.

As their own solution to over-crowding, LPM members in Protea South have set their sights on a piece of government land which lies on the other side of

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Potchefstroom Road, across from a row of shacks. Sylvia Matshoba, an LPM member who is raising her grandchildren in Protea South, describes the proposed occupation: “We want to go there, take that place for plowing. Yes, we are acting now. We want to go and do some green vegetables. Cabbage, spinach, whatever. Whatever so that we can eat. Everything here belongs to the government, but it does nothing about the place… Everything is government property! We don’t have anything! So we are going to take it by force.”\textsuperscript{118} They plan to build new houses and divide the space for growing food, as Serafina Molukane describes: “We are just going [to] occupy the land. We are just going to occupy it and then we are going to have our resources. So that everybody will cut a yard, ‘This is my yard, I’m going to plow here, I’m going to do whatever.’ Each and every one of us.”\textsuperscript{119} Several LPM members in Protea South spoke with nostalgia about growing up on their grandfather’s farm with cattle, wheat, maize, and many other varieties of vegetables. Others have never experienced a life of farming. But all of them are currently living in near absolute poverty and consider a small piece of land an opportunity to grow food, an alleviation for over-crowded conditions and a prospect for security. In his survey of a sampling of LPM Gauteng members, Bongani Mnisi found a similar variety in types of land demands. 96 percent of those surveyed need land for housing, but a full 66 percent of this urban constituency also need land for farming. 57 percent also want land for business purposes, and 64 percent for community services.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{118} Sylvia Matshoba. Personal interview. Protea South. 11 Aug 2003.  
\textsuperscript{119} Serafina Molukane. Personal interview. Protea South. 11 Aug 2003.  
\textsuperscript{120} Bongani Mnisi, 6.
The individuals and families of Protea South have found themselves landless due to a range of reasons and events. In her study of forced removals under apartheid, Paula Meth cautions against modernist theories of dispossession which tend to obscure diversity of experience as they focus on the ideological and political significance of forced removals within the prevailing social and economic structure of the time. Such theories can suffer from generalization and a false sense of historical linearity, as they attribute grand motives to the state for stripping populations of their land – motives such as functionality for apartheid and capitalism, or politics and ideology – while ignoring other factors and actors that contributed to the process. While much of my own analysis has traced patterns of land ownership through shifting political and economic motives of those in power, the goal has been to show how theoretical categories – in this case, urban and rural spaces – have been constantly transgressed. The experiences of the landless of Protea South and other Johannesburg townships and informal settlements indicate this blurring of urban and rural distinctions. And they share far more in terms of living conditions and political capital with their rural counterparts than strict theories of apartheid urbanization may allow.

*Ingogo*

The province of KwaZulu-Natal lies on the sugarcane belt which stretches through the Mpumalanga province and Swaziland. White-owned commercial farms sprawl from both sides of the highways which cut through the province. Blacks tend to live on these farms as farm workers, with negotiated grazing rights.

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and housing in lieu of monetary payment. Yet, the boundaries between farms are often unclear. Government land is scattered throughout, and so confusion often arises over whose land people are living on. Mangaliso Kubheka, the national organizer of the LPM, lives on a farm outside the small town of Ingogo, near Newcastle. He is not certain whose farm it is, but he considers it his own. His 84-year-old father was born on this farm. Kubheka has run out of money for cultivating the land; he does not own a tractor and cannot afford to rent one, and, though he has several cattle, the animals have not been trained to cultivate. From time to time, the commercial farmers on either side of Kubheka’s farm will claim that the family is living on their land. Kubheka has pored over maps at the town hall, and has determined that his farm falls on government property. Yet dispute continues. Kubheka was recently forbidden from using the road which runs from the highway to his farm, over his neighbor’s farm. He must drive along a service road, which takes 20 minutes rather than two.

Those working on farms near Ingogo have lived there for varying lengths of time, though many have lived in the same place for generations. They do not hold secure tenure, however, and so can be subjected to eviction. Farmers are required to give notice of eviction, but some workers complain that they did not receive a notice or that they could not read it. Violence between farmers and farm workers – including beatings, torture, and murder – is widespread, and has been documented by international human rights groups. Farmworkers have clashed with farmers over the right to bury family members on the land they occupy.

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Farmers refuse interment rights because these allow families the right to subsequently return or remain on familial land.\textsuperscript{123} Provincial and national law conflict in the case of burial rights, and so workers, police forces, and farmers can each substantiate their contentious positions. The matter is usually negotiated with force; workers will gather hundreds of LPM members together to bury their loved ones against a farmer’s wishes, the farmer will gather other farmers, and the police will be called in. Even if a burial is successful, there may be threats to exhume the body and throw it on the street.

