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GRASS, MONEY, AND CATTLE: The Livestock Dealers of Phalaborwa.[1]

Owen Sichone

I INTRODUCTION

During my visits to the Lowveld, I have not come across any veal monsters or their animal loving enemies. I guess one would have to go to the British port of Dover to witness that particular cattle battle. In the same way, the ecologists' and environmentalists' campaign against the hamburgers that threaten the Amazon rain forest is best understood from an American point of view. Phalaborwa is not veal or hamburger country, but the people love their meat and even named the township of Namakgale after it. Whether the people of Phalaborwa love their cattle is more dificult to say, but they do own and keep them. There are, however, a few questions about who should raise cattle and for what purposes that are yet to be answered to everybody's satisfaction. Everybody in this case being government officials implementing development, White ranchers producing meat for the country, and Black elites wanting a share of the beef business, as well as poor villagers who wish to speculate and accumulate using livestock as a concentrator of value. The idea that some people are not qualified to keep livestock is what constitutes the local cattle battle.

During one of my interviews with farmers in Phalaborwa a White beef baron, whom we shall call Willem Botha, told me that

Blacks have a misconception that grass, money, and cattle are one and the same thing. In 1982 the drought killed 147,000 and the 1992 - 80,000 cattle in Giyani but the owners got nothing because they refused to sell[2].

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[1] This paper is based upon research being conducted in Phalaborwa district Northern Transvaal. The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily attributed to the Centre for Science Development or the university of the Witwatersrand research council which is co-sponsoring this project. The 'people of Phalaborwa' for the purposes of this paper are not the *ba*Phalaborwa tribe but all the residents of townships, farms and villages around the mining town of that name, whatever their ethnic identity.

[2] Monday 9th January, 1995,interview Josephine Farm, Gravelotte

This is an old problem in the business of modernization. Blacks, or peasants, or tribals, as the case may be, are accused not merely of understanding modern business differently, but of just not understanding. Despite the efforts of many scholars to show that such behaviour is not irrational, the dominant culture of the civil service, the development agencies and the educated elites, tend to see only problems with 'traditional' behaviour. For instance: an anthropologist from Botswana who, in a recent book, compared White ranchers to Black entrepreneurs and wrote in relation to one of the village farmers:

By contrast, the better-experienced settler ranchers expanded their land as a single unit (cf. Vorster and the Clarks). Most probably, however, Tau was inspired by the African mentality which finds greatness, not in the amount of land or size of the ranch but rather in the quantity of farms, notwithstanding their sizes. In his home village, people used to talk of him as the man with two Tuli Block farms. Among settlers, the reverse is true;grandeur is based on the size of a ranch and not necessarily on the quantity of farms. Mazonde:1993,90

According to Mazonde, Tau's African mentality, more than his lack of access to information or his inexperience explain his failure to acquire a large farm with a river frontage or direct road link and his failure to ensure that when he bought his second farm it was adjacent to his first one. It is this same perceived African mentality that may be used to explain why Willem Botha suggested to me that,

Village elders are children in matters of modern economy and must therefore be guided (by the state). *Why, they are even bartering as if they are not in a money economy! They barter their big bullocks for scrap heifers from White dealers who exploit their lack of understanding of weights and the market.*

The African mentality somehow prevents people from seeing that one large farm is easier to manage than two small ones that are situated several miles apart, or that bullocks fetch higher prices than heifers on the market. Contrary to Willem Botha's view, barter is not a pre-capitalist mode of exchange though it may appear as such when taken out of its social context. (C.Humphrey and S.Hugh-Jones eds. 1992) There are numerous examples of counter trade between countries and barter between traders which fit into the modern economy perfectly. Discussed out of context, both barter and the African mentality can only appear silly.

As provocative as the concept is, this paper will not engage the notion of an African mentality directly except insofar as it is used by my informants to explain their or other people's behaviour. It needs a more careful problematisation than I can give at present. This paper is, however, not meant to provide a political economy of cattle in Phalaborwa or even detailed profiles of the cattle keepers even though I realise that this is crucial for the establishment of the social context and it will have to be done at a later stage. My present concern is merely to discuss some of the local ideas about cattle in the money economy and to illustrate the problems associated with a lack of a common vocabulary that result when a bureaucratic and technical-scientific world view comes into contact with foreign ideas and economic strategies.

Some local meanings may or may not qualify for the label of African mentality, as used by Mazonde and others, my main interest is the way in which small scale livestock keepers conceptualise, explain and cope with a stress situation that has over the years been been influenced by apartheid, economic recession and prolonged drought. May I add that *small scale livestock keepers* as I am currently using it is just shorthand for Black villagers who keep a few cows but whose economic security lies elsewhere. By no means do I imply a social class or stratum. Let me begin my search for local conceptions of development by looking at the basic raw material of the livestock industry, grazing.

II PASTURE PROBLEMS

Willem Botha's comment on the tribal misconception that grass equals money would seem to suggest that make believe-capitalist farmers like himself do not also convert grass into money. Of course they do. Their operations are technically more advanced and enjoy many advantages over the small scale operations. These include access to land and government support which enable them to turn all sorts of other biomass into profits. Make believe-capitalist farmers can afford to laugh at what appear like the futile efforts of the Black livestock keepers to extract money from an abused, overused and increasingly reluctant soil. What they do not understand is why anyone would bother to be a livestock keeper under hopeless conditions like those that prevail in the villages.

