

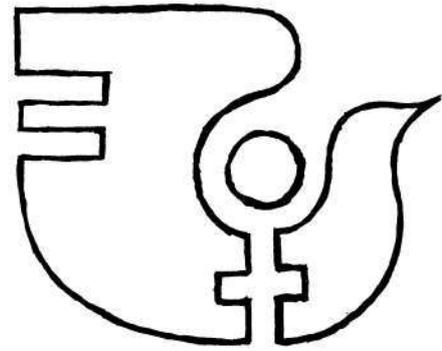
INTOLERABLE

A review of **Women without Men: A Study of 150 Families in the Nqutu District of Kwazulu**, by Liz Clarke and Jane Ngobese, with photos by Dorothy McLean and Anthony Barker; published by the Institute for Black Research, Durban.

by Colin Gardner

Life in the 'homelands' is on the whole quite intolerable—in several respects. Human beings cannot really tolerate an inhuman existence, and existence is inhuman for most of the people who live in the 'homelands'. 'South Africa' cannot tolerate what goes on in the 'homelands'—it should be unwilling to tolerate it on moral grounds; in the long run, or perhaps in the not-so-long run, it will be incapable of tolerating it, of allowing and containing it, in any sense. And certainly, for any moderately sensitive person, this well-written and well-produced little book makes intolerable reading.

But then of course not many people will read it. Most blacks hardly need to read it. And as for the whites—the people who hold the reins of power in this country—little books on life in the 'homelands', even when they are illustrated with fine photo-



graphs, are not exactly top of the pops. And yet at this moment in time more and more whites are allowing themselves to feel, in a suitably vague way, that the 'homelands' are going to prove, somehow, the solution to all the political problems of South Africa If the 'homelands' do indeed put an end to the political anxieties of white South Africans, it is hardly likely to be in the manner which many white South Africans fondly imagine.

Women without Men is a small and simple companion-piece to Francis Wilson's excellent and authoritative **Migrant Labour in South Africa**. Dr. Wilson tells the whole story of the men who move. Liz Clarke and Jane Ngobese, and their photographers, give us a picture of some of the women who are left behind





and of the circumstances in which they, their children and their parents drag out their mainly dreary lives.

Of course the very notion of migrant labour and of families that are almost perpetually split apart is appalling. But equally appalling are the spiritual and physical conditions that the inhabitants of the 'homelands' have to put up with.

The book is factual, so let me give a summary of the crucial facts. The minimum monthly cost of living for a family of seven in the Nqutu area is as follows (a third of the book is devoted to an analysis and explanation of these figures):

Food	R 57,83
Clothing	17,96
Fuel and light	8,84
Cleansing and toilet	2,39
Transport	2,30
Education	7,60
Tax	,83
Housing maintenance	,83
Replacement of household effects—bedding, utensils, etc.	,83
Ritual	4,58
Total	R103,99

The actual average monthly income of the 150 sample families (consisting of 973 people, i.e. about 6½ persons to a family) turned out to be as follows:

Commitments from migrant workers	R 9,90
Earnings from home industries and income in kind from livestock and agriculture	2,37
Income from pensions and disability grants	2,60
Total	R14,87

So there it is, in a nutshell: about R15 to do the work of R100. Comparatively affluent people sometimes talk of the difficulty, at a time of inflation, of 'making ends meet', but they use the metaphor without realising its full significance: for some people ends have never met, never can meet; the 'cost of living' is so far beyond anything they can ever hope to pay that they have had to recognise grimly that living, in the normal sense of that word, is something that they cannot aspire to.

Many of the effects of that missing monthly R85 are fairly well-known: unspeakable malnutrition, ragged clothes, crumbling homes, hopelessly inadequate education and the delinquency that always goes with it. But other effects have been less publicised: mental illness; guilt and anxiety because there has not been enough money to propitiate the ancestors properly; a general physical and spiritual distress. 'Little wonder then that a study of malnutrition in the Nqutu district of KwaZulu sounds the warning that poverty and malnutrition are so rife that the traditional Zulu physique is changing: the amaZulu in the area are becoming a puny, stunted and mentally enfeebled people.' (Page 95)

And yet Government policy—the policy that many whites like to think of as the 'final solution' to our political problems—continues to force Africans into the 'homelands'. The Tomlinson Report of 1954 estimated that the Nqutu area, if fully developed agriculturally, could support 13 000 people. There were then about 35 000 people there. Since 1954 there has been no significant agricultural development in the area, but the population has risen to about 85 000. It is estimated that by 1980 it will be 120 000. Is it surprising that the 'homelands' have been called the 'dumping grounds'?

I have outlined some of the central facts; but the book contains information on many important matters—the productivity of the 'reserves' over the years; the Bantu Investment Corporation; details of the lives of 'homeland' families; agriculture, home industries, pensions, tax, housing, rituals, education, health. These facts are not given as mere statistics, though there are plenty of statistics: they are often clothed in human form by the recounting of specific cases and of significant anecdotes. The humanity of the presentation, however, has the effect of making most of what is presented even more depressing.

What can one **do** about all this? How can a townsman respond in a human and useful way to the scandal of the 'homelands'? That is another story. But as one reads **Women without Men** in the second half of 1975, one can't help recognising—if it isn't illegal to make the point, to think the thought—that for many of the people caught up in the evil circle of migrant labour and hopeless 'homelands' there must be something very attractive about the programme of justice for all, and of starting again from scratch, offered to the peasants of Mozambique by Frelimo. □