Many Ingogo LPM members consider themselves engaged in highly individualized struggle with local farmers and, at times, police forces. As Kubheka states, “The problem is that in urban areas, people just come sometimes and say now [we will remove you from] this land and just [remove them] you see. There they are faced with the authorities. On the farms, we are faced with the authorities and some farmers. That is where the problem is now.”\textsuperscript{124} Still, their struggle is about more than maintaining their precarious position as labor tenants or farmworkers. They have been waiting for the government to buy portions of the white-owned farms and redistribute the land among black populations. Such change has not come in rural areas, as many relationships between farmer and farmworker are characterized by intimidation and insecurity, as they often were under apartheid.

\textsuperscript{124} Mangaliso Kubheka. Personal interview. Ingogo. 20 Aug 2003.
Connecting Urban and Rural: Tenure security and evictions

As one community leader from Thebelihle [just outside Johannesburg] told the meeting, “When it comes to development, the government only consults amabourgois. If you don't have work, you are an eyesore to them. The whole system is stinking - its about the oppression of the majority by a minority.”

LPM press release, July 4, 2002

Though experiences of daily life vary greatly between Soweto and rural farms, the differences are not so strong that parallels cannot be drawn. When asked to compare his experience with that of more urban LPM members, Ingogo farm dweller Ben Sithebe speculated that there may exist differences in livelihood, but that both groups are striving for their right to land: “We are fighting for our rights here to cultivate the land and keep our livestock here. Whereby in the township, mainly in the urban areas, people are striving for land to have a place to stay maybe in the morning and wakes up and looks for a job, when he comes home from work, then he goes into the house. Here they prefer to do the things themselves.”

Though urban LPM members describe more diverse livelihoods and needs for land than Sithebe attributes to them, Sithebe recognizes the struggle for land happening in both areas. Many women of Protea South and others in urban areas expressed a strong desire to farm, but also thought of starting small businesses or not relying on the land at all for any agricultural use. Whatever their current or prospective livelihoods, urban and rural landless are striving for land in order to gain a sense of security. Without tenure security, the threat of eviction looms.

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Members in urban and rural areas stated that on-going lack of land rights and the experience of eviction give the impression that the government is not intended to serve the poor and landless. As Christina Jakaiashe of the township of Eikenhof states, “The government works for the people next to government, not for us. They promised us change, but maybe they were not talking to us.”

According to Mangaliso Kubheka, “Our government is only saying they are working for equal rights of the people. But never doing anything. There are no equal rights here. People, we haven’t got the rights in South Africa. People who have the rights are those who are next to the government. Those are the ones who are getting the fruit of the freedom of South Africa. We are getting nothing.” As Ellie Madondo of Protea South says, “They say they are going to develop. Develop Protea South. You see this government, he wants to take the poorest of the poor far, far away… So that when maybe the people from outside the country they come here and then they must see the beauty that they didn’t [know before]. And then they see what we are doing here, thinking that this is what we are doing in South Africa. In the meantime, [the government] took the poorest of the poor back.”

The prevailing sentiment is that urban development is coming at the expense of the community networks and economic opportunities of the urban poor and landless.

In order to include an urban landless constituency, the LPM has revealed that rural and urban experiences of poverty are far more linked than a strict urban-rural dichotomy allows. As a young movement, the LPM is still trying to build up

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constituencies in both urban and rural areas and connect them in a meaningful way. Still, the LPM has made use of the great linkages which already exist between urban and rural families. These divisions illustrate the fallacy inherent in a vision of strict division between urban and rural areas. Hector Mzimkulu, an LPM member living in a flat he shares with many others in Hillbrow, states:

People come [to Jozi] to work. And after working, they go home to the rural areas… Not everybody, but most people came here to just work…. A lot of people who have come to work here have still got connections to rural homes. But a lot of people who have been here, working in the mines and working in Jozi are staying in these urban locations and they are taking this as their home…. I have not forgotten my roots, but my life is here now. It is not my liking that I am here. But it is only circumstances and resources. If I had my way I would be farming… When you want land, you want land for farming. Be it on a small scale, maybe on a large scale. But land is for farming. And I would want to say, when one gets old, it is an assurance, and an assurance to be sustained for life.129

Mzimkulu’s characterization of urban-rural linkages are hardly a universal picture, yet they underscore the LPM’s conviction that strict division is simply not founded in reality. Linking the issue of landlessness across rural and urban areas has been possible for the LPM because the experiences of poverty and tenure insecurity are comparable for the poor in both areas. Still, the strength of the movement’s urban-rural linkages are most apparent in their criticisms of South Africa’s new democracy, as discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE:
LAND & DEMOCRACY: THE LPM’S NO LAND! NO VOTE! CAMPAIGN

“It is the landless who voted for our government since 1994 in every election, but we have to ask this, why are we still landless and homeless ten years into our democracy? Is this the democracy we suffered so many years for?”