Grass is hard to come by during a prolonged drought and whether low rainfall has now become the norm in southern Africa is a question everyone would like answered. Nothing is certain. Willem Botha recalled that in the last 25 years he could only remember three or four years of good rainfall in Phalaborwa, and was inclining his future plans toward game ranching because beef cattle were more difficult to keep. In the

meantime, he was able to feed some of his beef animals on *mopane* leaves and twigs and other matter. Grass is more important for poor livestock keepers than for the make believe-capitalist farmers and yet the less profitable it becomes, the more the small scale operators continue trying to join the cattle dealing business.

As a result of the increasing shortage of grazing, Willem has decided to use the abundant *mopane* trees as fodder for his feedlot animals. Small trees are cut and fed into a shredder and minced. The milled twigs and leaves are then mixed into the fattening mix which is made up of hay, urea, citrus products and cotton husks. The feedlots take 79 bags 15 times a day (1185 altogether), and there is continous movement of tractor and trailer between the mill and the feedlots. When one looks at the grassless feedlots that stand just below the hill that houses JCI Monarch Shaft at Gravelotte, and in the shadow of its mine dumps, one cannot help thinking that this is not quite farming. Such beef production units are industrial operations in every sense of the word and very different from the activity that the village livestock keepers are involved in. Yet even that is not farming in the sense of a full time vocation.

Willem was very enthusiastic about his plans to start 'milling the whole tree" and with the use of a Zimbabwean product he had read about called *Browse Plus*, he would be able to increase the rate of browse consumed by his feedlot cattle, since the additives break down the tannin in the *mopane,* and make up for the reduced supply of grass. Needless to say, such technology is not available to the village livestock keepers who do not even own feeding troughs for their livestock, let alone tree milling equipment.

Local knowledge has it that in the past the Phalaborwa area was predominantly grasssland. The grass was taller than it is today, and I was told that military aerial photographs taken in the 1950s showed an average of 400 trees per hectare whereas today there are 6,000 trees per hectare and the grass has all but been smothered by the trees. Thus the monotonous *mopane* is indigenous, but the forest is almost as unnatural as a pine plantation. Why are the grasslands disappearing? Overgrazing is admitted to by both White and Black cattle keepers. Prolonged and frequent droughts, and the ending of annual burning which used to control the growth of young trees, a consequence of conservation ideologies that are against tree molesting, are also blamed.

It is not just the *mopane* trees that are doing better than grass. Fruit and timber plantations have also fared well in the recent past though it was probably at great cost to the environment. The cattle keepers recalled with envy the fortunes that their fruit growing counterparts

made before the drought. Farmers along the Letaba river are alleged to have made millions from citrus, mango and other trees in recent years, although at the time I was there waters levels were so low in most dams that irrigation was suspended. Evidently, make believe-capitalist agriculture is not without its faults. While stressing the negative impact of the trees on grass and livestock, let me just add that for the Africans as well, there is money to be made, albeit only on a seasonal basis, from the sale of *mopane* worms, also called *mopane* sausages, but that is another question.

If the grass disappears, the small livestock keepers should follow. A lack of grass and water leads to the industrialisation of both horticultural and pastoral farming thereby rendering it too expensive for most Black operators, unless they obtain state support. And yet there is still a lot of interest in the precarious pastoral project, but this is not because of the African mentality. The desire to keep cattle is not fueled by prestige but by a profit motive. In another context, (Sichone, 1994a), I suggested that the sowing of *mabele* sorghum in this area is more for aesthetic than food security reasons. Ploughing the land is tantamount to staking a political claim and re-affirming an ethnic identity. Keeping cattle is also like that but another reason why small scale livestock keepers will not give up their business is that by their assessment, the grass is available, *there behind the fence, where we used to graze our cattle before the land was taken away.*

A good business should move out of loss making ventures. White farmers say sheep, dairy cows, poultry and pigs are not worth keeping in this harsh environment. The scientific explanation is that such animals do not put on weight quickly enough and use too much of their energy just keeping cool. Willem does keep pigs on the feedlots, but only to supply his butcheries with fat for the sausages. As the hogs feed off the waste mash and cattle dung, they are cheap to keep for sausage fat but not for pork. According to Willem Botha, who owns abattoirs and butcheries in Giyani and Phalaborwa town, goats are also not worth keeping:

They may be kept for a sacrifice to granny but have no market value. If there is even a hint of goat in a butchery no European will buy mutton from there. Likewise if there is the slightest suggestion of pork the Black will not buy meat.

It is just as well, then that they do not know that pork fat is used in sausage making. But Blacks do keep goats in large numbers and by their own admission, only for festivals and rituals. I was asked on many ocassions whether a market for goats could be created somehow. I unfortunately, could not provide a solution to the problem of a market

for goats. So why do they keep goats that they cannot sell? Is this another example of the African mentality at work? It appears to me that goats are kept for their potential which has not yet been realised and are in this sense as economic a resource as cattle if only someone could find buyers. But because they may be responsible for much of the the overgrazing in the villages, keeping goats is even more irrational than keeping cattle in the eyes of people like Willem Botha.

Feedlot beef production turns trees and other matter into money. This option is closed to small farmers who need grass to prosper. Similarly, game ranching which the beef barons consider more profitable than cattle in the increasingly dry climate, is also beyond the means of the poorer livestock keepers. My assessment is that small scale livestock keepers are being pushed increasingly into goat keeping, wealthier Black farmers are going into feedlots and industrial methods of beef production while White farmers are looking to game ranching for a solution to the problem of the disappearing grass and , or falling rate of profit.

