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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

African Studies Seminar Paper
to be presented in RW
4.00pm MAY 1984

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by: Stanley Trapido

No. 147

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PUTTING A PLOUGH TO THE GROUND: A HISTORY OF TENANT PRODUCTION ON THE VEREENIGING ESTATES, 1896-1920.

by Stanley Trapido

"Mangolwane (Sammy Marks) did not bother anybody. After planting time you did not have anything to worry about, yours was just to look after the crop in the field."
Ninety-year old Abraham Mokale telling Mahlomola Ntoane of life on the Vereeniging Estates during his adolescence. 21st October, 1980.
Translation Thamsanqa Flatela.

"as soon as a native puts a plough into the ground on any of our farms then he is a tenant and have to give us half of the crop which he reaps from such land".
VAB. C0183/5310/02, 1st January 1903. I. M. Kok, Estates Manager, Vereeniging Estates, to Inspector Native Refugee Camp, Taaibosch.

"Mr. Sam Marks and Mr. Isaac Lewis...have developed mineral wealth, afforested the banks of rivers, made golden seas of grain to ripple over arid plains and caused smiling orchards to take the place of sandy wastes".
South Africa, 4th January, 1902.

"Sentiment plays but a small part with business people, and the cheapest market is the one they seek, all else being equal".
MSS Selborne Paper Vol. 197 fol.195, 20th August, 1902.
Samuel Marks to Sir Thomas Smart.

I. Introduction

The paper concerning tenant production on the Vereeniging Estates which follows this preamble, is extracted from a larger study dealing with the growth of capitalism in the agricultural heartland of South Africa. The introduction summarises my understanding of the way in which this small

but significant part of rural South Africa - farmed by the small-holding, share-tenant cultivators and pastoralists of the Vereeniging Estates - was transformed by the forces of an all pervasive capitalism. The Vereeniging Estates - a group of twenty-two farms in the southern ZAR and northern OVS - belonged to the Lewis and Marks partnership. Initially established in 1886 as De Zuid Afrikaansche en Orange Vrij Staatsche Kolen en Mineralen Vereeniging (The South African and Orange Free State Coal and Mineral Company), it was given new terms of association in 1897. The Company used the Estates to create a succession of mining, manufacturing and agricultural enterprises whose economic diversity was typical of the firm. In the first place, however, the Estates grew out of a proclivity for land accumulation which was central to the speculative nature of mining capital in South Africa. This speculative urge accounted for the fact that by 1900 almost one fifth of the total land area of the ZAR was claimed by land companies or absentee landlords. For the most part this accumulation had a retrogressive effect on the development of capitalist agriculture and this for three related reasons. Firstly, absentee owners, particularly those resident abroad, were concerned only with the possibility of windfall gains which these large tracts of undeveloped land seemed to offer. Secondly, since mining (and its attendant speculative activities) and manufacturing enterprises made higher immediate returns, absentee landowners were not going to invest in agriculture. This was particulary so, since much land was held by gold mining interests. Thirdly, as most of the shareholders in these land companies were resident outside the Boer Republics, or concerned to repatriate their profits, there was little social or political pressure on them to transform the countryside in keeping with the ideals, myths or self-images of a rural bourgeoisie.

The Vereeniging Estates was different to other South African land companies because the Lewis and Marks partnership, and Sammy Marks in particular, was committed to seeking profits in every area in which capitalist development made this possible. With their fortunes made in diamond mining and diamond marketing, Lewis and Marks entered into every possible capitalist enterprise which the ZAR made feasible before and after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886. The one exception was Rand gold mining, at least before 1902 although its holdings in the Sheba mine at Barberston made it the first major Transvaal gold producing company. Even though the Company was the primary supplier of coal to the gold mines and the railways, it was not faced with the same constraints to its profitability as were the gold mine owners of the Rand. It was able, therefore, to create an autonomy in its manufacturing activities whose development was not only welcomed by the Afrikaaner bourgeoisie of the ZAR, but positively embraced. Sammy Marks and his associates drew very close to the leading figures in the ruling class and state of the ZAR. So much so that Marks must be counted as one of them.

This would have given Marks reason to have developed some of the land which he owned so that he might derive prestige from being a farming landowner rather than acquire the odium which went with being a land speculator. The farms which formed the Vereeniging Estates were his earliest land purchases in the ZAR and the OVS. The first acquisitions of land which later became the Vereeniging Estates were made in 1879, whereas the bulk of Marks' private landholdings (over 90 farms, most of them in the western Transvaal) were bought after 1895. Marks was additionally involved in 1892 and 1893 in a syndicate which took over land accumulated by Aloïs Hugo Nellmapius and which under Wernher-Beit leadership was formed into the Transvaal Consolidated Land and Exploration Company. The Vereeniging Estates farms, acquired because of

their coal holdings - those already discovered as well as those anticipated - also offered the best opportunity to satisfy Marks' agricultural ambitions. (It was also to be in this pre-South African War period the site for the first of many industries, namely brick and pipe making). The opening of the railway line, linking Johannesburg to Bloemfontein and then to Cape Town, and which, not fortuitously, crossed the Estates, gave Marks and his managers access to markets for their agricultural products. At least one of these markets Lewis and Marks had created themselves. Their distillery and glass and bottling plants at Eerste Fabrieken near Pretoria provided a very large demand for grains and fruits. Johannesburg and its satellite towns could take all the food which the Estates might produce so long as this was cheaply priced. Equally the Company's own mining activities on the Estates promised local agriculture the possibility of selling much of the food which it grew. Again this had to be qualified with the proviso that this be cheaply produced.

But how could food be so cheaply produced that it could meet the requirements of a mining industry whose profitability was constrained by the price of gold and at the same time compete in a market whose prices were determined by North American production? Neither large scale cheap labour nor substantial investments of capital were available for agriculture. Such supplies either of labour or of capital were going to be drawn into the more immediately profitable mining and manufacturing enterprises. (It is well known that in the 1890's although some labour could, at a price, be recruited by coercive means, there was no systematic coercion to keep it at work, not even for the much more centralised mining industry.) But this labour and capital shortage, common to the agrarian society of much of the sub-continent, was juxtaposed by a land surplus reflecting the comparative weakness of an enclave capitalism which had not yet successfully inserted itself into the several previous socio-economic orders. A labour-shortage, land-surplus political economy had prevailed in much of the sub-continent since the beginning of colonial settlement and this had resulted in a variety of landlord-tenant relationships. Their exact form was everywhere different and everywhere dependent on local power relationships. In the southern ZAR and northern OVS a share-tenancy cum share-cropping system was already in existence when the Vereeniging Estates came into being and the Company - though it set up its own production - took the tenancy system for granted. (This may have been partly the result of habits in mining and manufacturing where it was often the case that employees either received a share of the profits rather than wages or salary or they effectively subcontracted tasks from their employers). For the Company and its white neighbours who employed the tenancy system, it had the advantage of providing not only rent and labour, both domestic and agricultural, but capital in the form of horses, oxen, ploughs, wagons and housing. It ensured that the tenant family by self-exploitation would produce food, part of it handed over as rent, the other part exchanged in the market place for commodities, the need for which came into being in tandem with the wider transformations that were taking place in the region.

For Lewis and Marks the system offered not only substantial amounts of rent and the possibility that seasonal labour could be recruited from their tenants for the coalmines and other activities of the Estates but it also provided an alternative source of capital. In addition Marks expressed the hope that these tenancies would disperse the industrial labour force and

reduce its potential for unrest. In the event the Vereeniging Estates' coalmines obtained only a small part of its labour locally and this not from tenants producing a surplus. At any one time about one hundred men were drawn as wage labourers from the Estates' population but these were not tenants, though they may have had the equivalent of an allotment for growing a part of their own food. In addition they were single men and it may have been that in the life cycle of the Estates' tenants some young men - possibly sons and nephews - worked on the coalmines before obtaining a tenancy themselves. Nevertheless the Company did not succeed in making the tenants of the Estates play a significant part in their scheme of labour recruiting or of social control. Still, in this context its success or failure was less important than its initiator's intentions.

What was more significant was the fact that this scheme - the settling of 250 black families on twenty-two farms - should not have run into major legal obstacles. Both the ZAR, the OVS and their post-war successor states, had specific legislation - the so-called Plakkerswetten - which denied landlords the right to settle more than five families on a ZAR farm, or more than fifteen on an OVS farm. But such was the political and economic power of the Company, that it was able to get permission to subvert legislation which was so dear to the majority of members of the Volksraads of both states and which populist agitation had so recently succeeded in having restated in the statute books. Moreover, this permission, to circumvent the unrepealed anti-squatting legislation was repeated after the war even when the political, though not the economic, power of Lewis and Marks had waned.