-- Maureen Mnisi, Protea South, LPM Gauteng provincial chair

On April 14, 2004, tens of thousands of LPM activists will not be voting in the national elections marking a decade of democratic governance in South Africa. Instead, they will be occupying privately-owned farm land in rural areas and government-owned land in urban areas, by force if necessary. The LPM’s No Land! No Vote! campaign is its most direct challenge to the government that many of its activists view as nothing but a “ballot box democracy.”

A decade of democracy in South Africa has not delivered land to the country’s 26 million urban and rural landless, but has continued to promote inherently undemocratic division between urban and rural spaces. As previous chapters have shown, the government continues to promote what may be apartheid’s most tenacious institution: the urban-rural divide. The government’s support of un-elected, male-dominated traditional authority in rural areas rivals that of the apartheid government, as evidenced by the passage of the Communal Land Rights Bill. Notions of the informal and impermanent presence of poor blacks in cities are implicit in viewing urban tenure as an issue of housing rather than land. Though decades of struggle against apartheid succeeded in gaining immense expansion of

the political rights of the black majority, some within South Africa’s landless majority increasingly view the democratic transition as meaningless.

Maureen Mnisi of Protea South wrote a letter to the editor of the *Mail & Guardian* in response to the editorial page’s criticism of the No Land! No Vote! campaign in early November 2003. Her letter summarizes the LPM’s conception of the campaign, underscoring the sentiment that democracy under the ANC does not constitute the political change struggled for under apartheid:

> The impression given [by your editorial] is that the LPM is irresponsible to a point of disenfranchising the landless majority. We need not be reminded that we struggled for the vote during apartheid. It was us who bore the brunt of the apartheid repression here in South Africa. But we did not struggle for the vote so that we may be treated worse than dogs. It is the landless who voted for our government since 1994 in every election, but we have to ask this, why are we still landless and homeless ten years into our democracy? Is this the democracy we suffered so many years for? As if that is not enough, we are being told to “register were we live,” but we are facing forced removals…. We demand respect and our full citizenship rights.132

With the No Land! No Vote! campaign, the LPM is calling upon the poor and landless to refrain from voting in the 2004 general elections. The LPM officially argues that South Africa has achieved only a “ballot box” democracy. Under this system, the poor and landless are called “citizens” but do not own land. In many rural areas, blacks live under undemocratic traditional authority, which received a boost when the Communal Land Rights Bill became law in February 2004. Under this democracy, landless are instructed to “register where you live,” but literally cannot do so when facing evictions.

During voter registration in November 2003, the LPM attempted to
discourage other poor and landless from voting by staging protests outside
registration centers across Gauteng province. In lieu of voting, the LPM will be
carrying out land occupations and persisting in its on-going resistance against
evictions. Arguing that a decade of democracy has not delivered land or an
improved life for South Africa’s poor, the LPM has issued demands which it
believes would give teeth to the democratic project: a moratorium on all evictions
and immediate delivery of land to the landless. In a November 19, 2004 press
release, the LPM leadership states:

As we countdown to a decade of ballot box democracy, barely two
percent of land has changed hands from white farmers to black
people. We continue to lose our land through farm evictions by
racist white farmers who are supported by the government that we
put in power, and through urban forced removals by councilors
who are still implementing the apartheid plans to force poor black
landless people far beyond the edges of our cities to die in
wastelands with no housing, no water, no electricity, no schools,
no clinics, no food, and no jobs!133

Both urban and rural struggles are underscored in this statement. The apartheid
strategy of removing blacks from cities to rural areas is described as continuing
unabated under the new government. Such a strategy may be consistent with a
“ballot box” democracy which extends the right to vote but which cannot be
considered as fundamentally challenging or changing the undemocratic aspects of
apartheid rule. Land tenure remains insecure in urban and rural areas, and blacks
do not appear to have a permanent place within cities. As Mamdani shows, these
forces were integral to apartheid and segregation patterns of governance, and

133 Landless People’s Movement. "LPM says ‘No land! No vote!’ means the poor & landless
caused the urban-rural divide to gain an undemocratic inclination. A South African government – whether or not it calls itself a democracy – that does not ensure land rights and promote equal entitlement to land in urban and rural settings is not considered democratic by many who remain landless.