Willem's wish to expand his game ranching side of his business is not just based on his reading of the tourism and beef markets but is backed by the notion that Black elites in South Africa's cities have lost their hunting tradition, not having had the opportunity to practise it in recent years. In the New South Africa, however, they will be willing and able to pay for the opportunity of resuming their hunting, if only at week-ends. Game meat is 30 percent more profitable than beef, but on top of that, Willem will charge his rich clients for the privilege of shooting the game. The meat, needless to say, will go to his butcheries for sale. This is one instance where an aspect of the African mentality will make sense for him, but whether it will make sense to the urban elites is yet to be seen. Suffice it to say that Willem's notion of the African mentality is strong enough for him to base his business plans on.

If beef ranching is not as profitable as it used to be, because of the increasing shortage of grazing, this problem is much worse in the villages. The only solution to the problem according to Willem is the privatisation of communal and state land. This is a position shared with officials in the former homelands' development parastatals and government officers. 'Indunas, chiefs and illiterate villagers could make sense of the communal ownership', Willem said, 'but the educated,*civilised,* urbanised Black has no need for the apartheid structure, the homeland and its communal land tenure.

As soon as Africans went to school apartheid was doomed and the question was when, not if, it would fall. The idea that chiefs should

continue to grant permission to someone who has the money and wants to build a house or buy a cow from me is absurd.

Willem Botha's plan is simple:

If all the land in Gazankulu, for example, were divided into 100ha plots and distributed equitably each Senior Male *would get one plot. At R1000 per hectare every family selling to developers would instantly be R100,000 the richer, a sizeable investable windfall much more useful economically than government subsidies for the poor.*

Such *Yeltsinomics* would not, of course, create a popular capitalism and turn everyone into property owners. The aim would seem to be the speeding up of the destruction of traditional land tenure in order to provide more grazing for the beef cattle, the bucks for the city hunters, and other game for the tourists. Willem's plan would only be complete after the land had been sold to those who can utilise it profitably. The negetation of reactionary systems of land tenure which fetter the development of capitalist relations is unlikely to follow this plan but it is yet another battle line in the war against the African mentality.

The role of the state in Willem's plan would be to take a paternalistic approach and guide the small scale livestock keepers into the market. Animal health officers would say:

We are now in January and only 15% of normal rainfall has been recorded. You must sell all your old cows that are likely to succumb to the drought, this may be 3 animals each. Then a few weeks later if the drought persists, the heifers, followed by the bulls would be sold. Each owner would be told that they could replenish their herds once rains returned to normal.

It is precisely this type of commandism that small scale livestock keepers resent. Not only are they already in the market, on their own terms, but they have their own way of judging whether a drought is upon them or not. If it rains in December and January and then again in April, there will be sufficient grass to enable the cows to survive and reproduce. Their cattle are not kept to attain maximum weight in the shortest possible period as is the practice on the beef ranches but to survive and multiply before all else. Consequently, drought means different minimum levels of precipitation to the two types of livestock keeper. Losses are usually highest during a spell of not more than four months and then mortality rates decline (see appendix). Even though it is possible for one to lose everything, the hope that the drought will soon pass is partly based on previous experience.

Although it would seem from what I have said so far that make believe-capitalist farmers are out to destroy the small livestock keepers, official records show that during the worst droughts such as the 1992 one, there was an increase in applications from village livestock owners, for permits to move their cattle out of the driest areas. The movement of livestock in this area is strictly controlled because of the high risk of disease from game animals. The animal health officers said these 'permits out' usually implied movement onto ranches belonging to White owners, but everyone was reluctant to discuss the nature of the relationship that made this transcation possible. At the moment I do not have sufficient data to offer an explanation, but it is possible that the movement of cattle and money between White and Black economic units is mutually beneficial but that aspects of the contracts facilitate transfer pricing of one sort or another. Each time I asked about the renting of grazing from White landowners, informants merely indicated that it does happen and that the charge is an agreed amount per unit of land for a given period. That was all.

If farming is a business, and only a business, then of course there is no room for unprofitable methods of production. If the only way that the rearing of livestock can continue to exist is by using capital intensive techniques then again those who cannot afford to keep up with technological change will not survive, but the small scale cattle keepers of Phalaborwa continue to exist because they need less water, less grass and less land to carry out their business. Make believe-capitalists need to more than survive and consequently need more of everything to remain in the industry. Even as the grass shortage worsens for the big ranchers, the small farmers still see sufficient grass around them to enable them to keep cattle. The reason why they need to keep cattle, as I will show in the next section, is money but money for a specific use that does not require frequent and regular sales of high quality beef animals. Cattle are meant to cover planned, but unusual, expenditures, the most important of which, I was frequently told, is children's education. The cattle in the kraal are only part of the plan. Ultimately cattle must be exchanged for money which in turn must be exchanged for a college education so that the next generation can gain access to higher sources of income. With a higher income, many things are accessible, including more livestock.

III MO MONEY

Money, time and the value of land are understood differently in different cultures although there is a tendency for western education to give us an egocentric desire to remake other worldviews and accuse them of ignorance. I am of the view that a lot of what has gone wrong in

African development probably has something to do with this problem. Mazonde and Willem Botha, whom I have already referred to, are convinced that the African mentality is an aberration and they are not alone. Virtually every civil servant involved with the rural development enterprise holds the opinion that unless we can change this mentality, all is lost.

In most of my research situations, including research *at home*, I been reminded that development agents, experts, bureaucrats and others in the state apparatus, work within a different culture and regularly demonstrate their difference from 'these people', 'our people'. And their job is to impose what I call the western paradigm onto 'the masses'[3]. The impositions of the western paradigm is carried out even by local people who in their other roles outside government work may even revert to local ways.

