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South Africa's Land Reform in Historical Perspective:

Land settlement and agriculture in Mopani District, Limpopo, 19th century to 2015

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, August 2015.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It has been submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university.

Signed Michelle Hay, August 2015

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Abstract

This thesis explores the hypothesis that South Africa's land reform programme is based on a set of assumptions about the country's past which are inadequate and have contributed to the failure of policy. The impact of these assumptions is that they support particular models for restitution and rural economic development which became 'accepted wisdom' within international development agencies, government, and amongst land activists in South Africa, but which were and still are inappropriate in the South African context. To test this hypothesis I look at the history of land settlement and agriculture in Mopani district of Limpopo province. In particular, I look at how ordinary people accessed and lost rights to land over the nineteenth and twentieth century, and how land became tied up in struggles for political authority and access to resources. I show how the importance of ethnic identities and a sense that land belongs to 'indigenous' people of a particular ethnicity, deepened during the Bantustan era. I argue that policymakers could have learned from past government policies. This includes the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act which called for the state to purchase farms from private landowners for African settlement, and smallholder irrigation schemes and co-operatives, which were intended to improve agricultural production in the reserves and homelands. What this history reveals is that land settlement patterns and experiences of land loss were far more complex than the simplified narratives on which land restitution was based. The poor performance of agriculture in reserves and bantustans cannot be blamed on past government policies intended to destroy a peasantry, or on land loss alone, rather there were many challenges and constraints. Women maintained an interest in agriculture throughout the twentieth century, but were not taken seriously by those attempting to improve African agriculture. Africans interested in commercial farming were constrained in how much land they could access. The idea that Africans are naturally communal, and that restitution and development should target 'communities' is deeply problematic. Policy failed to take into account these realities. The consequences have been that land restitution has failed to bring redress, restituted farms have failed as commercial operations, those with a real interest in agriculture continue to face constraints, and smallholder irrigation schemes continue to perform poorly.

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List of Abbreviations

ANC: African National Congress

AZAPO: Azanian Peoples' Organisation

BEE: Black Economic Empowerment

COLA: Commission on Land Allocation

CPA: Communal Property Association

CRDP: Comprehensive Rural Development Programme

CRLR: Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights

DBSA: Development Bank Southern Africa

DoA: Department of Agriculture

GFI: Gross Farming Income

IARC: Industrial and Agricultural Requirements Commission

LBFC: Letaba Bantu Farmer's Co-operative

LRAD: Land Redistribution and Development grant

LRLCC: Limpopo Regional Land Claims Commission

NAD: Native Affairs Department

NEC: Native Economic Commission

NFA: Native Farmers' Association

NP: National Party

NGO: Non-governmental Organisation

OH: Operation Hunger

PLAAS: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies

RLCC: Regional Land Claims Commission

SABRA: South African Bureau of Racial Affairs

SANT: South African Native Trust

SEPC: Social and Economic Planning Council

SLAG: Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant

ZAR: Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the hypothesis that South Africa's land reform programme is based on a set of assumptions about the country's past which are inadequate and have contributed to the failure of policy. The impact of these assumptions is that they support particular models for restitution and rural economic development which became 'accepted wisdom' within international development agencies, government, and amongst land activists in South Africa, but which were and still are inappropriate in the South African context. In this thesis I will look at a history of land settlement and agriculture in Mopani district of Limpopo province, showing how historical realities shaped the way policy unfolded, and how a lack of appreciation of history impacted on what policies were formulated and how they were implemented.

As the initial phases of land reform failed, policymakers searched for new explanations for the continuing poor performance of agriculture in communal areas and newly restituted land. Some policymakers and politicians particularly those involved in land reform and commercial agriculture, have tended to blame beneficiaries' lack of farming and business skills, and poor post-settlement support. This informed recent policy initiatives such as the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development grant, which aimed to assist black commercial farmers, the recapitalisation of failing farms, and recent insistence on business plans and strategic partnerships in land restitution projects. Many activist-scholars – the most prolific contributors to the land reform debate – point to the 'compromised' nature of land reform policy: the neoliberal economic policies of the ANC government, including liberalisation of the agricultural sector, commitment to a large-scale commercial farming model, a 'restrained state' in terms of spending on land reform, as well as the willing-buyer willing-seller market-based model of land reform which protects private property rights.[1]