This share-renting system was not only effective in coping with shortages of labour, but - if evidence from the Estates is anything to go by - it was, in this time, a more viable alternative to a capital intensive strategy. In 1904 J. A. McLaren, the South African agent of the steam plough manufactures, John Fowler & Co. of Leeds, became a tenant of the Estate renting 2,000 acres. For ten years McLaren & Fowlers poured money into their tenancy in the hope of demonstrating the efficacy of their products. In this period their productivity was dramatically higher than that of the other tenants. In 1910 McLaren reaped 40,000 bags of grain and the remaining 240 share-tenants combined produced only 25,000 bags. There was, as a result, public praise for McLaren's progressive methods and the local magistrate urged the farmers of the district to follow his example. Banking officials, it must be said, had a better eye for these things than did magistrates and the local clerk of the rival Standard Bank - McLaren was a customer of the National Bank - thought his methods wasteful. And so they were. The McLaren-Fowler enterprise lost large amounts of money, £35,000, before the tenancy was brought to an end. The time would come when enterprises such as McLaren's would be cushioned by state aid and the individual capitalists would not have to carry the entire burden. Then the share-tenant and the share-cropper's time would be over. But in the years leading up to the first world war, this system of tenancy was still effective.

We need to make one last observation about the Lewis and Marks Company's decision to develop the Vereeniging Estates. There can be little doubt that in a society where power was held by a rural ruling class, much prestige was to be gained from the related notions of progressive farming and a gentrified way of life. The steam engine which Marks acquired to cope with the aftermath of rinderpest was for him a source of such wonder that he could bring President Kruger and other notables from Pretoria to

the Estates to view the latest development which the industrial world had to offer. The progressive image was undoubtedly furthered by the degree of specialisation which the Company brought to its own, and sometimes to its tenants' production. Managers and supervisors skilled, amongst other things, in forestery (five million trees were planted on the Estate by 1910), the growing of lucerne and the breeding of sheep, brought new trees, new seed, new strains and better animals to the Estate. As a result, in 1905, when the British Association held its meetings in South Africa, they chose to visit the Vereeniging Estates. Lewis and Marks allowed themselves the role of the southern hemisphere's Turnip Townsend. The new progressive farmers were also the new gentry. Such game as survived on the Estates was carefully protected and the right to shoot was given only to those who could count on the company's highest favours. In 1890 a hunt was arranged for Lord Randolph Churchill and in the next twenty years permission to shoot was given only once or twice a year. Similarly the Automobile Club was given a site on the Estates which it was allowed to rent at a nominal charge. Finally, the manager's house on the estate, Bedworth, gave notice that a new if corporate gentry was on the make.

II. Putting a Plough to the Ground.

With the very rapid emergence of Johannesburg in the last decade of the nineteenth century a sizeable and demanding new market for foodstuff was created. The owners of land in the districts straddling the central reaches of the Vaal River quickly sought to realise the area's commercial potential. This farmland - within which the Vereeniging Estates fell - was both under capitalised and short of labour. The landowners of these districts were, therefore, anxious to attract a flow of newcomers to add to such labourers and tenants as they already had. As a result agriculturists drawn from recent black settlements in Lesotho and from white farms of the eastern Orange Free State were encouraged to settle as share croppers or labour tenants in the mid-Vaal region. Most of these new settlers had suffered successive upheavals on the high plateau of the South African interior both as a result of the difiçane and of the white colonization which took advantage of that cataclysm. The terms of settlement offered these black agriculturists in the 1890's and in the years immediately after the South African War presented them with the possibility of recouping the losses of the previous half century. The history of this recuperation on the Vereeniging Estates has been constructed from the records of that Company, administrative papers of the state, and newspapers. These sources have, however, been given an additional dimension as a result of the interviews collected by the Oral History Project in Johannesburg. This has brought to light the experiences of several families who were settled on the Estate and in the wider region in the years between 1896 and 1918, and who lived through the high drama of Ngumi invasion, white settlement and land alienation. These families, having been reduced either to servile status or forced to become refugees, then found that their economic revival was marred by pestilence and war. This was followed by a substantial but short lived post-war restoration, short lived because as landlords increased their wealth so tenants began to be seen as a break on their further enrichment. Thus while a class of accumulating white farmers was set on increasing their labour supply as well as their control of the labouring classes, the semi-autonomous status of tenancy caused much resentment. What emerges, therefore, is that the peasants of the region, whose economic history we are about to reconstruct, having rebuilt their lives for the third or fourth time in just over half a century, found that they were no longer of any use to landlords whose own accumulation permitted them a new form of productivity based on a more exploitative set of

relationships.

As we have suggested the majority of black settlers on the Vereeniging Estates - and very probably in the Vaal River region surrounding it - were drawn from the recently established Kingdom of Lesotho and its environs. At the same time we should remember that the Lesotho nation had been moulded out of a good many disperate groups. Among these were a fragment of Kwena society whose original home was alongside the Magalieisberg Mountains in the Western Transvaal. Some of these Bakwena fled to Lesotho before establishing themselves on the Vereeniging Estates at the end of the 19th century and it is from among their number that recollections from three family histories have been acquired to extend our understanding of our several documentary sources. Of these, the interviews of Abraham Mokale who grew up on the Estate farm Vaalbank, and undertaken by M. S. Ntoane and then Thamasanqa Flatela, are the most important, but we must add to these those undertaken by Tet Matsetela in which he recorded the histories of the Molefe and Hpahe-Molope families with their connections with the Driefontein farm and which form the basis of his published article and his dissertation. As we might expect these interviews - and the extracts which appear in the Matsetela essays - show that the disruption of the early and mid-nineteenth affected different members of Kwena society in different ways and that there were different paths which led to the same ultimate destination, namely share cropping on the Vereening Estates. Thus the Molefesand the Molopes,according to their traditions, fled the Magaliesburg in the wake of Mzilikazi's Ndebele army and immediately settled in Lesotho. On the other hand Abraham Mokale's grandfather Tloale, who was born in that part of the Magaliesburg known as Mmanetsi, was, as his grandson recalled, held in a serf-like relationship by a white farmer known to his tenant-labourers as Maspere. This unfree connection seems to have been required of these Mokales by their chief Mamogale who was himself reduced to being a vassel of the Boers as a result of their occupation of the Western Transvaal. After a long and arduous journey on foot the Mokales crossed into Lesotho in the middle of a winter whose cold was long remembered by a low-land people for whom such weather was a new and frightening experience. Although the fleeing Kwena were - according to the tradition reported by Abraham Mokale more than a century later - given a site to establish a village it appears that they were less than comfortable under the new political overlordship now established in Lesotho. Mrs. Emelia Pooe, who had been Emelia Molefe, is reported to have said, in the translation provided by her interviewer, that her grandparents were 'afraid of the ethnic discrimination in the emerging South-Sotho nation' and that they therefore 'opted to relinquish their Ngwato-Kwena origin'. Tensions taking this form seem to have manifested themselves and probably because of them many of the Kwena settlers were to become Sotho-speaking and thus their descendants have remained even when, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, they were, as a result of state policy, resettled in the Kwena heartland. Whether it was the weight of political oppression or the fact that they could not support themselves in Lesotho because the arable land to which they had access was not sufficient for them, and because their new situation offered no way of recouping their stock losses, the long term result of the Kwena exodus appears to have been a widespread resettlement on white-owned farms in the Orange Free State.[1]

Emelia Molefe's father and mother were born in Lesotho - her father in 1853 and her mother in 1862 - but her paternal grandfather found it necessary to move to a farm in the Caledon district sometime between 1850 and 1860. When Emelia Molefe was born in 1882 her parents were labourers or labour tenants on the farm Slagfontein which was to the south of Heilbron. Between that date and 1897 they moved twice before they settled on the farm Zaaiplaas to the west of Heilbron. Two events appear to have made the move to Zaaiplaas memorable to the young Emelia. Firstly the move took place soon after the rinderpest plague had struck and secondly it was on Zaaiplaas

that her father Rankwane Molefe, first became a sharecropper. In spite of the fact that rinderpest had destroyed much of his stock, Rankwane was able to plough his fields partly by borrowing cattle from his neighbours (and his ability to train animals may have helped in getting them lent to him) and partly by inspanning cows. After what Mrs. Pooe called a 'sharing ceremony' (and of this more anon) her father's first harvest as a share cropper left him in 1897 with forty-five bags of maize and an unspecified but unremarkable quantity of sorghum. The following year was a disasterous one for the Molefe family. A drought was followed by a plague of red locusts. As a result, the Molefes had no harvest and the young Emelia and her mother trekked across country to the Rustenburg district in the western Transvaal where they stayed with her mother's sister. Here the harvest was good and when it was reaped her aunt gave her ten bags of sorghum.[2]

The Mokale family experience was not dissimilar. The settlement in Lesotho failed to provide them with a permanent subsistence and like other Kwena, they had sought their living in the Orange Free State. Tloaele Mokale entered the service of an Afrikaner farmer in the Lindley district remembered as Wessels. In return for the right to live on the white farmers' land with his family and his stock, Tloaele Mokale was required to work for Wessels for three months of the year. He shared this labour with three other men who had also families and stock with them. The Mokales lived on Wessel's farm for a considerable period during which time six children, including Abraham Mokale's father Andries, were born. The young Andries was married on the Wessel's farm and it was here that Abraham Mokale was born. These years are remembered as reasonably good ones and they are recalled as a time when sheep, cattle and particularly horses were accumulated. Wessel's farm, according to Abraham Mokale, allowed his grandfather very little arable as distinct from pasture land and this made it difficult for the Mokales to maintain their horses for which they had to grow feed. Thus, when the news came that the owners of the Vereeniging Estates were seeking share cropping tenants, Tloaele Mokale accepted with alacrity. The reason for this was possibly to be found in the report of the Johannesburg Star which claimed, in 1903, that the Estates' black tenants were not only 'allowed as much land as they pleased' but that they could 'cultivate it in their own way' and 'according to their own ideas'. Abraham Mokale's recollection would seem to confirm this report.