The No Land! No Vote! campaign constitutes the LPM’s most pro-active strategy to date. The LPM’s membership is usually relegated to a defensive position: defending against eviction in urban townships, trying to raise money to buy back cattle which have been impounded in rural areas, or pleading cases in the courts. With the No Land! No Vote! campaign, LPM members are taking matters of land reform into their own hands, in a very public show of force. Prior to this campaign, the proactive strategies carried out by some landless on a local level had not been recognized by the general public as a coherent line of attack. LPM members in parts of Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and elsewhere have been carrying out burials against the will of farm owners, while others are re-opening closed access roads.\footnote{Landless People’s Movement. “Submission.” 2.} Still, the No Land! No Vote! campaign has been widely criticized by the media as a reactionary strategy which is crudely neglecting the hard-won right to vote. Most critics have focused their attentions on the LPM’s boycott of the vote, rather than on the actions the movement intends to carry out in lieu of voting. Land occupations are a significant worry to many, but this threat is not new; the LPM has been threatening a wave of land occupations around the 2004 elections for some time. Pairing land occupations with a boycott of the vote

\footnote{Landless People’s Movement. “Submission.” 2.}
is a new element of the campaign – and a sharper critique of South Africa’s new democracy.

*From Rural to Urban and Back*

The progression of the No Land! No Vote! campaign between urban and rural areas follows the trend of the LPM as a whole as the impetus was found in rural areas but only transformed into a national campaign through the actions of urban areas. The means of communication and media exposure available to urban activists quickly allows sentiments to become more uniform, while ideas remain more diffuse in rural areas and struggles more local. The No Land! No Vote! campaign has been pursued most strongly by LPM members facing direct attacks either on farms (in Mpumalanga, North-West, and, to a lesser extent, KwaZulu-Natal) or from government-led removals (as in Johannesburg). Where LPM members still feel relatively confident about the prospects of gaining land through government channels, the No Land! No Vote! campaign has not been pursued with as much strength. The earliest sentiment around the No Land! No Vote! Campaign began among rural farm workers in Mpumalanga province, but urban LPM membership – specifically in Johannesburg – have brought visibility to the campaign. Gauteng province was the first to officially launch the campaign, with a march to the Union Building in Pretoria in November 2003. After the march, the campaign against voter registration intensified and found a large following in urban townships, including Protea South, Thembelihle, Orange Farm, and Eikenhof. Voter registration was particularly low in the LPM strongholds of
Eikenhof, where just three individuals registered, and Thembelihle, where only 70 registered.\(^{135}\)

The campaign has been embraced by many LPM members in Johannesburg largely due to the on-going threat of eviction that comes without tenure security. LPM members find politicians unresponsive to the needs of communities facing eviction, and are not willing to lend their vote to a government which is forcibly removing them from their homes. As Sisi Zulu of Orange Farm states:

> For us, it’s like we’ve been applying and applying, begging, having meetings and meetings, spending a lot of money to say, ‘Government, we do want to speak to you.’ But it’s like there’s no action. We don’t get any answers. We fax them, even march to our councilors. We didn’t even get any response. So that’s why we are telling ourselves that during the elections, LPM is going to take back their land. We are saying, ‘no land, no vote’ because where people will be voting is a land that is being rented by somebody, so that building is being rented, even the land on it is being rented. So we don’t see any necessity to vote if you don’t have a place to stay. Because it’s like you are chaining yourself again to another government that is going to promise and do nothing. We say: no land, no vote. We don’t vote as LPMs unless there is somebody who is inside today that is going to run from LPM, [so] we can say we vote for LPM.\(^{136}\)

Maureen Mnisi of Protea South describes the government as not only unresponsive, but violently antagonistic:

> We’ve been writing those letters to the government and we’re marching, trying to show them that is what we want. The only thing: there’s no results that we’re getting. You get guns and laws, is what we get. So is that an answer from our government? It’s guns and laws, just putting to the poor people. When you fight, they resist instead of replying. And then they put those forces to shoot you and they put the bulldozer to destroy your shack and you

\(^{135}\) Andile Mngxitama. National Land Committee. E-mail correspondence. <andile@nlc.co.za>. 4 Nov 2003.

don’t have any say, but you have to listen to what they think because there’s a gun. They fight, you know.”

The evolution of the LPM’s increasingly radical tactics is evident, as both women describe attempts to work first through governmental channels by requesting meetings with councilors, sending letters and faxes, and marching to politicians’ offices. However, LPM members have engaged the government on the land issue more often through eviction processes than through discussion meetings in government offices – which gives the impression that the government is more an adversary than an ally.

The No Land! No Vote! campaign is only catching up in rural areas as of late and is taking hold unevenly across rural constituencies. Still, there have been several rural actions around the campaign. The North-West province branch has had four actions since activating the campaign last year. The Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga branches (also composed of mostly rural membership) had their first actions in February 2004, including a continuous sit-in at the Umtata offices of the Department of Land Affairs. The Limpopo province is divided, as the leadership does not support the campaign, while the majority of members do.