[1] R. Hall, 'Land restitution in South Africa: Rights, Development, and the Restrained State' *Canadian Journal of African Studies,* 38 (3) 2004; R. Hall, 'Transforming rural South Africa? Taking stock of land reform' in R. Hall and L. Ntsebeza (eds.) *The Land Question in South Africa: The Challenge of Transformation and Redistribution,* Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007; L. Ntsebeza, 'Land redistribution in South Africa, the property clause revisited' in R. Hall and L. Ntsebeza (eds.) *The Land Question;* B. Cousins, 'Land reform and agriculture uncoupled: the political economy of rural reform in post-apartheid South Africa' in P. Hebinck and B. Cousins, (eds.) *In the Shadow of Policy: Everyday practices in South African Land and Agrarian Reform Debate,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013; H. Bernstein, 'Commercial Agriculture in South Africa since 1994: 'Natural, Simply Capitalism', *Journal of Agrarian Change,* 13 (1) 2013; M. Aliber, T. Maluleke, T. Manenzhe, G. Paradza and B. Cousins, *Land Reform and Livelihoods: Trajectories of change in northern Limpopo Province, South Africa*, Cape

This type of ideological critique characterises much of the land reform debate, allowing Aliber to remark that 'If there is one thing regarding land reform in South Africa about which there is near-universal agreement, it is that the 'willing buyer, willing seller' approach is problematic'.[2] Many of these scholars see smallholder agriculture as the best option for rural development, and support programmes such as the revitalisation of smallholder irrigation schemes.[3] Meanwhile, in public fora the failure of agriculture in communal areas and land reform farms is blamed on the 'lazy poor'.[4] These more recent explanations for failure tend to rest on some of the same old assumptions underlying policy in the 1990s. There are of course some important exceptions, which I look at below.

Finally, land reform has come after a century of land policies and agricultural programmes designed to redistribute land from private white owners to the state under the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, and even to improve African smallholder agriculture. I argue that a better understanding of the history of rural transformations, as well as the challenges and outcomes of past land and agricultural policies, could provide lessons for current policymakers.

The argument that historical understanding is important to policymaking is not new. Delius and Schirmer argued that history can inform policy because the 'ideographic' approach taken by many historians can guide the nomothetic approach used by policymakers.[5] The

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Town: HSRC Press, 2013; F. Hendricks, 'Rhetoric and Reality in Restitution and Redistribution: Ongoing Land and Agrarian Questions in South Africa', in F. Hendricks, L. Ntsebeza and K. Helliker (eds.) *The Promise of Land: Undoing a century of dispossession in South Africa,* Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013. Weideman discusses how this 'compromise' was reached and notes that it failed to take into account the interests of the poor. M. Weideman, 'Who Shaped South Africa's Land Reform Policy?' *Politikon,* 31 (2) 2004.

[2] M. Aliber, 'Unravelling the 'Willing Buyer, Willing Seller' Question', in B. Cousins and C. Walker, *Land Divided Land Restored: Land Reform in South Africa for the 21st Century,* Johannesburg: Jacana, 2015, p. 145; for a critique of land reform debates up to 2009 see S. Schirmer, 'Land Reform: The State We Are In' *African Studies,* 68 (3) 2009.

[3] M. Aliber, M. Baiphethi, R de Satge. J. Denison, T. Hart, P. Jacobs and W. van Averbeke, with R. Alcock, M. Antwi, A. Belete, B. Cousins, L. Field, I. Mariga, P. Masika, S. Materechera, D. Mayson, N. Monde and B. Tapela, *Strategies to support South African smallholders as a contribution to government's second economy strategy, Research Report 41*, Cape Town: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, School of Government, Faculty of Economic Management Sciences, University of Cape Town, 2009.

[4] I explore this in Chapter 7. See also D. James, 'Citizenship and land in South Africa: From rights to responsibilities' *Critique of Anthropology* 33 (1), 2013; Sisonke Msimang, 'Poor bashing is the new slut shaming: Zuma, Sisulu and the lazy nation', *Daily Maverick* 23 October 2014, http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2014-10-23-poor-bashing-is-the-new-slut-shaming-zuma-sisulu-the-lazy-nation/#.VUDiYtKqqko

[5] P. Delius and S. Schirmer, 'Historical research and policy making in South Africa' in *African Studies,* 59, 1, 2000, pp. 5, 11.