> "Mmangolwane (Sammy Marks or one of his managers) did not bother anybody. After planting time, you did not have anything to worry about, yours was just to look after the crop in the field. He would never come and worry you. After harvest he would come and you would give him his share and he would not burden you with anything".[3]

Rinderpest struck very shortly after the Mokales took up residence on the Estate and we know that cattle losses were suffered there as elsewhere. It was, after all, immediately after the rinderpest devestations that Sammy Marks acquired the first steam engine for the Estate, the steam engine which Marks demonstrated to Kruger and other Afrikaner notables. The Mokales seem to have been less affected by rinderpest than many others and the family still had two of its three teams in operation in 1897. At the same time, even if Andries Mokale could not raise a team of oxen, he was able to do his ploughing with horses, for the three adult men had come to the Estates from the Wessels farm with ten horses each. In spite of

rinderpest the year 1897 was not a bad one for the tenants of the Estate. It saw 114 African tenants produce 12,000 bags of grain, an avarage of eighty bags each. The next year the combined production remained at 12,000 bags for all the African tenants but their number had increased to 140. At sixty-nine bags per tenant, production was, therefore, down. It may, however, have been that the drought and the locusts, to which Mrs. Pooe referred, rather than rinderpest, were the cause of this decline. Nevertheless, these two harvests promised much and - as we shall see - with the Company providing loans which permitted the purchase of cattle, seed and ploughs, much could be hoped for in the years ahead.[4]

Instead, the coming of the South African War brought destruction, chaos and even death for many families on the new settlement. Boer forces ranged across the farms of the Estate conscripting men where they could, commandeering cattle and horses, raiding grain stores and in the process destroying the dwellings which families had built. The incoming British Army, partly, it was said, for their safety and partly to prevent them from assisting Boer forces, chose to concentrate parts of the rural black population in protected and restricted settlements as it was to do with the rural Afrikaner civilian population and whose original function gave its name to one of the horrors of the twentieth century, the concentration camp. It was, of course, not part of that function to decimate the inhabitants of the camp but the incompetence of the military who established these overcrowded bivouacs must be held responsible for the appalling death rate. The Afrikaner Women's Memorial records some 28,000 white lives lost but, even without a nationalist account, British sources reported just over 14,000 African deaths in the camps - a figure which takes no account of deaths in earlier months for which period there is no record. While the death rate among Afrikaners reached the astonishingly high figure of 336 per thousand in October 1901, even this was overtaken by the 436 deaths per thousand among Africans in the O.R.C. camps in December 1901. In the Transvaal camps the African death rate was 320 per thousand. Of these 81% were children and most deaths were caused by epidemics of chicken-pox, measles and dysentry. In addition it should be noted that once the problem was comprehended the authorities spent far more money in improving conditions in the Afrikaner camps than they were to do in those which held Africans. Moreover, it was expected that African refugees should grow their own food and provide labour, not only for the army but for the gold mines which in 1900 had temporarily lent part of their remaining labour force to the military. It is intriguing to note the different place occupied by the camps in Afrikaner and African political symbolism. In the former casethe very real anguish which these caused became an essential part of the weft of a nationalist movement. For Africans, on the other hand, the experience was to leave behind an introverted quietism which suggests very strongly that such experiences in themselves are insufficient to generate a populist anger.[5]

Different families fared differently during the war. The Mokales and Molefes both saw their men conscripted and forced to serve with the Boers as agter-ryers. They acted as grooms, maintaining horses not immediately being used by the mobile fighting units but always moving with them as they roamed the countryside. While the brothers Andries and Isaac Mokale survived the war, their father Toasle did not. The Mokales and the Molefes lost all their cattle, sheep and horses early in the war, the Mokales to a marauding commando, the Molefes to British troops as they rounded the family up before moving them to a concentration camp. The Molopes on the other hand, like some others, were to hand their cattle to a kinsman who was to move them to safe keeping in Lesotho. The women and children in all three families were to be placed in various camps, the Mokales at Taaibos, the Molefes at Vredefort and the Molopes at Kroonstad. Dinah Molepe, as she

was, recalled that her younger brothers and sisters who had entered the camp with her had died of 'natural causes'. Abraham Mokale, who was nine years old when the war began, recalled the camp with some equanimity since he had retained his childhood perception of events in which a need to beg for food was transformed into a prank. He remembered running alongside the British troop train which passed through their camp shouting 'koekies, koekies, beef, koekies'. The soldiers, he recalled, threw tins of beef down to them. Others had less cheerful memories. Emelia Molefe, who thought of the camp as her first experience of 'location (that is town) life', remembered that they ate a porridge made of a maize which had previously been thought of as an animal feed. Partly to cope with malnutrition in the camps the British administration began to organise the growing of food by the inhabitants. In this process the Vereeniging Estates farms played a considerable part. Those Mokales who were held, had taken their ploughs with them into a camp on the farm Taaibos, but it is from another of the Estates farms, Zandfontein, also used as a camp, that we get some idea both of the scope of the interned tenants' production and of the Company's unrelenting attitude to its sources of rent. In 1902, the last year of the war, the tenants on Zandfontein grew 1,628 bags of maize. This was much higher than the 628 bags grown on the same farm in 1900, also a war year, but it was also better than the 1,438 bags (1167 bags of maize, 271 of sorghum) harvested there in 1905. The higher yields may have been the result of the inmates not being allowed to eat green mealies (the maize in growth) by the camp administration, a prohibition which the elderly Mrs. Pooe seems to have recalled with some of her original amazement. As for the Company it knew what its rights were when it came to crops grown on its farms. As the Estate Manager I. M. Kok wrote to the Native Refugee Department,

> "we do not want any rent from your department for the use of our farm Zandfontien as a Native Refugee Camp but we certainly want half of the 1628 bags Mealies which was reaped by your department from our Mealie fields sown and ploughed on Zandfontein by our Tenants, as soon as a native puts a plough into the ground on any of our farms of which he is a tenant and have to give us half of the crop which he reaps from such land", [6]

The camps were remembered for the disruption which they brought to family life but for some worse was to come when the war was over. Thus the young Dinah-Mpse-Molefe and her mother emerged from a 'war location' in which brothers and sisters and children had been lost and their homes had become a ruin. Seeking out relatives they found these 'flat on the ground and so ill as to scare anyone away'. They were, she remembered, 'as grey as ashes'. It was Sekgoeripane, Small pox. [7]

For the Mokales the end of the war saw a return to Vaalbank without cattle, horses or seed, but loans from the Company were to help make it possible for the family to return to sharecropping. For the Molefe family, as well as the brothers David, Salthiel and Naphtali Pooe (the latter was to marry Emelia Molefe in 1905 and all three men appear in the Estates Census for that year) the war provided the opportunity to earn money and it was claimed that this extra cash made possible their return to share cropping. But not every African peasant on the Estates or in the region for that matter - had the resources to become a sharecropper. Without stock, ploughs, sufficient family labour or apparently savings to buy these commodities, peasants were reduced to labour tenants on white farms or part-time miners on the Estates coal mines or on the Johannesburg gold mines. As Abraham Mokale reported, if a tenant failed to produce anything then he 'was supposed to send out one of his family members to go and work for Mongoloana in the place of a crop'. It was from among the labour tenants

that the Pooes acquired additional hands for their own production during crucial points of the agricultural cycle and Emelia Molefe-Pooe remembered beer and fresh mutton being served to work parties. Nevertheless, the basic unit of production on the Vereeniging Estates was the family.[8]