On Wednesday, March 4, 2004 more than 300 members of the LPM marched to their premier’s office in the Eastern Cape provincial capital of Bisho. Upon arrival, they declared that the government had seven days to respond to their ultimatum: “give us land, or we will take over farms forcefully on April 14.”

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138 Mngxitama. E-mail correspondence. <andile@nlc.co.za>. 14 Mar 2004.
LPM members traveled to Bisho from across the province, gathering from Umtata, Uitenhage, Port Elizabeth, Bizana and Grahamstown.

Increasingly, the common complaint of LPM members (urban and rural alike) is that this is “not the democracy we struggled for.” As Sylvia Matshoba of Protea South explains:

Mbeki said to us on TV, I still remember, said ‘I am going to make your lives better.’ Electricity. Even water. Nothing of that sort is happening. It seems maybe he was speaking to someone else. We used to fight with them, for this ANC to be in government today. But all the grassroots, left with nothing. We lost our children here fighting for this democratic government. We lost our daughters. We lost our sons. We lost our children for this democracy. They fought for this democracy, this democracy to be today. But what did we get: nothing. Just left with tears. Because our children, we used to tell them ‘The boys are going to shoot you,’” they said ‘All the children that are being shot, mamma, they are also human beings. Their mothers and fathers loved them like you love me. So if I die there, I will die like a soldier. I’ll be fighting for my country because this is our country. We must fight for it.’ They fought for it, but they got nothing. Other people that fight for this land, they didn’t get anything.

Matshoba and others express a dual sentiment of dashed expectations. They refer to specific promises made by the ANC – land, housing, electricity, water – which have not been followed through upon during the last decade. But they also describe a more profound expectation of what “democracy” itself might bring. This latter sentiment runs deeper than the disappointment of voting a party into office and its politicians subsequently not making good on campaign promises. Many LPM members had a vision of a political system which would allow for greater participation by the people, and would provide services and land for the majority. The ANC was once viewed as an ally in this struggle – more than just a

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remote political party. When the majority is not extended rights and services in the particular case of post-apartheid South Africa under the ANC, the disappointment extends far beyond one political party and to the entire democratic system itself.

Not all LPM members share this sentiment, of course, or even share support for the campaign. Many LPM activists will vote in the April elections, and many will lend their support to the ANC. The views of the landless in Protea South, other areas of Johannesburg, and on the rural farms of Ingogo towards the government and the ANC’s attempts at land reform are varied, complex, and contradictory. Just as there is no singular experience of landlessness in either urban or rural areas, the opinions of LPM members about the government and the ANC are varied. They come from various political backgrounds themselves, as the LPM is intended to create a space for all who are landless, regardless of their political affiliation. Many have struggled against apartheid as members of various parties, but find that their situation remains unchanged regardless of which party benefited from their energies.

Some contend that there is nothing wrong with the ANC besides their policy on land. Zola Tatane of Protea South objects to continued forced evictions under the ANC, but does not see reason to withhold her vote: “We don’t want that action of the eviction by the red ants because we are people. And then we are going to vote. We do not say we are not going to vote. It’s our government. We voted for them, they are the government because of us. But we are fighting that treatment. It is no good for us. We are going to vote. It’s our government, it’s
true. But we need help.” Rhina Ntlomben of Protea South expresses a similar sentiment: “Our government we like. But he promised us a better life. But now ‘better life’ is bad life.” The amount of debate among urban LPM members over the No Land! No Vote! campaign is captured in Bongani Mnisi’s survey results. His report was completed in April 2003, and support for the campaign has risen among urban and rural branches since then. Still, his data allows for a comparison that reveals the ideological evolution of recent months, and the increasing willingness of landless individuals to take land reform objectives into their own hands. The majority (61 percent) of Gauteng LPM members interviewed supported a plan to use the LPM’s vote to pressure existing political parties into supporting the land struggle, while a significant portion (17 percent) believed the LPM should form a political party and contest the elections. 22 percent felt that the election would not address the LPM’s demands for land, and either supported a boycott or a strategy of simply ignoring the polls. Support for the campaign has grown across the LPM’s branches nationally since it was officially launched in November 2003. Since shifting from rural areas to gain a foothold in urban areas, the ideology behind the No Land! No Vote! campaign has gained a higher level of uniformity, and is now more easily translated back to other rural areas and across the nation.