There have always been alternatives to the western paradigm even in the money economy. Most of the cattle in Phalaborawa belong to the wealthy White ranchers and homeland elites. Small livestock keepers are very vulnerable in the harsh environment but harbour a stubborn wish to continue keeping cattle. They value big framed exotic breeds despite the fact that such beasts demand more land for grazing and better management than small farmers can provide. Wages paid by the mining industry and the service sector including retail trade probably contribute more to local income than the village cattle keepers do. The Black elites are active in cattle farming mainly on a part- time basis. Doctors, lawyers and civil servants, or tribal chiefs for that matter, use their access to cash, information and power to obtain land upon which they build herds of cattle in a commercial way. Undoubtedly, cattle are also kept for prestige, but all the indications are that it is still a profitable enterprise and it is to make money that the White ranchers, the Black elites and the small scale livestock keepers are involved in it. But there the similarities end.

The government bureaucracy is, under normal circumstances, the most powerful of the purveyors of the western paradigm in the development process and the livestock extension workers treat eveyone who keeps cattle as a farmer. Small scale livestock keepers are not farmers, and they do not behave like farmers. Jobs were lost during the recession and the drought, which are closely linked for the people of Phalaborwa. The one pushes food prices up while bringing down fertiliser

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[3] I have borrowed this concept from Claude Alvares who uses *paradigm* quite differently from the Kuhnian original to refer to the western cultural model which has become universalized but co-exists with other worldviews.

consumption by farmers and taking away jobs and wages from employees of FOSKOR and their dependants[4]. If markets for fertilisers and other local mineral products are found, then the local economy may create new jobs. Until that happens, alternative sources of income must be created, and speculating in cattle is one of them.

The Phalaborwa area is too dry and hot for genuine crop production but attempts to grow vegetables and grain crops persist and attract government and donor support. The livestock keepers are less dependent upon such aid, but are closely monitored by livestock health officers to control foot and mouth and corridor diseases that periodically break. In general, money entitlements are more important than spinach gardens or stock keeping as a source of sustenance. The keeping of cattle, however, goes beyond mere subsistence as we shall see.

The majority of small scale livestock keepers are, as I have said, speculators who buy and sell cattle for profit and are not breeders in the true sense. One machine operator at Namakgale copper mine, for example, who lives in Makhushane village just outside the township kept goats and cattle. Although he had lost most of his goats in the drought and had no cattle in his krall at the time of my interview he was known as a cattle owner, and was trying to arrange the purchase of a cow from a man in Mashishimale to re-establish his herd. He stressed to me that *selling cows* helped him to educate his children, one of whom was already attending university. Having a regular wage placed him in a very good position to speculate in a shorter cycle than other cattle dealers and he never sold to the established abattoir but found his buyers among the village butchers[5].

Very few people can afford to keep cattle for non-commercial reasons although it is assumed by extension workers that when livestock owners refuse to sell their starving animals they are behaving in the traditional manner. The Black elites who are active in cattle farming sometimes as part-timers, include doctors, lawyers and civil servants. They may be in it for the prestige of having a farm as week-end retreat, property, a long term investment and so on. But there are signs that they do take profit making seriously and that this is the group from which Black capitalist farmers will emerge in the Phalaborwa area.

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4 FOSKOR (Fosfaat Ontginningskorporasie Beperk) the Phosphate Development Corporation Ltd. is one of the major employers in Phalaborwa's minerals based industries.

5 Interview 5: Makhushane, Thursday 26 May, 1994

Let me summarise the ideal way in which money may be converted into cattle and vice versa, from the small operators' point of view:

i Not more than R1000 should be spent on the purchase of a single animal;
ii no cattle should be sold before the herd exceeds ten;
iii it is better to exchange a bullock for a heifer than to sale it for cash;
iv cattle are there to support the children and specifically to pay for their edication.

There is nothing un-commercial about this way of economic planning. *Kgosi* Malatji, one of the few people in the area who owns more than a hundred head of cattle spends up to R4000 on a single Brahmane bull but he is a breeder. The village stock keepers also keep Brahmane cattle but of a lower quality and price range. Willem Botha referred to such cattle as *scrap*. A group of village farmers I had ambushed at a dipping tank one morning admitted that they bought *rejects* but explained that it was not out of ignorance. That was all they could afford.

It would thus appear that a cow is meant to reproduce and expand the herd. The herd should exceed ten before sales are entertained, and then only to pay for the education of the children. There are enough examples around the villages to show that a higher education means more money and that when doctors keep cattle it is on a large scale. Using low quality beef cattle to generate upward social mobility makes sense but I am yet to locate a family that has completed the cycle. The great majority are still in phase one and appear to be destined to remain there. Phase one is where wages, pensions or savings are converted into cattle. The next step is to sell the livestock to pay for the children's education, finally, highly paid elites can then become farmers on par with the White ranchers. The homeland leaders do provide an example of how this can be achieved even though they were greatly helped by their access to government support, nevertheless they are role models.

Having briefly looked at the place of money in the cattle keeping enterprise and suggested that grass can be converted into I will now look at the extent to which cattle keeper know their craft.

IV CATTLE KEEPING

In an area where rain has been such an important religious phenomenon and the subject of many prayers and sacrifices it sounds blasephemous to say 'Thank God for the drought'. But that was exactly what a livestock officer in the former Gazankulu government said to me

when we were discussing the impact of the 1990-92 drought on cattle owners. His reasoning was very persuasive although most civil servants and cattle keepers I spoke to do not share his view.