The families on the Estates were for the most part monogomous but whether this was because of the economic conditions of these households, or because of a widespread adoption of Christianity is difficult to tell from the slender evidence and of course the issues of cause and effect would become more complex if the evidence were denser. There were polygamous households on the Estates but they were a small minority of the total in the years for which we have reliable figures, 1903 and 1905. In 1903 there were sixteen households with two wives and a seventeenth was added in 1905. In this period there seems to have been no correlation between the productivity of a household and the presence of a second wife. On the other hand one of the most prosperous households on the Estates, living on the farm Zandfontein, was headed by a polygamist listed simply as Jonas by the white Estates Manager. In 1905 Jonas, with his two wives, had twenty oxen, sixteen cows, fifty sheep, a waggon, three ploughs, and harvested 248 bags of maize. Wives and children, it should be said, were listed by the Company alongside draught animals, sheep, carts, waggons, ploughs, and bags of grain as part of the tenants' property. Similarly, on the farm Rietfontein, where the tenant Sagana was registered as having two wives, a productive and prosperous peasant household was to be found. With eight oxen, sixteen cows, eighty-five sheep, a waggon and a cart, a single two furrow plough and a 1905 harvest which enabled him to reap 105 bags of maize, Sagana was one of the more well-to-do tenants. On the other hand Rietfontein was also the home of the tenant Springkan who had two wives and three children, but he could only claim one ox, two cows, a harvest of nineteen bags of maize and two of sorghum and was one of the less well off residents on the Estates. Springkan did, however, have a waggon which may have permitted him a non-agricultural income but not one which required the labour of an extra wife. There were other households with two wives which appeared neither to have produced a commercial crop nor to have run a sizeable number of animals. At the same time it should be said that none of the tenants on the farm Vaalbank - the most productive of the Estates ORC grain farms had more than one wife.[9]

It may be that because the Estates' tenants had only recently settled its lands, most of the men were too young to have accumulated the wealth needed for a second wife. Or where there was a second wife she had only recently joined the household and its combined labours had not yet resulted in an increase in productivity. But, as important, if not more important than the labour which second wives brought to the household, were the children which they bore. In spite of the war the number of children in each household was just over four in 1903 and just under five two years later. Toaele Mokale may have been exceptional in having adult children with him when he began farming on Vaalbank before the war, but their adult status, the fact that they had children of their own did not reduce their obligation to work for their father.

> "These people" said Abraham Mokale referring to his uncle and father, "the way I see it now, they were still under my grandfather. Even whatever they did by way of farming, they had to plough his land first."
>
> "Did he also work?" (i.e. your grandfather?)

"Yes he did although most of the time he was their head. His duty was only to look after the cattle, sheep and lambs at home and generally to give instructions".

If there were psychological ties which bound these adult men to do as their father instructed them, there were also material benefits to be got from accepting his authority. Again, Abraham Mokale reported:

"At the beginning of each year he would brand-mark all the expectant cows for one of his sons. Even if they were eight in number. All the calves would belong to that one that year. If some of the cows were weak, say four of them and the other ones cows have calves, he would take some from the latter owner to make up the number for the first one for that year. It was a nice living."[10]

In the first year after the end of the war the number of households listed as tenants of the Estates had risen dramatically from 150 in 1898 to 240 at the end of 1903. It is probably, however, that a large part of this increase was made up of households where the adult males were predominantly coalminers with the equivalent of an allotment although it is possible that some of these men were to acquire the resources to become agriculturists in the next few years. There were, in addition, 25 white tenants also farming on half shares. In 1904 the combined grain production of black and white tenants was up from 12,000 bags in 1898 to 21,000 bags. With the black tenants sowing an average of 2 bags of seed per household and the whites 5, but with the white tenants ploughing twice as much land, we may estimate - assuming the fertility of the soil, precipitation and sources of irrigation being much the same, as we know implements and sources of (animal driven) power were - that the total black production was 16,800 bags and that produced by the white share croppers 4200 bags. On the basis of these figures the average production per black household was 70 bags, and that of the white households 175.** The Company then claimed half the crop which the tenants harvested as its rent. How the landlord's share of the rent was arrived at is difficult to establish. Tet Matsitela thinks that there was so much interest in the size of the harvest and curiosity about the amount that had to be shared that those who came to witness the landlord taking his rent unwittingly created a sharing ceremony. The argument would appear to be that because these witnesses were neighbours they were famili with the amount which had been grown, and were able to judge whether the landlords claims were legitimate or not. This rather idyllic and somewhat functional interpretation is belied by the tension which Thomas Flatela captured when he questioned Abraham Mokale on this subject. From this interview we get a sense of unease and menace which infused the division of the harvest between landlord and tenant. Abraham Mokale recalled the visit of the Estates' foreman, known to the tenants as 'Nthapdeng' (pray for me).

"We called him (Nthapdeng) because he used to come on a cart pulled by four horses and we would take off our hats when he came to us. Without talking he would start marking Mangoloana's bags. He had a boy with him who was holding the paint bucket

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** In 1903 white tenants ploughed 1/5 of the area ploughed by blacks, i.e. 1/5 of 21,000 bags = 4,200 bags.
At the same time 240 black tenants sowed 2 bags of seed each, i.e. 480 bags
24 white tenants sowed 5 bags of seed each, i.e. 120 bags
600 bags

$\frac{480}{600} \times 21,000 = 16,800$ bags ; $\frac{120}{600} \times 21,000 = 4,200$ bags

Number of bags per black household $\frac{16,800}{240} = 70$ bags

Number of bags per white household $\frac{4200}{24} = 175$ bags

for him.

He was a cruel man or what?

He was a cruel man because whenever he came he would ask. "Hoe veel sake is hierso?" ("How many bags are there?")
You were expected to be quick and accurate in answering.
If you gave a wrong number he would penalise you by marking an extra bag for Mangoloana which meant that you would have to fight to get him to unstamp that bag". [11]

It seems very likely that not all the tenant's production would have been shared with the landlord and we must assume that where possible tenants held back a part of their harvest. We have already seen that Emelia Molefe-Pooe thought it natural for 'green mealies' to be eaten while the crop was growing. The exact distribution of the crop between landlord and tenant must have been a source of resentment in other ways. On one occasion that we know of in 1906, the tenants having harvested both maize and sorghum, the Estates Manager chose to take the Company's rent very largely in the higher priced sorghum. Some of the tenants were so dissatisfied with this division of the crops that they gave notice of their intention to leave their land. As a result the Company's board asked the Manager to use his discretion when taking his half share of the crop and in 'order to meet the objections of the native tenants' he was advised to accept a larger proportion of maize than the higher paying sorghum. [12]

The 80 bags reaped in 1897, the 69 the next year and the 70 bags in 1903, compare well with the yield which Abraham Mokale thought reasonable.

"If there was no hoeing alone that year, it would be up to eighty bags per man. When I say no hoeing I mean that only a harrow would be used to break the clods and for removing the uprooted weeds and grass when ploughing was done. After this only a hand plough would be used....when there was hoeing we used to get more bags". [13]

In 1905 Isaac Mokale, Abraham's uncle, farming on Vaalbank, managed to produce only 49 bags of maize and six bags of sorghum, but his father Andries more than made up for this by harvesting 128 bags of maize and 38 bags of sorghum. On Driefontein David Pooe and his three brothers produced 98 bags of maize and 42 of sorghum in 1905, but their uncle Eseau Pooe, who also farmed on Vaalbank, harvested 194 bags of maize, while Jermiah Pooe, on the same farm reaped 208 bags. The highest average yield reported in the 1905 farm register was the 132 bags of maize per household grown on the farm Vaalbank. In fact three quarters of the grain produced by the Orange River Colony farms of the Estate in 1905 was grown on only six of its fourteen farms. [14] Production on these farms was as follows:

TABLE I [15]

PRODUCTION ON ORC FARMS

Farm	Number of households	Bags of maize grown	Bags of sorghum grown	av. yield of grain
Rietfontein	14	619	71	49
Bankfontein	17	863	225	64
Maccauvlei	14	693	77	55
Zandfontein	15	1167	271	96
Vaalbank	14	1307	148	132
Driefontein	12	801	129	77

Averages, we have already said, are misleading. On Zandfontein for example, where a total of 1167 bags of maize were grown by fifteen tenants, average production was 77.8 bags. But the figures recorded for each household read 86, 62, 21, 66, 37, 58, 82, 60, 110, 112, 80, 54, 62, 248 (by a tenant listed as Jonas) and 29 bags. The 248 bags grown by Jonas compares very favourably with the production of the most successful of the white smallholder tenants. Only I. M. Kok, the Estates Manager, who had a tenancy of his own on Rietfontein and grew 455 bags in 1905, and George Ridge with 328 bags had a larger yield than Jonas. Less than half of the 29 white tenants listed on the Estates ORC farms in that year had grown any maize at all and Kok and Ridge produced almost half of the 1,736 bags harvested by this group of tenants.[16]

By comparison the 1905 harvest on Vaalbank shows a tenantry uniformly effective as maize cultivators.