The ANC’s Reaction

The ANC’s response to the No Land! No Vote! campaign has similarly evolved dramatically over recent months from a position of disregard to one of

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144 Bongani Mnisi, 8.
strict denunciation. Upon the LPM’s national launch of the No Land! No Vote! campaign in November 2003, officials in the ANC government discounted the LPM as a “fringe” group which could not seriously affect voter turn-out, the electability of the ANC, or the overall integrity of the elections. The ANC still does not express any worry in these respects, but has begun to react very sharply to the LPM’s threats of land occupations. The party also denies the LPM’s charges that they have failed in the land reform process.

In an uncharacteristically fierce press statement, released just six weeks before the election and in response to the No Land! No Vote! campaign, the ANC maintained that it has not strayed from its land reform commitments as adopted in 1994. The party states that it “has made significant progress over the last ten years in ensuring the progressive redistribution and restitution of land.” The ANC further expressed its intolerance of the LPM’s plans to occupy land and the movement’s characterization of official land reform policy:

South Africans will not tolerate hooliganism that is only aimed at misleading people and creating chaos and discord. Those with designs to deliberately flout the law and occupy land illegally will be met with the full might of the law. South Africa is a constitutional democracy that enshrines the right to demonstrate and freedom of expression, but such rights do not include a right to perpetuate lies, violate the law and act in a manner calculated to polarize society.... The ANC indeed respects the right of the Landless People's Movement to choose to forgo their right to vote, but will not tolerate any act calculated at intimidating people and stopping them from exercising their right to vote.... If the LPM has legitimate concerns regarding the land restitution process, these can and should be dealt with through the appropriate government departments.

146 ANC. “ANC Keeps to Land Reform Commitments.” Press statement. 4 March, 2004
The initial announcement by the LPM that it would boycott the elections did not raise a stir from politicians. With or without the votes of the poor and landless, the ANC would be able to remain in office. However, as the possibility of land occupations in rural and urban areas across the country comes into focus, the ANC is responding decisively. Besides reassuring those South Africans who have longed feared that the country may go the way of Zimbabwe, the party is likely acting to lower investor fears of erupting land occupations and violence.

Attracting foreign investment and factories to South Africa has been central to President Mbeki’s economic plan, yet it has not been successful at keeping jobs within South Africa or creating new ones.147 After the world’s divestment from apartheid South Africa, the new ANC government strained to re-attract capital by creating an investor-friendly environment. However, these efforts are being dashed by rising crime rates, the low education of workers, and the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on, among so many other aspects of society, factory productivity. Land occupations in neighboring Zimbabwe and that country’s economic collapse further deter those considering investing in South Africa. Thus the threat itself of land occupations is enough to terrify investors and cast yet another blow to the ANC’s faltering macroeconomic plans.

Unless macroeconomic policies begin to target the needs of South Africa’s poor majority – through policies such as basic income grants and security of land tenure – a class struggle may arise as the demands of the new social movements

coalesce around the ANC’s economic failures. This day may not be so far off. About 10,000 people stormed to a new marine park in Durban in February 2004, after the park advertised 300 jobs as cashiers, janitors, and security officers. Over one hundred people were injured in the stampede towards the park gates, 17 of them crushed against a steel fence.\footnote{LaFraniere.} After being turned away, many job seekers began to chant: “No jobs! No Vote!”\footnote{Desai, Ashwin and Richard Pithouse. “(Un)civil Society and the Vote.” The Mercury. 8 Mar 2004. 13 Mar 2004. <http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?2,40,5,375>.} Many poor South Africans envisioned a democracy that would break the bonds between economic oppression and political exclusion. Unless those in power begin to de-link these structural elements, the poor and landless will continue to view their authority as little more than a ballot-box democracy. As the new social movements develop their class ideology and pursue a more rigorous structural analysis, they will take democracy into their own hands.

I can confidently conclude that the LPM would not have reached its radical position – which is evolving into a class-based position – without bridging the urban-rural divide. In its early months as an exclusively rural initiative, the LPM was limited by its dependency upon the National Land Committee and its affiliated NGOs. The careful positioning of these NGOs as mediators between the government and the rural landless and their role as service providers hindered the development of a more radical ideology. Since the NGOs work in cooperation with all aspects of rural societies – including traditional leadership – the democratization of rural authority, though it has been lobbied for by the NLC and others, has not been a central concern. The focal point has always been delivery of
land to the landless, and it took the engagement with urban poor to connect land distribution issues with the poverty perpetuated by the ANC’s macroeconomic policies. Through connecting with urban landless populations and urban social movements, many LPM activists – urban and rural – have come to see land as the most important, but not the only, issue driving persistent poverty. As it heads towards a head-on confrontation with the ANC during the elections, the LPM is still connected with and heavily supported by the NLC, but both organizations recognize that a split, though traumatic at first, will allow the movement to grow. The LPM is now explicitly criticizing the ANC’s macroeconomic policy and broken promises on land reform in its direct attack on South Africa’s new democracy. In lifting cries of “No Land! No Vote!” the LPM is criticizing the government in radical terms that would not have been foreseen without the process of invalidating the urban-rural divide. The LPM has much to teach other social movements about bridging urban and rural demands and organizing tactics, which I will discuss in my concluding chapter.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