In the 1970s, I am ashamed to say, we went around the area castrating the indigenous nguni breeds of cattle in the hope that improved cross-breeds would emerge from the local cows serviced by Afrikaander bulls. Many farmers were and still are enthusiatic about having large framed animals and excitedly accepted the breeding scheme. However, large breeds of cattle naturally require more water and more fodder. Add to that the fact that they have lower levels of tolerance vis-a-vis high temperatures, tick-borne and other diseases and you have a situation where men who cannot afford the best management of the their herds lose them. During the drought, the 'improved breeds were the first to succumb and people realised the advantage of keeping indigenous cattle because they clearly have the best drought survival record. Not only that, Nguni cattle have a higher fertility rate and when they are able to graze properly again they quickly regain their normal weight.

The case of the 'improved bulls' reminded me of another breeding scheme I came across in northern Zambia. In 1981 I did a survey of an integrated rural development project in Isoka district which was then being supported by Danish and Swedish aid agencies. The donors were putting money into several small development projects designed to keep rural people from migrating to the cities. One of these included the free distribution of hybrid roosters in the villages as breeding stock. When I returned to the area in 1988 to conduct research for my doctoral thesis I found that the development programme was being run by the British aid agency which, in true Thatcherite fashion had sub-contracted it to a private company. After the departure of the Swedes and Danes all the tiny coffee irrigation schemes, dry land wheat growing experiments and free cattle dips disappeared. The improved roosters had not only all perished too but had, unfortunately, wiped out the entire chicken population as well because their improved offspring had a low disease resistance. There quite simply were no chickens in the area and people had resorted to keeping ducks and guinea fowl as alternative table birds. hybridisation is not always improvement. In many cases improved varieties of seed or livestock require improved management to fulfil their potential and when this is lacking they perform worse than local varieties.

The policy of the former Gazankulu government was that their livestock officers were to promote indigenous Nguni cattle as better suited for the

area and their farmers than exotic breeds. In the former Lebowa, however, Afrikaander and Brahmane were still being pushed with great enthusiasm. Not that the Lebowa cattle keepers needed any pushing. In Gazankulu post-drought recovery of the lost herds has been focused on the *Nguni* cattle mainly because the homeland government influenced livestock keepers. After obtaining breeding stock from different parts of the former Gazankulu they established the registered breeding herd at Hartebeest. This idea has not caught on in the former Lebowa civil service. I still have not fully understood why this difference exists but it appeared to me that speculators have no particular preference for the hardier breeds. They are interested in seeing their herds grow but they also buy cattle for fattening in order to sell at a profit and prefer larger breeds. The Brahmane, in any case, is a good browser and can withstand poor management quite well. The Gazankulu livestock keepers on the other hand were following the advice of their livestock officers who were promoting a return to *Nguni* cattle on the assumption that everyone with cattle was a breeder or a farmer.

The meaning of cattle has changed. Although many men fondly remembered the good old days when cattle owners obtained real milk from their cows, regaining that lost golden era was not of paramount importance. But they did say that

They have injected our cows so that they no longer give much milk. Why? So that we can buy the watery milk from their dairy.

Many of us would agree that the milk that modern farming methods produce is not a natural food. The anti-biotics, hormones and chemicals additives that some dairy cows receive may not be good for human health. The complaint in this case, however, is based on the deeply held mistrust of the apartheid government that most South Africans share and which generates a quite powerful mythology. In my interviews I was frequently told how:

i 'they' have grabbed our best grazing areas, land;
ii 'they'injected our cows to make them produce less milk;
iii 'they' told our fathers in 1947 that all our herds were diseased and would have to be killed and fed to the lions;
iv 'they'castrated our bulls as a de-stocking ploy.

According to the former Gazankulu civil servant, the 'positive results' of the drought were an involuntary destocking, and also a de-romanticization of the large framed foreign breeds of cattle that villagers had adopted. Destocking is one of those government policies that the 'traditional' livestock keepers never seem to understand or

support and which are advocated by all extension workers worried about over-grazing. Exotic breeds on the other hand are welcomed by local farmers for they do not conflict with their idea of what a good animal is. It was suggested to me, for example, that Blacks do not think in kilograms and that scales are quite irrelevant to their scheme of things, or that they frequently exchanged their bullocks for 'scrap' cows from White con-men. Both implying that the poor are ignorant. Infact they know a good animal when they see one but cannot afford anything costing more than R1000. This magic figure marks the line beyond which a sensible speculator will not go but I am yet to work out why. They prefer heifers to bullocks because their strategy is to increase the size of the herd to more than ten before starting to sell.

The explanation offered for the Gazankulu failure to with Afrikaander bulls was that they perished not so much because of the drought but also because they were introduced by the government and perceived as government bulls. The department of agriculture had introduced Afrikaander bulls in all the tribal authorities *without consulting* . An the official in the Giyani headquarters of the former Gazankulu government who gave me this information stressed this lack of consultation as the source of the problem and in South African democracy it is a key political concept. In the eyes of the public the bulls were not meant *to assist the people* (another set of key words), but for the Tribal Authority. This was reinforced by the fact that the department of agriculture paid the wages for the herders assigned to look after the superior bulls and told the Tribal Authority never to slaughter or sell them even if they proved troublesome or unproductive. And so, after this chain of misunderstandings, in some villages the Afrikaander bulls were herded separately from the local cattle and no mating took place. But supporters of *Nguni* cattle will say it is just as well that the cross-breeding herds did not take place as this probably saved the livestock keepers from losing their entire herds during later droughts and outbreaks of corridor disease.[6]

Kgosi Malatji was exaggarating about the motivation of government workers who injected local cows to render them unproductive but the breeding bulls plan was a just the sort of government fiasco, albeit without the perceived malicious intent, that keeps such myths alive. Despite complaining about the milk, *kgosi* Malatji himself was full of praises for the improved breeds:

6 Interview: Giyani Offices, Thursday 5 May, 1994.

We have changed our traditional Nguni breeds of cattle, first to Afrikaander and more recently to Brahmanne for which we pay R4,000 for a one and a half year old bull. The latter can be ready for sale in six months . It is old fashioned to keep cattle for prestige, with the land shortage one cannot keep on expanding the size of the herd. [7]

The *kgosi* indicated that that sheep had died out (see appendix) and fewer goats were being kept than in the glorious past, he himself had more than 300. 'Goats don't like long grass' he said, ' they just die when it rains and the long grass re-appears.' Be that as it may goats are still important for ritual slaughter and are kept mainly for that purpose. Traditional leader he may be but the *kgosi* is not a traditional herder, and as already stated, no one here really is.