TABLE II[17]

PRODUCTION ON VAALBANK

Tenant's Name	Maize Harvested	Sorghum Harvested
Eseau Pooe	194	3
Stefan Marugu	124	17
Andries Mokale	49	6
Isaac Mokale	128	38
Petrus Serero	64	6
Ismael Serero	82	-
Jermiah Pooe	208	-
Joseph ?	110	6
Lukas More	126	28
Salmon Kwaperi?	122	19
Elias ?	100	25

The 1906 harvest resulted in the Company receiving at least 14,000 bags of grain as rent from its tenants. Tenant production (or at least that part of it which was monitored) was up to 28,000 bags. Even if we allow for an increase in the white tenants' production from one fifth to one quarter (and their 1905 ORC harvest does not suggest that this should be so) the African tenants probably harvested 21,000 bags, an increase on the 1903 figure of 4,500 bags. The average yield per household in 1906 was 87 bags. In 1908 the small holder harvest was about 27,000 bags with the Company receiving 13,646 bags as its share. Again, it is probably that the African tenants accounted for three quarters of the crop, approximately 20,500 bags with a similar average yield of 85 bags if the tenant population remained constant.[18]

Production would seem to have dropped substantially in 1909 and the small holder tenants were reduced to a harvest of 21,000 bags that year. Production recovered slightly in 1910 to just over 24,000 bags, the Company's rent being recorded as 12,108 bags. In 1911 production rose again and stood

at 33,000 bags with the Company recording its share at 16,540 bags. Significantly the Company's own production - recorded for the first time - was a mere 1,775 bags. After 1911 the Company's minute books, as well as other sources, become less helpful about the size of the harvest. In 1912 the Company sold 12,743 bags of maize and it seems reasonable to assume a tenant production of at least 20,000 bags of maize. The only other figures we have are for 1917 when the Company reported receiving 23,565 bags, the highest rent recorded thus far. By that date, however, the African tenants were probably paying two thirds of their crop as rent and we do not have any sense of the part played by white tenants in the Estates production. This makes it virtually impossible to estimate the production of the two sets of small holders in the years when share-cropping among the black peasants had become illegal but was still continued.[19]

In the months immediately after the war the Mokale brothers returned to Vaalbank. They were close to destitution, their father dead, their stock destroyed and - because they had been forced to serve with Boer commandoes - without even the small savings accumulated by those in the camps who had work imposed upon them by the Native Refugee Department or by the military. But, as tenants of the Vereeniging Estates they had one advantage, they were able to acquire a Company loan.

> "...at that time Mangolwane came back (Abraham Mokale reported) with a lot of cattle and started distributing them to tenants. He was actually borrowing them so that they could have a span to plough with. He gave ten to each of my father and uncle". [20]

Both before and after the war the Company found it necessary to landworking capital to its tenants, both black and white. At the end of 1903tenants had been lent £8,305.13s.1d. of which £6,720 was in advances for cattle. White tenants received £2,032, an average of £86.10s. a tenant and the black tenants £4,688 or £19 for each household. Of the remaining monies still outstanding in 1903, £606 was lent for the purchase of ploughs and £978 for seed. The suspicion that we might find some variation of debt bondage is unjustified in this instance and nor do we have any idea of any other forms of dependence which these loans may have created, although we must assume that some subtle forms of dependence existed. The Company's primary intention in granting loans does seem to have been to increase the productive capacity of these small cultivators and stock farmers. Between 1898 and 1902 cattle valued at £3,630.15s. were sold to the Estates tenants, both black and white, all with loans from the Company. [21] In August and September 1903 cattle worth a further £3,700.17s. were sold to tenants with Company loans.[22] In the same period tenants repaid £2,092 on their cattle loans. In October 1904 when the cattle loans were reviewed by the Company's board 28 tenants were shown to have failed to reduce their debts in any way. Of these, four - 'Native' August who owed £14.0.0., J. N. V. Smit owing £40.0.0., Michael Smit whose debt was £50.0.0. and 'Native' Willem owing £36.0.0. - had repaid nothing since 1898. A further four debtors - 'Native' Paulus and 'Native' Martinus owed £32.0.0. each while 'Native' Abram owed £48.0.0. and Willem Booi £16.0.0. - had failed to repay any of their loans since 1900. In addition nineteen tenants who had been given loans in 1902 had, two years later, made no repayments. [23] Furthermore, £724 on ploughs and £619 on seed were still owed to the Company. At the end of 1904 there was some anxiety about these debts not having been repaid and they were, therefore, discussed at successive

board meetings of the Company.[24] It was agreed that the arrangements for the provision of credit were not satisfactory and that these should be revised.[25] In January 1905 the debts in the tenant's loan account stood at £7,612 and by May of the same year this had only been reduced by £185 in spite of the activities of the Estates Manager.[26] In order that the debts might be reduced further the Estates Manager was empowered by the Board to accept grain from the tenants.[27] However, by February 1906 shareholders were being given the assurance that advances 'made to natives and other tenants (were) against security'.[28] In 1908 the Estates Manager was again given permission to accept grain from tenants. Whatever the terms of trade, and we must assume that the Company used its superior bargaining position to order these to its own advantage, African tenants undoubtedly benefitted from these loan arrangements, if only because by 1908 their cattle numbers had increased to such an extent that Marks proposed something be done to limit the cattle numbers held by African tenants. At that point he recommended that they be made to pay a grazing fee.[29] In its immediate task of reducing the stock debt, the Company appears to have been more successful and by 1909 the total owed had been reduced to £1,655.[30] At this juncture the Company produced an alternative strategy in an attempt to eliminate the debt more completely and at the same time to retain its advantage with its tenants who still needed the use of cattle. After setting the value of its outstanding stock debt at £1,245, it now reclaimed cattle to this amount from its tenants and then returned them to their previous owners who were now required to repay a half share of the increase.[31]

The original loans had permitted the Estates' white tenants to buy - at £14 an animal - an average of six head of cattle each, while the African tenants purchased, on average, just over one animal per household. This figure was slightly higher for the Transvaal farms at just over two and slightly less in the ORC at just under 1. Between 1903 and 1905 in the two years between registers being taken on the ORC farms of the Estate, the number of cattle rose from 1.9 to 4.5 in each household.[32] Averages, we must again stress, disguise a great deal and the actual distribution of oxen among tenants of the Estate makes some limited statement about the variations in productive capacities which were to be found there. Take the farm Driefontein where David Pooe and his brothers were tenants in 1905. The farm as a whole had an average of 4.4 oxen (and a similar number of cows), owned by each tenant, but the actual distribution read 1,1,20,2,1,1,8,3 (the latter number recorded in the name of David Pooe) 6 and 8.[33] Among those listed as having 1 ox was Willem Booi who between 1900 and 1904 owed the Company £16 on his cattle loan.[34] The farm Rietfontein had an even lower average number of oxen per household, namely 3, and this was below the average for the ORC farms as a whole. Even so distribution was again uneven and six of its households had no oxen at all. The remaining eight tenants owned 3,7,10,4,6,8,3 and 1 respectively. On Maccauvlei, which had an average of five oxen per household, there were two households with none at all, but again the distribution among the remaining twelve households was uneven. The Maccauvlei householders had respectively 5,3,8,6,4,24,5,8,2,3,2 and 7 oxen. On Vaalbank, the farm with the highest grain production in 1905, the average number of oxen held was 7 but the distribution, 9,7,6,8,2,11,14,6 and 9, was unequal. Andries Mokale with 6 oxen (and 3 cows) and Isaac Mokale with 8 oxen (and 4 cows) together possessed fewer animals than they had together with their father when they had arrived on the Estates before the South African War. This was in spite of the fact that they had taken advantage of the Company's scheme for restocking the Estates after the war.[35]

TABLE III [36]

STOCK HELD BY TENANTS ON VAALBANK

Tenant's Name	Oxen	Cows
Esaau Pooe	9	1
Stefan Marugu	7	2
Andries Mokale	6	3
Isaac Mokale	8	4
Petrus Serero	2	7
Ismael Serero	-	-
Jermiah Pooe	11	14
Joseph?	6	1
Lucas More	14	13
Salmon Kwaperi?	6	6
Elias	9	5

Increased production in grain depended not only on maintaining or increasing the number of draught animals, but as our evidence seems to suggest, it also depended on changing and improving the equipment used for ploughing fields and sowing seeds. Settling on the farms of the Estates meant a considerable change in production methods for most tenants. The Mokales had used wooden ploughs on the Wessells' farm. As the incredulous Andries Mokale reported 'even its parts were made of wood'[37] The Mokales had taken a wooden plough with them into the wartime camps - Emelia Pooe recalled wartime cultivation being undertaken with hoes and with bare hands[38] - which suggests that the family only acquired its metal implements in the post-war period. In 1905 Andries and Isaac Mokale each had a two-share plough. As early as 1894, however, there were reports of 120 iron ploughs on the Vereeniging Estates and not surprisingly at least one informant claimed that it was Mangolwane who was responsible for introducing modern ploughs into the region.[39] Abraham Mokale's testimony shows how rapidly the process of technical change took place and suggests that this transformed the capabilities of these tenant farmers.