South Africa’s urban and rural spaces – and the boundary between them – have been constituted through centuries of power struggles, policies, and shifting theoretical justifications. Over the course of the twentieth century, the consolidation of white minority rule profoundly shaped the nature of the country’s urban-rural divide. With the arsenal of segregation and apartheid policies, including policies which artificially de-urbanized blacks, the urban-rural divide was imbued with a racial significance it had not earlier had. The divide between urban and rural areas lies at the center of South Africa’s political and economic history. Today, it has become so naturalized through hegemonic discourse that it is largely taken for granted. This study has interrogated the urban-rural divide as a political construct, and has revealed its enduring impacts on land reform and social movement organizing. The Landless People’s Movement has been the empirical focus of this study, as it is unique among South Africa’s social movements in its bridging of the urban-rural divide through its organizing tactics and demands.

My introductory chapter provided background on the Landless People’s Movement and the state of land distribution in post-apartheid South Africa. My second chapter traced the construction of the urban-rural divide through land-related policies and the thoughts of political scientists and historians. My rendering of the history of land distribution relied heavily upon the cheap labor thesis, as this historical-political framework offers insight on the intersection of
political and economic forces and the critical role of migrant labor in bridging the
political boundary between urban and rural. Of the economic and political
theorists I reviewed, Mahmood Mamdani offers the most useful theoretical
framework for understanding the construction of the urban-rural divide as an
inherently undemocratic structure. I drew upon his analysis of urban and rural
modes of governance to explain the categorically distinct entitlements to land for
blacks in urban and rural South Africa. Chapter three explored the ways in which
the divide continues to shape the direction of resistance and policy change. In the
fourth chapter, I studied the Landless People’s Movement’s bridging of the urban-
rural divide through its use of economic parallels between urban and rural.
Specifically, the problem of tenure insecurity and the threat of eviction serve to
link the struggles of urban and rural landless. The fifth chapter explored the
LPM’s direct ideological challenge to South Africa’s new democracy with the No
Land! No Vote! campaign. With this campaign, the LPM is attacking what they
consider to be South Africa’s “ballot box democracy,” and are threatening to take
democracy into their own hands. The LPM’s vision of democracy (and,
increasingly, that of other social movements) seeks to realize greater political
participation and power for marginalized groups, specifically by invalidating
inherently undemocratic urban-rural division.

My study has found that the Landless People’s Movement’s identification
of urban landlessness requires a rejection of the strict urban-rural dichotomy
which prevails in debates over land reform strategy. By defining “landless” as a
population which knows no rural or urban bounds, the LPM is challenging the
divide which ascribes distinct forms of land entitlement to urban and rural populations. By challenging this divide, the LPM is revealing the extent to which current approaches to land reform rely upon – and perpetuate – apartheid-era politics of division. Since the urban-rural divide has functioned as a threat to democracy and the realization of full citizenship rights, the LPM’s attack of the divide provides a critical example for social movements and policy-makers seeking to realize a more democratic future for South Africa.

My study has only tangentially addressed two critical challenges facing contemporary South African society as they relate to land rights: stark gender inequality (specifically where the rights and opportunities of rural women are concerned) and HIV/AIDS. During my interviews in rural areas, women were rarely vocal. Male LPM members often encouraged women to speak and lamented that women’s voices were not being heard, yet gender dynamics are so entrenched in many rural areas that it will take very concerted efforts to change them. These efforts are only just beginning to take on substance within the LPM. The LPM is losing many comrades to HIV/AIDS, and has drawn links between the epidemic and landlessness in some of its campaigning, particularly their actions around World AIDS Day. Though some members express a desire to do more campaigning around HIV/AIDS, the movement has not devoted much effort to AIDS activism or raising awareness among LPM comrades. Some LPM members consider the Treatment Action Campaign to be handling AIDS-related advocacy, and so see little need for the LPM to direct its efforts in that direction. The connections between gender, HIV/AIDS, landlessness, and poverty could fill
volumes, and I hope that future scholarship will take up these areas of inquiry, perhaps along the following lines.