nomothetic approach tends to use evidence to back certain theories, while the ideographic approach is not bound to theory and grapples with complexity, specificity and a range of variables. Historians can help policymakers modify policies so that they are more effective. For example, with land reform policy, when it comes to interpreting and acting on statistical data showing high poverty rates, unemployment, and low levels of agriculture in rural areas, it is important to place this in historical context: 'we need to know how people came to be pushed out of agriculture and into dependence on wages before we can make an informed decision about whether or not it is feasible to revive agriculture amongst the rural poor.'[6]

Walker has most recently argued that one of the key problems with land reform today is that the symbolic and material dimensions of land are being confused, reflecting:

> a reluctance to come to terms with the complexity of the history of this country, especially (but not only) of the hundred years since the passage of the 1913 Natives Land Act – a reluctance to understand the messiness but also the dynamism, for better and for worse, of a century of massive social and economic change.[7]

For better land reform policy to be formulated, 'a critical shift in thinking about the past and a deeper appreciation of the fundamentally non-agrarian nature of South African society today' is required'.[8] Walker is also critical of the government's failure to learn from even their own policy history, which shows land restitution as currently formulated to be 'a far-from-sturdy foundation on which to build "a better life for all" at significant scale.'[9]

Sender and Johnston similarly call for a greater use of evidence and understanding of context in designing agricultural policies targeting the poor. They criticise the consensus that emerged in development agencies and amongst economists that small family farms were more efficient than large commercial farms. The theory behind the consensus is not supported by evidence from Africa or South Africa, but to get around this, theorists used an ahistorical formulation of why there was no evidence: 'market distortions or missing markets… can be called upon to explain the surprising failure of small farms to outperform

[6] P. Delius and S. Schirmer, 'Towards a Workable Rural Development Strategy' *TIPS Working Paper,* 2001, p. 8.
[7] C. Walker, 'Sketch Map to the Future: Restitution Unbound', in B. Cousins and C. Walker, *Land Divided Land Restored: Land Reform in South Africa for the 21st Century,* Johannesburg: Jacana, 2015, p. 233.
[8] Ibid, p. 249.
[9] Ibid, p. 233, see also C. Walker, *Land-Marked: Land Claims and Land restitution in South Africa,* Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2008.

large farms.'[10] Thus, the World Bank continued to 'peddle the same ahistorical vision of an egalitarian co-operative African countryside inhabited by 'small family farms', who will use 'undistorted' markets to achieve dynamic capitalist accumulation with no workers, capitalists or poverty'. In the meantime what policymakers were missing was the 'technological dynamism, growth in investment, contribution to exports and wage employment' of large scale agricultural enterprises.[11]

Woolcock et al point out that in recent years development economists have accepted that 'institutions matter', and a consensus has developed that if 'institutions matter' then 'history matters' in development policy.[12] The disastrous consequences of one-size-fits all projects which try to order society or categorise it without attention to historical specificity, was considered by Scott in *Seeing Like a State.* He warns against social engineering projects that are based on an 'imperial or hegemonic planning mentality that excludes the necessary role of local knowledge and know-how'.[13]

Woolcock et al make a systematic case for the importance of the discipline of history in development policy. Historians make use of a wide variety of sources to recreate a time and place, they appreciate the importance of context, 'how the present came to be what it is' and have a sense of how 'policy actions in the present might shape future trajectories'.[14] Historians are aware that policy often has unintended consequences, which ties into the idea that the history of past policies – and understanding where they went wrong and why – can provide lessons for current policymakers. But most of all:

> The strongest argument for the importance of bringing history into dialogue with policy and policy-making… is that history is already there, all the time: the only question is what *kind* of history is going to be used. Without the explicit input of critical and reflexive professional historians, the 'history' which policy-makers use is likely to be naïve, simplistic and implicit, often

[10] J. Sender and D. Johnston, 'Searching for a Weapon of Mass Production in Rural Africa: Unconvincing Arguments for Land Reform' *Journal of Agrarian Change,* 4 (1 and 2) 2004, p. 145.
[11] Sender and Johnston, 'Unconvincing Arguments' p. 159.
[12] M. Woolcock, S. Szreter and V. Rao, 'How and Why History Matters for Development Policy' in C.A Bayly, V. Rao, S. Szreter, M. Woolcock (eds.) *History, Historians and Development Policy: A necessary dialogue,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011; some recent literature includes R. Neustadt and E. R May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers,* London: Collie Macmillan, 1986*;* F. Cooper and R. Packard (eds.) *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on History and the Politics of Knowledge* Berkley, CA: University of California Press 1997.
[13] J.C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 6.
[14] Woolcock et al, 'How and Why History Matters for Development Policy', p. 13.