> "When you are ploughing for the first time in your life you usually do not have the experience of a farmer. As time goes on one gathers more skills in farming. We started when we were still using the hand plough pulled by a span of oxen with one person leading the span. As time went on that plough was no more used. The new plough did not need a person to hold it in position. One had only to let it stand at the beginning of the furrow and let it stand on its own." 40

The Company, we have already noted, lent over £600 for the purchase of ploughs. But this was a comparatively small sum and the Tenants' Census of 1903 shows that the number of ploughs held by each tenant was small. In that year the white tenants on the Estate had 47 ploughs (10 one share, 37 two share, 87 shares in all) and the black tenants 172 (86 one share, 86 two share, a combined total of 258 shares). The black tenants had between them 98 ploughs on Transvaal farms (50 one share, 48 two share, 146 shares between them) and 74 on the ORC farms (36 one share, 38 two share, a total of 112 shares) which meant that African tenants on the Estate, had on average, fewer than one plough per household, i.e. 0:88 on Transvaal farms and 0.57 on ORC farms. This state of affairs was only achieved after the Company had

lent an average of £11.6s.8d. to its white tenants and an average of £1.7s.0d. to its black tenants, although individual African tenants would certainly have received more.[42] Two years later the black tenants on the ORC farms had increased the number of ploughs they owned by 38 to 112 (0.9 of a plough per household). More significantly, on the 6 productive farms there were 91 ploughs to the 83 tenant households. At the same time the white tenants on the ORC farms increased the number of ploughs they held from 25 to 32. These increases still left some of the households on this part of the Estates without ploughs of their own although there were also those with more than one. Of the white tenants five had three or more ploughs and this was largely reflected in their production. E. T. Ferreira on Rietfontein had five ploughs and thirty-nine oxen and produced 279 bags of maize but it should also be noted that the Ferreira household could call on the labour of seven adult male members of the family. I. M. Kok, the Estates Manager, harvested 455 bags of maize on his own tenancy on Rietfontein and this he did with the use of three ploughs. According to the census, Kok had no oxen of his own but owned forty cows. Rautenbach on Bankfontein with a harvest of 209 bags and Ridge with 328, each had three ploughs and each owned sixteen oxen. But implements and draught animals were not of themselves sufficient. The tenant de Klerk, also of Bankfontein could only produce seventy-two bags of maize in 1905 even though he had three ploughs and 100 oxen. On the other hand Jonas on the farm Zandfontein, who, in 1905, was the Estates' most successful African cultivator with the 248 bags of maize which he reaped, had three ploughs, as did Stefans Maragu whose Vaalbank harvest included 124 bags of maize and 17 of sorghum. By contrast there were the Serero brothers on Vaalbank who between them produced 150 bags of corn without apparently owning ploughs or oxen. Of the six ORC farms with substantial yields Rietfontein had ten ploughs for fourteen households, Bankfontein twenty-three for seventeen, Maccauvlei eighteen for fourteen, Vaalbank thirteen for eleven, Driefontein nine for twelve and Zandfontein eighteen for fifteen. But even where there was more than one plough per household there were few tenants who could have had more than one team of oxen in the field at any one time. For those who did not have the resources to do their own ploughing Abraham Mokale insisted that it was usual for their neighbours to provide assistance. '...whenever it was ploughing time those who had the means would join hands and plough his lands first before they could plough their own fields'. But he added 'He only had to supply his own seed'.[43]

At this point an ambivalence comes into Mokale's testimony. When he was first asked where the needy were to find seed, he seemed to be saying that those who provided help drew the line at providing seed. 'He had to see to it that he had some' was his response to the question. It is possible to read into Abraham Mokale's answer the suggestion that not having seed for the next year was seen, at least by him, as a major failing in domestic organisation. When he was pressed to say why he would not give seed in the same way in which he would provide milk for the children of the needy, his own labour, animals and implements for their ploughing, Mokale responded in the following way:

> "...we wanted him to learn to work for himself. It would be the same if a long time passes without him buying cattle for himself although his crops were good. Also if we found that his field had weeds and he was not removing it, we would not do any ploughing for him the next season because that person did not want to live like other people".

It seemed worth getting greater clarity on this matter of the seed and when Abraham Mokale was interviewed two years later it appeared at first that he was reiterating the point he had made previously.

TF: 'Where would he get the seed from when you ploughed for him?
AM: 'We used to tell him that man you have to see to it that you have seed'.

But then he seemed to modify his position considerably.

'As I have just told you, people used to sympathise with one another. That person would get his seed by actually going around to the people and we would each give him some grain in a dish until he had enough to make seed'. [45]

It is possible that some of the attitudes which emerge in these interviews belong to a later period, possibly even to a time when Abraham Mokale was no longer a farmer. But it is just as likely that the contradictory positions which he appears to have adopted reflected the ambivalence which an act of beneficence might have produced in the family carrying it out. And out of this ambivalence, different individuals and different situations would have permitted either response at different times. On one occasion they might have provided seed for destitute households while at the same time impressing upon them their dependent position. On another occasion the same set of attitudes might have made it possible to justify their not providing this essential assistance.

Although a half share of the tenant's harvest had to be handed over as rent to their landlord, many tenants retained part of their remaining crop - we hesitate to describe it as their surplus - for other transactions. In the main the Mokales seem to have transformed their crops into cash. Abraham Mokale remembered his family selling their maize to a local trader called Sang for what was the very low price of 4/- a bag. Mokale gave no date for this transaction but in view of the prices cited at various times in the minute books of the Company this appears to be much lower than those recorded before 1910. On a number of occasions substantially higher prices were provided both when the Company bought part of their tenants' crop and when they accepted grain as a contribution towards reducing tenants' loans. In May 1905 8/6d. was deducted from the Company's debts for each bag of maize handed over by the Estates' tenants. In September 1909 8/- was allowed while the next year in July, 7/- was given to tenants reducing their debts with grain. Two months later in September 1910 the Estates Manager was given 7/- a bag for grain which the Company owed him which was not significantly lower than the 7/10d the Company received when it in turn sold the crop. The following year in 1911 when the African tenants on the farm Palmietfontein sold their crop of 4,000 bags of maize, at 8/- a bag, to the Company, it in turn committed itself to reselling this crop to Barnato's at 10/- a bag. [46]

A less sanguine - but also less coherent - pattern emerges from the more scattered references to the tenants' sorghum crops. For seventy-five years or more Emalia Molefe continued to be amazed by the exceptionally high prices received for sorghum in the first years of her stay on Vaalbank and the Company minute books confirm that 1905 and 1906 were good years. In 1905 the Company offered to reduce its tenants' debts by accepting 10/- for each bag of sorghum given to them and the next year 9/6 was permitted. In 1909 this had come down to 8/- a bag and had fallen to the even lower price of 6/- in July 1910 which compared very badly with the 15/- received by the Company

from the sale of its sorghum three months later. But to draw any deductions from these latter transactions we would have to know whether or not the quality of the two lots of sorghum was similar and whether or not other factors affecting prices had remained constant. Since we have no means of retrieving this information it is difficult to draw any conclusions from these scattered references to prices. It should be said, however, that the sorghum prices received by the Company in the years after 1910 varied from year to year but were reasonably constant until 1915 when they dropped dramatically before recovering in the years 196 - 196 .

TABLE IV[47]

PRICES RECEIVED FOR SORGHUM

1910	15/-
1911	12/3
1912	11/6
1913	12/-
1914	11/8
1915	6/9
	7/9
	8/-
	7/0½
1916	15/-
1918 (Jan)	16/6
1918 (Dec.)	16/-

Prices received by tenants on the Estates were probably higher than those received on white-owned farms in the surrounding districts. The Company not only had grains to sell to its coal-mining interests and its other enterprises on the Estates but it acted as an alternative to the local traders as a purchaser of grain. In addition the Company's substantial crops attracted purchasers from Johannesburg who brought with them the region's market prices. In their time, on the Wessels' farm, the Mokales had taken his fodder on the three day journey to the Johannesburg market with their own horses, mules or donkeys, but a decade later, with their own different crops, such a journey seemed inappropriate and instead their grains were sold to local traders. Abraham Mokale remembers selling a harvest to a trader they called Sappir (Shapiro?) at what became the South African village of Coalbrook. What stands out about the Mokales' transactions with Sappir is that these, unlike many undertaken by small farmers at this time, resulted in the exchange of cash. They sold their crops to Sappir but made their purchases - of such goods as blankets, sugar, coffee, salt and cloth - from a store across the river from Vaalbank owned by a white trader known to them as Rapara Sheleng from his habit of saying to his customers 'gee my 'n paar Sheleng' (give me a few shillings). Rapara Sheleng also sold a bread made from wheat roughage and known as Rant aloci. 'That', said Abraham Mokale, 'was the only type of bread we had. If you could not get your bread there, there was nowhere else to find any'. There were other sales which the Mokales transacted with local traders. In December of each year they would sheer their sheep and sell wool to a trader in Heilbron.[48]