On my visits to the dipping tanks, I was struck by the ferocity with which the boys and men who brought the cattle to the weekly dipping struck their animals as they urged them into the pens. The leather whips were used on the cows quite viciously, many animals had welts and cuts and this just did not fit the cattle keeping tradition that the local people claimed. Whips tend to lower the value of the leather for one thing.

Dipping was done very early in the morning. The boys had to go to school and would already be dressed in their uniforms. The men said they had to go and plough their fields as it was raining again and this may explain the haste with which the dipping was conducted on the occasions that I witnessed and the use of whips. I could not help thinking that if the cows are going to pay for the boys' education, they ought to be handled better. The cattle are kept for the children but the children probably do not seem to realise this.

V CONCLUSIONS.

Cattle dealers in Phalaborwa all operate within the market even though some of them use barter for some of their transactions. Their economic planning is considered incorrect by government officials for example, but it is not. There are at least five types of cattle dealer:

i the White ranchers who own most of the land and cattle and who run 'capitalist' enterprises. They have exhausted their options as beef producers and are set to diversify into other businesses;

ii the homeland elites who own most of the land and livestock among the Black population and who are set to diversify into

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[7] Interview, Makhushane local court, Wednesday 20 April, 1994

cattle out of other professions and have not yet fully developed their enterprises;

iii the small scale cattle keepers who own more than ten head of cattle and may go up or down depending on social and natural factors;

iv the wage earning villagers who speculate in cattle for a quick profit and do not do any long term breeding themselves.

v owners of less than ten animals who are reluctant to sell.

Livestock in Phalaborwa are an ordinary commodity produced for exchange within a capitalist economy. They are not used for ploughing, tractors can be hired to do the job and the donkey is the preferred draught animal. Cash bridewealth is the norm and, as the locals themselves say, the cows do not even provide milk. The situation in Lesotho (Ferguson 1990), is different although some of the rules governing the sale of livestock are quite similar.

Cattle among the small scale livestock keepers in Phalaborwa constitute savings and little else. The standard answer to the question, what do you keep cattle for? was: 'For the children, to support the children, for their education.' Obviously they would not say that if education were free in which case they would think of a similar project. And clearly I need to compare what they say they keep cattle for and what they actually use them for. It is important to stress, however, that this is the dominant ideology and one that correctly sees access to education as the best option for upward social mobility.

Cousins (1994, 101) has reiterated the observation that 'Livestock production of extensive rangeland is a potentially highly efficient form of land use, and one of the most effective ways of producing human livelihoods from low quality resources.' But this is only under ideal conditions. Normally it is an uphill battle. In the Phalaborwa area as in other parts of Africa where keeping animals is difficult, the dispersal of the herd is a well tried means of spreading risk. To a certain extent such strategies are used even here but I have not yet found out how they operate.

In both the former Lebowa and former Gazankulu a small elite owns most of the cattle and these keepers of large herds are invariably traditional rulers, ex-homeland government officials or businessmen (Vink:1987). The homeland elites are infact both traditional and capitalist and constitute, in my view, one group rather than three.

Vink found that most households in rural Lebowa owned no livestock at all and of the owning ones most had less than ten. In Phalaborwa ten was the magic figure that cattle owners dreamnt of as most had less than that and excluded themselves from the sale of cattle as a result. The elites who owned over a hundred also sold and bought cattle continuously and could not be said to use herd size alone for prestige. When I visited a farm owned by a medical doctor who is the son of a university educated former homeland chief (see appendix), he had just hired a recent graduate from Pretoria university to help him erect new feedstocks. Like kgosi Malatji, Dr Ntsanwisi's aim is clearly to emulate the White ranchers and maximize the weight of the animals he sells, as well as to make up for the lack of grazing. The doctor is currently a week-end farmer commuting between his Giyani surgery and his farm near Seloane. It was said that he was planning to give up medicine for farming. This sounds unlikely as the income from his surgery is probably important for the farm's profitability.

I end with the tentative suggestion that the less arable land poor people have, the more importrant cattle become as a means of making, saving, investing and accumulating money. Rands on the hoof are not taxed and cattle are the best way of keeping savings. Of course there is always the threat of losing everything in a drought or outbreak of foot and mouth disease, but in economic development there are no guarantees.