> derived from unconscious assumptions or vague memories; as such it is likely to be highly selective, used to suit predetermined purposes, and to be largely unverified.[15]

History can be dangerous when a poor understanding of it informs policy and the people implementing policy.

That said, not all approaches to history are useful to policymakers, and many historians would disagree that history can be used in that way, for a number of reasons. Some would find the idea that we can learn from past policy mistakes unacceptable because history 'contains no teleological or Hegelian imperative' and each time and place is unique.[16] Theoretical historians, such as Marxist revisionists of the 1970s who put theory before empirical research, dispense overly simple and often teleological models of how the present came to be.[17] These theories present activists and policymakers with an easily identifiable enemy responsible for present social ills, for example with regard to the poor performance of smallholder agriculture: 'capital', 'imperialism', 'land dispossession', 'the migrant labour system'.[18] For post-modernist historians, 'both the content and epistemological underpinnings of orthodox 'history' are suspect at best, since… such history is merely a series of hegemonic ex-post rationalisations propagated by powerful elites, the accounts of the past reimagined by 'winners' in the present'.[19] The very idea of 'development' is problematic. Post-modernist arguments - that history is subjective, it changes with the teller, it is fluid and corruptible - have been used by some land activists and claimant communities. While not in published form, these ideas were discussed during a workshop in Cape Town on the use of various sources in researching land claims.[20] Claimants and activists threw doubt on the ability of the archives to reveal anything useful about the history of land settlement and belonging, and glorified the use of oral history in telling

[15] Ibid, pp. 7 – 8.
[16] Ibid, 'How and Why History Matters', p. 5.
[17] For a reflection on 'The "Classic" Southern African Dispossession/Accumulation Model' see B. O' Laughlin, 'Introduction: Agrarian Change, Rural Poverty and Land Reform in South Africa since 1994' in *Journal of Agrarian Change,* 13 (1) 2013, pp. 1 – 15.
[18] C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry,* Berkley: University of California Press, 1979; H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid' *Economy and Society,* 1 (4) 1972, pp. 425 – 456, F. T Hendricks, "Displaced proletarians in Transkei" in *Towards and New Agrarian Democratic Order,* South African Economic Research and Training Project, 1990.
[19] Woolcock et al, 'How and why history matters'. p. 6
[20] This was a theme at the 'Workshop on the use of archives, oral history and other heritage resources in land claims' held at the Western Cape Archives and Records Service, 18 – 19 June 2013.

meaningful narratives about the past (even if they do not correspond with documentary evidence).

How did land reform policymakers understand history? What models did they draw upon? Binswanger and Deininger were very influential in shaping South Africa's land reform policy, but their arguments were also supported by a wider group of scholars working for the Land and Agricultural Policy Centre.[21] They provide a neat account of South African history to explain the emergence of the dual system of agriculture in South Africa whereby most of the land in the country was farmed by wealthy but inefficient white farmers, while a small percentage of land was reserved for the majority of the population farming at subsistence or sub-subsistence level. They drew on a narrative of history that was well-rehearsed amongst land activists and which drew on Colin Bundy's 1979 *Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* to develop an argument for how South Africa's past land and agricultural policies destroyed an African peasantry and supported inefficient white farmers. [22] They also drew on international development literature, and an argument developed by the Liptons for the South African context, that small-scale family farming was not only more efficient, but the best option to reduce rural poverty and increase food security – as proven by theory and experience from other countries.[23]

According to this narrative, before dispossession and unfair agricultural policies biased towards white farmers, black farmers responded effectively to the market and became efficient and prosperous farmers. Their farming was done on a small scale using family

[21] Weideman, 'Who shaped', p. 223.

[22] D. James, *Gaining Ground? 'Rights' and 'property' in South African Land Reform,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007, p. 157; C. Walker, *Land-Marked: Land Claims and Land restitution in South Africa,* Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2008, p. 41. For examples of this narrative see H. Binswanger and K. Deininger, 'South African Land Policy: The Legacy of History and Current Options', *World Development,* 21 (9) 1993, pp. 1460 – 1463; M. Mbongwa, R. van den Brink, J. van Zyl, 'Evolution of the agrarian structure in South Africa' in Van Zyl (ed) *Agricultural Land Reform in South Africa,* Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1996; C.R. Cross 'Introduction' in *Towards Freehold? Options for land and development in South Africa's Black rural areas* Johannesburg: Juta, 1988, p. 1; Editorial in *Towards a New Agrarian Democratic Order,* South African Economic Research and Training Project, 1990; Z. Skweyiya, 'Towards the Solution of the Land Question in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Problems and Models' in *Towards a New*; E. Letsoalo, 'Land reforms – state initiatives' in *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa,* Cape Town: Idasa, 1991*;* R.Hall and L. Ntsebeza, 'Introduction',L. Ntsebeza and R. Hall, (eds.) *The Land Question in South Africa: The Challenge of Transformation and Redistribution,* Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007, pp. 3 – 4.