Whether wool was an important part of the Mokale household economy or not is difficult to say since the census which tells so much about their arable production has nothing to say about their ownership of sheep. Nevertheless, sheep and wool became an increasingly important part of the economy of the Estates in the decade after the South African War. It may be that for some tenants a shortage of family labour encouraged a move to sheep. In any event there was a marked increase in the number of sheep recorded as being on the Estates between 1903 and 1905. In the 1903 census sheep were not classified separately, but were listed together with goats. Even so the combined number of sheep and goats recorded was very small. White tenants were reported to have 391 sheep and goats, and most of these, 321, were on Transvaal farms. Black tenants had 549 sheep and goats of which 345 were on ORC farms. In the 1905 register sheep were listed on their own and there was no enumeration of goats. White farmers increased their holdings from 50 sheep and goats to 268 sheep in the two years between the making of inventories. These 268 sheep were, however, distributed between five individuals on five separate farms while on the remaining nine farms the white tenants in occupation did not run sheep at all. On the other hand the African-owned sheep on the Estates increased to 1310, a rise of almost a thousand on the combined goat and sheep total recorded in 1903. (And this probably understated the increase in sheep since, as we have seen, the Mokales are recorded as having no sheep. Abraham Mokale could, nevertheless, recall the annual sale of wool as an event of some significance). As we might have expected the number of African tenants with a significant number of sheep was quite small. Only eighteen tenants had more than 25 animals and their distribution was uneven. On Rietfontein, the farm with the largest number of African-owned sheep, 278, their distribution between households was as follows: 3,6,40,75,26,3,3,15,85 and 22. In addition there were four tenants who owned no sheep at all. The pattern of distribution was similar on other farms. For example on Maccouvlei, where there were fourteen tenant households, only five owned sheep and ownership was spread in this way: 48,56,4,22 and 73. The African smallholders with the largest number of sheep were the tenants Charles with 134 sheep on Palmietfontein, Nicholas with 100 on Ruiter, and Jack with 93 on Dampaats; all three farms being among those which grew little or no maize or sorghum. On the other hand Ridge on Schaaplaats had the largest flock among the white tenants with 100 sheep (whatever the reason for Schaaplaats getting its name, in 1905 Ridge's sheep were the only ones within its substantial boundaries) and the tenant Myberg on Nyverhyd, with 91, had the next largest flock.[49]

It may have been that the success of African tenants in increasing the numbers of their flocks influenced the Company in its decision to give a greater part of its energies to raising and improving sheep themselves. This decision had been taken by the Board at the end of 1905 because it believed, probably too pessimistically, that agriculture would soon exhaust the sandy soils south of the Vaal. The Board began by proposing that it should buy 5,000 sheep for the Estates, but after delaying the implementation of this decision it made the more modest purchase of 2000 animals from the former Boer commander, General de Wet.[50] At much the same time the Company announced that it would begin the restocking of the Estates with well bred Marino sheep. Simultaneously it announced that it had begun the planting of lucerne to provide feed for its stock. It also began the process instructing its tenants in the best ways of caring for their sheep. Sheep may have resulted in a reduction in the amount of labour required on the Estates but it probably brought an increase in overall supervision both for its own flocks and for those run by its tenants. The Company was set on improving its own stock and that of its tenants and to undertake this improvement it had a three-fold strategy involving firstly, the importing of new breeding stock, secondly, the

weeding out of sheep of inferior quality and thirdly, as will become apparent, the weeding out of tenants of inferior quality.[51]

Even if it had not set out to transform its tenantry, the relationship between the sheep running tenants and the Estates management was bound to become increasingly fraught. This was because of the way in which the Company required its tenants to repay their sheep loans and to pay their rent as sheep farmers. Unlike the cattle loans which the Company made, sheep were from the very beginning - with the white tenants at least - distributed on a half share basis. The Company was to claim not only a half share of the increase, but also a half share of the wool. Moreover, it claimed its share of the increase in stock in the more valuable ewes. The Company also claimed the right to purchase the remaining lambs at a price which they would establish. Not surprisingly, the tenants tried to renegotiate this agreement but without success. In 1910 the Company acceded to the tenants' demand that they also have access to ewes, but it responded by reducing the price at which it bought lambs from tenants. Although all but two of the tenants refused to sell to the Company, their situation was untenable since the Company laid claim to tenants' surplus stock.[52] The result of the tensions which these claims and counter-claims produced was the Company's terminating a very high proportion of tenancies. In general the turn-over in tenancies held by white farmers - and we only have evidence for white farmers - was dramatically high. If we compare the 22 names on the 1905 ORC census with a list of tenants' names which appear on a 1912 Estates survey, we find that only one tenant survived the intervening seven years. The minute books are littered with references to casualties as, one after the other, tenants were dismissed. In 1908, for example, the Estates Manager reported that he had placed 'flocks of three tenants in the hands of better men'. At the same time the tenant N. Borman, who had recently completed a 'good stone house' on Palmietfontein was also dismissed. Although Borman was eventually allowed to keep his tenancy, this was only renewed on condition that he did so without running sheep. There were other indications that tenants were extremely vulnerable at this time. In 1909, when there was a complaint from a neighbouring farmer, Edward Wallace, that tenants' sheep which, he alleged, were infected with scab, had strayed on to his land. He claimed that the negligent and haphazard shepherding which had allowed this to happen was the result of the overseer being under notice of dismissal.[53] I. M. Kok's response to this criticism of one of his tenants shows how severely the Company treated those who were thought to be dealing incompetently with their sheep.

> "We are doing everything in our power to keep our flocks clean and are continually discharging tenants who are negligent about their flocks and I am certain that your Scab Inspector of this District will bear my statement out."[54]

Wallace's perception of the incompetence which had allowed the sheep to go astray on his land can be gaged from an earlier complaint which he made to the Director of Agriculture in the ORC.

> "I have been clear (of scab) for this last one and three quarter years. When I took over the place was absolutely rotten with diseases. I have spent a lot of hard work and cash to get this place clean. The Vereeniging Estates Lewis and Marks adjoin me on two sides. Their flocks have not been clean, only for short periods during the whole of my sojourn here which is close on three years. Their flocks are handled by these low class Dutch whom I consider to be the worst class of men to have charge over any stock."

Wallace thought that he should claim compensation but from whom? As he noted in his letter to the Director of Agriculture, 'these man that are in charge of the Vereeniging Estates flock have got nothing'.

> "It is," he continued, "simply impossible to keep clear of infection alongside the class of men with their antiquated ideas and their crude theories. I hear that the Estates hold each of these men responsible for the flocks under their charge under a signed contract. Will it be worth while trying to make them pay all the damages I have suffered or must I grin and bear it?"[55]

The demand for greater control over the quality of the wool which they produced saw the white tenants being forced off the Estates. Similarly the end of the black tenancy system on these farms was related to the Company's belief that they could make more effective use of the land. On Vaalbank around about 1918, the Mokales saw the Company ploughing right up to their homes. The earlier haphazard system of ploughing on the Estates was brought to an end.[56] Mangolwane, Abraham Mokale claimed, came with his own spans of oxen and told the tenants that he would now have his own people working for him [57]. There was now a Company overseer on Vaalbank, a bywooner remembered as Van Tonder, who 'took over the administration of ploughing'. Those who remained on the farm had to accept Van Tonder's authority and undertake the work he gave them. The Company's oxen, according to Abraham Mokale, were soon followed by its tractors.[58]

The 1913 Land Act was not directly required by the Vereeniging Estates - and Lewis and Marks had registered their dissent from the Act - to bring about changes in productive relationships. Those changes seemed to have emerged from the growing economic power of the landowners. Among smaller landowners where this economic power was absent, the old relationships usually continued even if they were illegal. It helped small landowners, however, that under the new conditions the status of tenancy was denied to share croppers in the region. During the heyday of share farming on the Vereeniging Estates a photograph appeared in an African Observer for 1910, showing the 'Native Tenants' of the Company. Wearing their Sunday best and sitting with their arms folded, looking every inch the proud Edwardian yeomanry.[59] That their photograph had been taken and the Company had chosen to show them off in the space they had purchased from that journal, suggests very strongly that the Company accepted them on their own terms, as yeomen farmers. Tim Keegan has argued that it was the status of tenants that most concerned white farmers rather than their economic roles.[60] We can agree that there were a number of reasons, not all of them immediately economic, which had led to the reiteration of the old anti-squatting laws. But the effect was everywhere to be the same as, ultimately, economic weakness and low status came into line. As Abraham Mokale reported:

> "we only noticed that things were changing when we left Mangolwane's only to find that in all the farms the boers had...wanted to use their own spans for ploughing and were no more willing to do any share-cropping but wanted people to work for them as labour tenants. We were now required to work only two days in a week for ourselves and the other four days for the boer". [61]

Abraham Mokale could remember that his father had gone to a meeting in the Heilbron district which had sought to protest against the changes which had been made, but he remembers little of the political activity which the region saw when the new system came into being. He could recall nothing of the ICU in the districts in which the Estates existed. Nevertheless mention of Kadalie's

name revived memories of the greatest change of all which took place in those times and brought the independent tenantry to an end.