The manner in which land tenure is reformed, and the way in which the urban and rural are bridged in South Africa will carry the greatest implications for women, particularly rural women. If urban-rural channels continue to be opened and dominated by men as they have been throughout migrant labor processes and resistance struggles, women will continue to have their economic, social, and political opportunities severely limited. More academic inquiry must be directed at finding ways to bridge urban and rural spaces to ensure that women become direct holders and beneficiaries of land rights and tenure security. The democratization of rural authority would allow rural women to assume a far greater role in local decision-making processes. The implementation of economic policies, such as micro-credit and basic income grants, intended to jumpstart rural economies and create opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurship and empowerment could potentially increase women’s social and economic capital.

The links between landlessness and HIV are undeniable. Single women who do not have a place to stay often have little choice but to move in with a man, exchange sex for shelter or food, or remain without a home. The spread of HIV/AIDS is thus perpetuated by the insecurity and poverty arising from landlessness. Married women also possess few options when negotiating the sexual relationship with their husbands. A refusal to have sex with a promiscuous husband could result in a woman being left without any assets, as long as property continues to be held by men. On the policy level, HIV/AIDS prevention
campaigns are often widespread in inner-city areas, but are not extended to the
townships or informal settlements at the edges of the city. Finally, the
antiretroviral treatment programs recently won by the Treatment Action
Campaign will require pressure from rural and peri-urban areas to ensure that they
are adequately carried out in these areas. HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in rural
KwaZulu-Natal are the highest in the nation, with approximately 40 percent of the
adult population living with HIV. Without grass-roots pressure, it is unlikely that
treatment programs will reach such rural areas any time soon. The TAC has been
an urban-based movement, but is trying to expand its membership in rural areas.
Lessons from the LPM concerning the translation of ideologies and linking of
issues between urban and rural areas may help the TAC and other movements to
build rural bases.

There is a great need to strengthen rural civil society around issues besides
land. This must be done in order to ensure that rural-specific demands are acted
upon, and that rural areas benefit from gains that are, at this point, largely won
through urban struggles. South Africa’s urban-based movements are making
crucial links between the issues of privatization, homelessness, police brutality,
and broader macroeconomic policies, and this may be one way for urban
movements to positively influence rural civil society actors. Struggles to attain
viable rural livelihoods must incorporate much more than a demand for tenure
security. Rural constituencies will be well-served to gain a greater understanding
of the effects of macro-economic policies, and could learn much from their urban
comrades in this arena.
I would recommend delaying future study of the LPM for some time to come. As the LPM is a very young movement, its effects on land reform and South Africa’s larger democratic project cannot yet be determined. Though it is tempting to study their work, it is likely best (for the sake of the movement) not to weigh it down with too much theoretical baggage before it truly gets off the ground. The spontaneity and unpredictability of an emerging social movement is fleeting, and should not be over-analyzed or speculated upon too early. Rather than attempting to analyze the movement itself, I have turned my eye towards understanding the significance of the movement’s demands within South Africa’s broader democratic project. The Landless People’s Movement, along with the rest of the country, has a long struggle ahead to ensure not only equitable land distribution, but also access to jobs, education, healthcare, and other opportunities for the majority of South Africans. Though a fascinating case, I would suggest allowing the movement to find its course before much more academic inquiry. In the meantime, the LPM is always looking to learn more from studies of its international partners such as the Movimento sem terra (Landless Worker’s Movement) of Brazil. Research on building national and transnational linkages among land rights movements and training programs for inexperienced potential farmers would be especially valuable.

As long as urban-rural division is promoted through land policies in South Africa, redistribution of land and tenure security will not be enough to ensure that every South African is able to exercise full citizenship rights. The terms of land reform must not perpetuate the racialist and undemocratic approaches of
apartheid. The political character of the urban-rural divide has been constructed over the course of centuries, but it must not take that long to diminish the exaggerated power of physical location to determine one’s life chances.
## APPENDIX 1. LAND DISTRIBUTION AND MIGRANT LABOR IN SOUTH AFRICA TO 1913

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>The “Great Trek” begins. 10,000 Boers, the Voortrekkers, leave the Cape Province and head north and northeast. Both Voortrekkers and blacks are largely stock-farmers engaged in grazing. As a result, conflicts over land ensue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Discovery of diamonds (Kimberley).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Discovery of gold on Witwatersrand. Johannesburg founded. The focus of the country’s economy rapidly shifts from agricultural production to the mining industry. The country is hurtled into industrial capitalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Rinderpest outbreak devastates cattle and puts black peasant families under increasing economic pressure. Labor migrancy increases to pay for restocking of cattle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Blacks excluded from the vote everywhere except in the Cape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Johannesburg’s population exceeds that of Cape Town; becomes region’s largest city. Population increase is attributable to black labor in the mines. Over 90 percent of Johannesburg’s black population is male.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>South African Native National Congress (later the ANC) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Black employment on mines exceeds 200,000. Natives’ Land Act passes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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