[23] M. Lipton and M. Lipton, 'Creating Rural Livelihoods: Some Lessons for South Africa from Experience Elsewhere', *World Development,* 21 (9) 1993, pp. 1515 – 1548; M. Lipton, F. Ellis and M. Lipton, 'Introduction' in *Land, Labour and Livelihoods in Rural South Africa vol. 1 and 2,* Durban: Indicator Press, 1996.

labour. Years of land theft culminating in the 1913 Natives Land Act led quickly to the widespread dispossession of these farmers who were then shunted to overcrowded reserves where women undertook sub-subsistence agriculture and men were forced to become migrant labourers for South Africa's exploitative gold mining industry. In the meantime, agricultural subsidies and market 'distortions' such as the marketing boards, protected white farmers from competition from black peasants. [24]

A consensus emerged that, should these policies be reversed and land given to 'communities', a black smallholder farmer class living in communities with shared land rules would emerge, South African agriculture would become more efficient, rural poverty would be reduced, and the wrongs of the past would be redressed.[25]

Alongside these models was a rhetoric of 'community development', based on the assumption that African communities were naturally egalitarian and communal, and that 'communities' were the appropriate social unit to which Africans belonged.[26] Walker unpacked the particular historical narrative on which she argued land restitution was based, which included rhetoric about 'community' as well as an overly simple story of how black people were dispossessed. It included the idea that 'once upon a time, African people lived in peace and harmony with their neighbours, with nature, with the ancestors', millions were forcibly removed and resettled in places far from the 'centres of power and wealth' – in this context, 'families and communities were destroyed, lives were lost, economic potential squandered'.[27] Once communities got land back, this legacy could be reversed.

Informed by these arguments, and within a changing economic and political context internationally, the agricultural sector was liberalised, the marketing boards shut down and farmer subsidies cut. Land reform included three elements: land restitution which aimed to return land to 'communities' and individuals that had been dispossessed in the past, land redistribution which aimed to provide land for Africans who did not qualify for restitution,

[24] J. van Zyl, J. Kirsten and H. Binswanger, 'Introduction', in Van Zyl (ed) *Agricultural Land Reform*
[25] Sender, 'Unconvincing arguments'; for an example of this argument see J. Kirsten and J. van Zyl, 'The contemporary agricultural policy environment: undoing the legacy of the past' in Van Zyl (ed) *Agricultural Land Reform in South Africa*.
[26] D. James, '"After Years in the Wilderness": The Discourse of Land Claims in the New South Africa', Journal of Peasant Studies, 27, 3, 2000, pp. 142 – 161; see for an example of this discourse, 'Editorial' in *Towards a New Agrarian Democratic Order*, p. 1.
[27] C. Walker, *Landmarked,* p. 36.

and land tenure reform which was intended to assist those in communal areas to gain more secure tenure to land. These policies ended up privileging 'communities' as the appropriate unit to which restitution and redistribution programmes should be targeted. Richard Levin pointed out that legislation was 'biased towards the submission of unitary claims from homogenous communities'.[28] The Settlement Land Acquisition Grant of R15,000 per beneficiary was not enough for any single beneficiary to do much with, but it was imagined that 'communities' could club together to use their grants to purchase land which would then be farmed communally. Land tenure reform has diverged from its original intention to give individuals more secure tenure, towards giving chiefs more control over land and people as 'custodians', based on a deeply problematic and inaccurate version of 'communal' land ownership and the idea that Africans are by nature 'communal'.[29]

These understandings of the past ignore completely the rich historical literature on South Africa's rural transformations which emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s. Bundy's thesis was criticised in review articles which questioned his theoretical rigour and use of sources, and show that neither a prosperous nor numerous peasantry existed in the periods or places Bundy suggested they did.[30] These articles give other explanations for the sale of large amounts of grain by African farmers to the European/town market at competitively low prices, such as the need to pay taxes. Migrancy and 'proleterianisation' is seen more as a way out of poverty than a way into poverty. Simkins meanwhile showed that agriculture in the reserves did not decline dramatically after 1913, rather 'one must locate the really dramatic decline in production per capita…after 1948.'[31] The impact of the 1913 Land Act in causing widespread dispossession was also questioned: Feinberg showed that land purchase by Africans continued in the Transvaal long after the Act was passed, others have pointed

[28] R. Levin 'Land restitution, the Chieftaincy and Territoriality' paper presented at African Studies Centre, Univeristy of Illinois, (March 1996) p. 6.