> "During Kadalie's time it was the time when the Government started changing....We were at that time required to send our children out on the farms to go and work for nothing as long as we stayed on the farm".[62]

This paper was written with the help of a grant from the Social Science Research Council.

Peter Delius spent some time looking for the minute books of the Vereeniging Estates and he and Wendy Furness undertook the arduous task of photocopying the surviving five volumes. Charles Van Onselen organised the interviewing of Abraham Mokale and he has always been very generous with information. Charles Van Onselen and Peter Delius contributed substantially to my understanding of the period. If I could hold them responsible for this paper I would, but I can't, so I won't.

Abbreviations

C.O.	Colonial Office ORC
D.A.	Director of Agriculture ORC
N.T.S.	Naturelle Sake (Native Affairs post-Union)
O.R.C.	Orange River Colony
O.V.S.	Oranje Vrystaat
S.N.A.	Secretary for Native Affairs TAB
T.A.B.	Transvaalse Argiefbewaarplek (Transvaal Archive Depot) Pretoria
T.B.V.	Tussen Bewaarplek (Intermediate (Archive) Depot) Pretoria
V.A.B.	Vrystaatse Argiefbewarplek (Free State Archive Depot) Bloemfontein
V.E.	Vereeniging Estates Minute Books
Z.A.R.	Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek

Mokale I: Transcript of the interview of Abraham Mokale undertaken by Mahloma Ntoane, 21st October 1980, translation by Thamsanga Flatela.

Mokale II: Transcript of the interview of Abraham Mokale undertaken by Thamsanga Flatela (with translation) with questions provided by the author, 2nd April 1982.

Mokale III: As above, 12 May 1982.

NOTES

1. The above paragraph is based on the Mokale interviews (I, II, and III and Ted Matsetela 'Aspects of Sharecropping Mokale I, II, III, Ted Matsetela. Aspects of sharecropping and proletarianization in the northern, Orange Free State 1890-1920: The life story of Emelia Mahlodi Pooe'. Social history conference paper 2 January 1980. A revised version of this paper has now appeared in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone. Industrialization and social change in South Africa: African class formation culture and consciousness 1870-1930. (Longmans 1982) 'The life story of Nkgone Mma Pooe .....' pp212-237. Theti Jackson Matsetela, Appendix II, Interview with Diana Pooe, Ga - Mokgapa 28 August 1980 in 'Rural change among Africans in the Ventersdorp District 1910-1935. A case study of Bakwena-Ba-Ga-Mokgopa'. M.A. Area Studies dissertation 1981.

2. Matsetela 'Aspects' pp 4-6.

3. Mokale I pp 14-15. Star 30 January 1903.

4. Standard and Diggers News 1897. Mokale I p11, Star 30 January 1903.

5. Mokale I pp 20, 21, Matsetella 'Aspects' p6. Peter Warwick The African refugee problem in the Transvael and Orange River Colony, 1900-1902 Centre for Southern African Studies Collected Seminar Papers, 2. January 1976.

6. Mokale I pp 21-22, Matsetela 'Aspects' p6. The quotation and the 1900-1902 grain figures are from VAB CO 208/314/03 I.M. Kok to Inspector Nature Refugees 1, January 1903. The 1905 figures are from VAB NAB7/99/9/05 I.M. Kok to Nature Commissioner Bloemfontein 19 September 1905, Enclosing Statement, Pass, Summary of the ORC portions of the Vereeniging Estates. (Hereafter NAB Census 1905) p10 for quantitative information on the farm Zandfontein.

7. Matsekla, Appendix II.

8. Mokale I p23, Matsetela 'Aspects' pp7., 8 NAB Census 1905 p11 for quantitative information on the farm Driefontein. This page reports the presence of the brothers David Salthiel and Naphtali Pooe which confirms an important detail in Emelia Pooe's testimony. Mokale III p15.

9. TAB: SNA 192/138/04 S. Marks to Sir Geofrey Lagden and January 1904 enclosing 'Vereenging Estates' Tenants Cencus and Report' December 1903 by I.M. Kok. December 1903. (Hereafter SNA Tenants Census 1903) Summary 2 Native Tenants. NAB Cencus 1905 p6 Rietfontein, p9 Vaalbank p10 Zandfontein.

10. SNA Tenants Census, 1903, Summary 2, NAB Cencus 1905. pp6-14 Mokale I pp16, 17.

11. SNA Tenants Census 1903. Summary 2 NAB Cencus 1905. p6-14.

12. VE Vol II 21 August 1901 p161.

13. Mokale I p18.

14. NAB Census 1905 p9 Vaalbank, p11 Driefontein.

15. NAB Census 1905 p6 Rietfontein, p7 Bankfontein, p8 Maccouvlei, p9 Vaalbank, p10 Zandfonte n, p11 Driefontein.

16. NAB Census 1905, p11, p6, p12 Schaapplaats.

17. NAB Census 1905 p9. Mokale II p4. Abraham Mokale provided the family names of the Vaalbank tenants. Among them Isaac Mokale, his father and Andries Mokale his uncle.

18. VE Vol II 31 July 1906, VE Vol II 2 September 1908 p466.

19. VE Vol III 13 September 1910. p264. VE Vol IV 4 October 1911, pp39, 40. VE Vol IV 31 October 1912, p138. VE Vol IV 22 October 1913, p193. VE Vol V 1 November 1917 p128.

20. Mokale I p23.

21. SNA Tenants Census 1903. Summary 1 and 2.

22. VE Vol I 25 October 1904. pp 201, 202.

23. VE Vol I 25 October 1904, pp201, 202. VE Vol I 16 1 November, 16 November 1904 pp205, 213.

24. VE Vol I 16 November 1904, p213.

25.

26. VE Vol I 23 May 1905 p313.

27. VE Vol I 20 June 1905 p331.

28. Report of the Shareholders Meeting, 9 February 1906.

29. VE Vol II 3 December 1908, p519.

30. VE Vol III 13 July 1909 p75.

31. VE Vol III 13 July 1909 p75.

32. SNA Tenants Census 1903, Summary 2. NAB Census 1905. pp6-14. Calculations based on these sources.

33. NAB Census 1905, Driefontien p11.

34. VE Vol I 25 October, 1904 pp 201, 202.
NAB Census 1905, p11.

35. NAB Census 1905. Rietfontein p6, Maccouvlei p8 and Vaalbank p9.

36. NAB Census 1905. Vaalbank p9.

37. Mokale I p6.

38. Masetela 'Aspects' p6.

39. Summary of interview with Mrs. Radebe p1.

40. Mokale III p17.

41. SNA Tenants Census 1903 Summary 1 and 2 ploughs.

42. SNA Tenants Census 1903 Summary 2.

43. NAB Census 1905 Mokale I p17.

44. Mokale I p17.

45. Mokale III p16.

46. Mokale III p8. VE Vol I 20 June 1905, p317. VE Vol. III 28 September 1909, p117 VE Vol III 12 July 1910, p238. VE Vol III 13 September 1910, p259 VE Vol III 6 December 1910. p292 VE Vol IV 10 August 1911 p20.

47. VE Vol I 20 June 1905 p317. VE Vol II 22 May 1906 p110. VE Vol III 28 September 1909 p 117. VE Vol III 12 July 1910 p328. VE Vol III 12 October 1910, p272. VE Vol IV 5 September 1911 p29. VE Vol IV 31 October 1912. p138. VE Vol IV 22 October 1913. VE Vol IV 18 June 1914. VE Vol V 25 December 1915 p15. VE Vol V 25 September 1916 p53. VE Vol V 3 January 1918 p 136. VE Vol V 13 December 1918 p222.

48. Mokale I p12, Mokale III p8, p12.

49. SNA Tenants Census 1903, Summary 1 and 2, Sheep and goats. NAB Census 1905 pp6-14, Sheep. Mokale III p5.

50. VE Vol II 19 December 1905. p25.

51. VE Vol II 21 January 1908, p375. 3 November 1908, p496. 21 January 1908 p378. 13 January 1909, p541
VE Vol III 19 October 1909, p130 28 June 1910 p232.

52. VE Vol III 3 May 1910, p207, 23 June 1910, p238. 9 August, p252.

53. TAB: NTS 283/3528/12/2684. Vereemging Estates L.H. White. Tenants (for comparison between white tenants on the Estates in 1905 and 1912 See Appendix II). VAB: DA 47/1968/1/09 Edward Wallace Director of Agriculture, Bloenfontain, 6 May 1909.

54. VAB: DA 47/1968/1/09 I.M. Kok to Director of Agriculture Bloemfontain 17 May 1909.

55. VAB: DA 47/1968/1/09 Edward Wallace to Director of Agriculture Bloenfontain, 6 May 1909.

56. Mokale II p13.

57. Mokale III p23.

58. Mokale II p16.

59. African Observor

60. Journal of Southern African Studies Vol 5 No 1 p252.

61. III p23.

62. III p24.