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APPENDIX IJANUARY 1995 LIVESTOCK CENSUS, NAMAKGALE DISTRICT

1 MAKHUSHANE

DIPPING TEAM	CATTLE	OWNERS	AVERAGE HERD
Group 1	149	19	8
Group 2	364	45	8
Drooivelt	259	10	26
Maseke	89	19	5
TOTAL	861	93	9

2 MASHISHIMALE

DIPPING TEAM	CATTLE	OWNERS	AVERAGE HERD
Group 1	393	47	8
Group 2	91	18	5
Group 3	403	52	8
TOTAL	887	117	8

3 SELOANE

DIPPING TEAM	CATTLE	OWNERS	AVERAGE HERD
Group 1	887	41	22
Group 2	412	81	5
TOTAL	1299	122	11

THE SMALL STOCK POPULATION

1 MAKHUSHANE

DIPPING TEAM	*SHEEP*	*OWNERS*	*AV.No.*	*GOATS*	*OWNERS*	*AV.No.*
Group 1	*19*	*2*	*9*	*430*	*42*	*10*
Group 2	*8*	*1*	*8*	*666*	*40*	*17*
Drooivelt	*0*	-	-	*0*	-	-
Maseke	*0*	-	-	*586*	*37*	*16*
TOTAL	*27*	*3*	*9*	*1682*	*119*	*14*

2 MASHISHIMALE

DIPPING TEAM	*SHEEP*	*OWNERS*	*AV.No.*	*GOATS*	*OWNERS*	*AV.No.*
Group 1	*21*	*4*	*5*	*756*	*63*	*12*
Group 2	*0*	-	-	*653*	*49*	*15*
Group 3	*0*	-	-	*1295*	*50*	*26*
TOTAL	*21*	*4*	*5*	*2704*	*162*	*17*

3 SELOANE

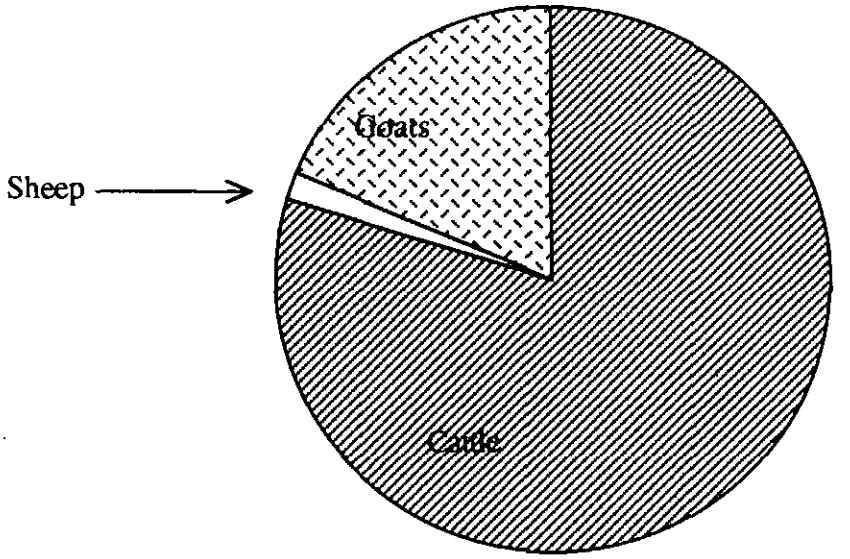
DIPPING TEAM	*SHEEP*	*OWNERS*	*AV.No.*	*GOATS*	*OWNERS*	*AV.No.*
Group 1	*0*	-	-	*1827*	*105*	*17*
Group 2	*0*	-	-	*956*	*67*	*14*
TOTAL	*0*	-	-	*2783*	*172*	*16*

APPENDIX IIa No OF LIVESTOCK AT MAJEJE FARMS, 1991.

No.	**NAME OF OWNER**	NAME OF FARM	**CATTLE**	**Sheep**	**Goats**
1	A. SIHLANGU	LANDRAAD	226		23
2	R. SHIKWAMBANA	BREAKFAST	108		
3	J. CHAUKE	BREAKFAST	114		18
4	P. WARREN	BROOK	213		
5	J. MABUNDA	BROOK	137		
6	J. MATIVANDLELA	KASTEEL	111		3
7	T.C. HLAYISI	HAMMAN (A)	458		53
8	T. TSHABALALA	HAMMAN (B)	217		
9	E. RISABA	HAMMAN (C)	238		8
10	E. MABUNDA	WILDBEES (A)	200		33
11	R. DLAMINI	WILDBEES (B)	107		
12	R. MOHLABA	GRANVILLE (A)	116		
13	P. WARREN	GRANVILLE (B)	31		
14	D. ENGELBRECHT	LEEUSPRUIT	133		
15	J. MAHESU	LEEUSPRUIT	7		27
16	J. SHIKWAMBANA	LEEUSPRUIT	6		
17	E. NGOBENI	LEEUSPRUIT	55		
18	M. NGOBENI	LEEUSPRUIT	23		
19	**GAZANKULU**	**LULEKANI**	**712**	**7**	**1318**
20	S. MBETHENI	SCHEIDING	127		8
21	S. HORN	SCHEIDING	122		
22	W. NGOBENI	SCHEIDING	16		
23	**GAZANKULU**	**HARTBEES**	**562**		
24	P. WARREN	ALLOUBRIDGE	774		
25	R. NGOBENI	MASALAL	18		
26	PROF H.W NTSANWISI	MASALAL	375		
27	DR T.V. NTSANWISI	MASALAL	247	114	
28	P. HLUNGWANI	MASALAL	79		
29	S.B.J. VAN HEERDEN	NONDWENI	76	14	
30	H.L.P. BASSON	STK VARVOSING	18		
31	R.P.H. MOHLABA	PRIESKA	192		
32	M. NUKERI	MAHALE	15		
33	J. RISABA	ZEBRA	578		

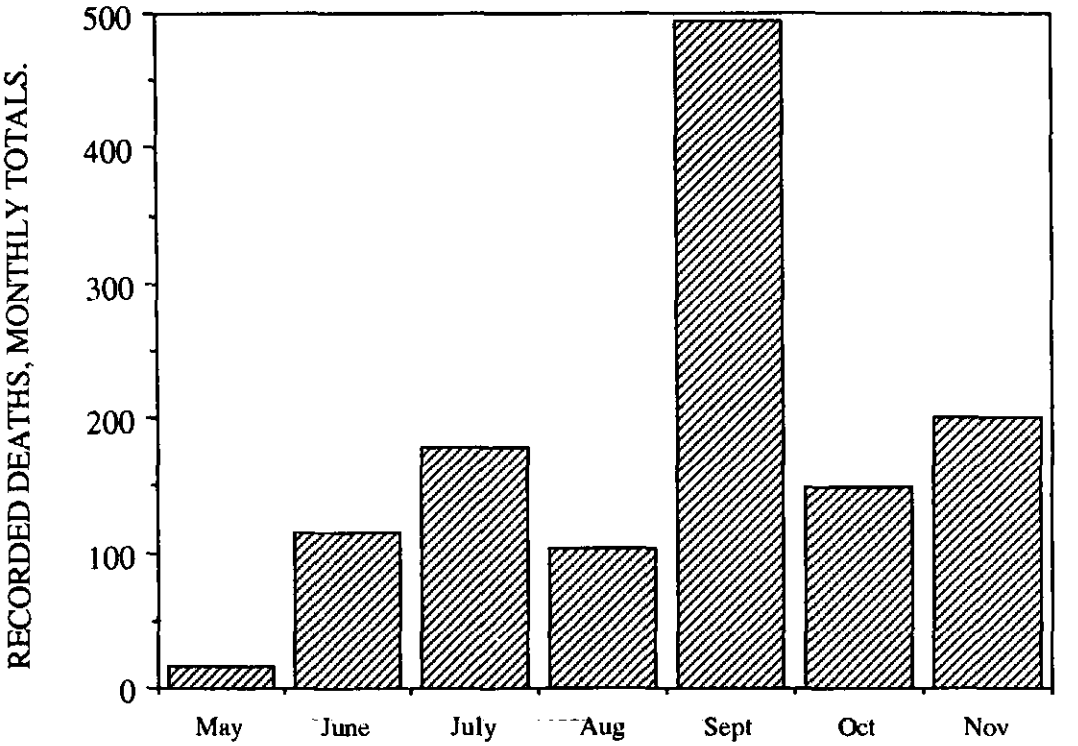
APPENDIX IIb

TYPES OF LIVESTOCK KEPT ON MAJEJE FARMS, 1991.



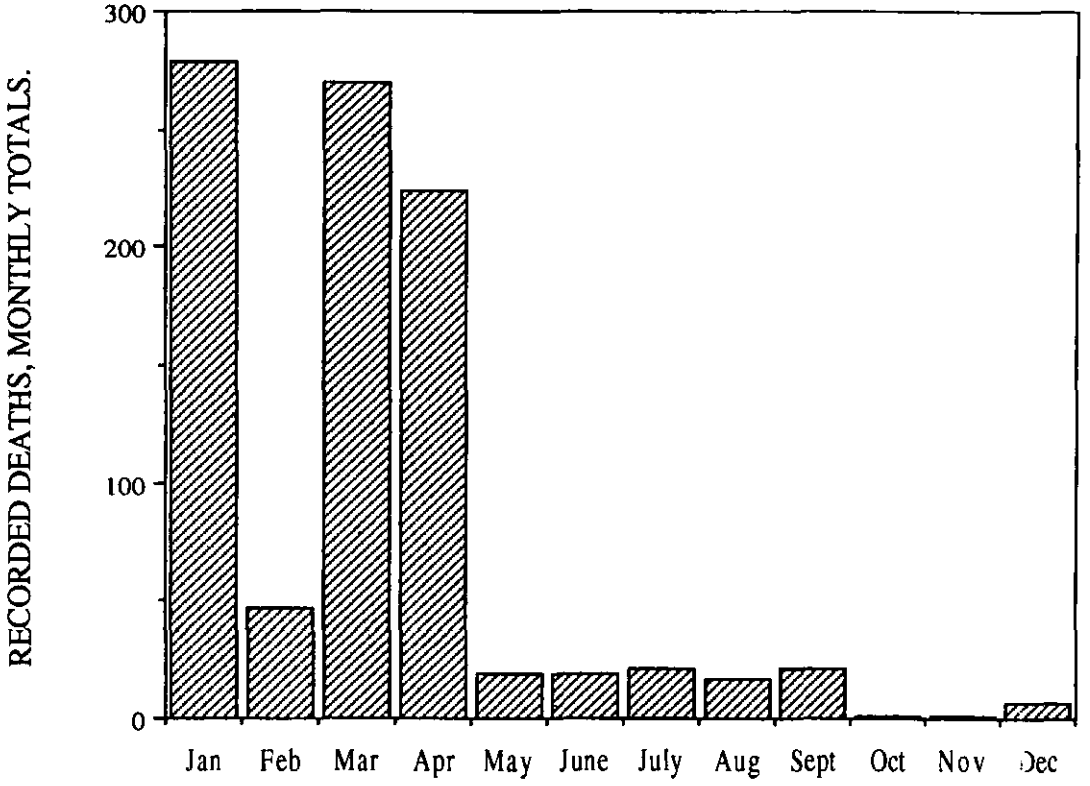
APPENDIX IIIa

CATTLE DEATHS DUE TO DROUGHT IN THE GAZANKULU SECTION OF PHALABORWA, 1992



APPENDIX IIIb

CATTLE DEATHS DUE TO DROUGHT IN LEBOWA SECTION OF PHALABORWA, 1993.



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