[29] A. Claasens and B. Cousins, *Land, Power and Custom: Controversies generated by South Africa's Communal Land Rights Act,* Cape Town: UCT Press, 2008; B. Oomen, *Chiefs in South Africa, Law: Power & Culture in the Post – Apartheid Era,* Oxford: James Currey, 2005, pp. 70 – 77.

[30] F. Cooper, 'Peasants, Capitalists, and Historians: A Review Article', in *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 7 (2), 1981; J. Lewis, 'The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry: A Critique and Reassessment', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 11, (1) 1984; H. Bradford 'Peasants, Historians and Gender: A South African Case Study Revisited, 1850-1886', *History and Theory* 39, 2000.

[31] C. Simkins, 'Agricultural Production in the African Reserves of South Africa 1918 – 1969' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 7 (2) 1981, p. 262.

out that black people continued to live in the 'white' countryside up to the 1960s and beyond.[32] There were many other causes of land dispossession.[33]

Beinart provides perhaps the most comprehensive critique of Bundy, showing that 'proleterianisation was not in the main predicated on rural differentiation; on the accumulation of resources by a minority of families in Pondoland and the expropriation of land and stock from others… the great majority of families from which workers came retained their rural homesteads , access to land and, to a considerable extent, access to cattle.'[34] In fact, mass migrancy began in a phase of expanded crop production.[35] Beinart also emphasises the internal, and pre-colonial impetus for the particular response to capitalist penetration, showing the changes in the Pondoland economy over time. One is struck by the huge risks faced by agricultural producers in South Africa, including drought, cattle disease, pestilence, floods, and unfavourable terms of trade. The adaptation of the political as well as homestead structure and economy to these risks were the driving force of change in the countryside.

One of the responses to the 'top-down' and theoretical perspectives of Bundy and others was to suggest that agriculture 'should be analyzed in terms of a larger number of regional political economies each distinguished by marked differences in ecology, class structure, ethnic composition, access to markets and linkages to other forms of production.'[36] There was enormous variety in the experiences of rural Africans in the white settler farmlands and in the reserves. The 'view from below' emphasised internal forces of change in rural areas, African agency in engaging with the migrant labour system, the labour tenancy system, in

[32] H.M. Feinberg, 'Pre-Apartheid African Land Ownership and the Implication for the Current Restitution Debate in South Africa' *Historia,* 40 (2) 1995; W. Beinart and P. Delius, 'Introduction' in W. Beinart, P. Delius and S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850 – 1930,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986; S. Schirmer, 'The Struggle for Land in Lydenburg 1930 – 1970' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1994; More recent literature: H.M. Feinberg and A. Horn, 'South African Territorial Segregation: New Data on African Farm Purchases, 1913 – 1936' *The Journal of African History,* 50 (1) 2009; W. Beinart and P. Delius, 'The Historical Context and Legacy of the Natives Land Act of 1913' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 40 (4), 2014; M. Hay, 'A Tangled Past: Land Settlement, Removals and Restitution in Letaba District, 1900 – 2013' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 40 (4), 2014.

[33] L. Platsky & C. Walker, *The Surplus People,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985; C. de Wet, 'Resettlement and Land Reform in South Africa' *Review of African Political Economy,* 21 (61) 1994 ; A. Mabin, 'The Land Clearances at Pilgrims Rest' *Journal of Southern African Studies,*13 (3) 1987; More recent, Hay, 'A Tangled Past'.

[34] W. Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.131

[35] W. Beinart, *Pondoland,* p.4

[36] Beinart and Delius, 'Introduction' in Beinart, Delius and Trapido, *Putting a Plough*.

keeping alive an agricultural base and shaping the outcomes of government policy in rural areas.[37] Agricultural production and accumulation continued within and outside the reserves after the 1913 Land Act, but it became increasingly differentiated and it was in fact those with alternative sources of income such as migrant wages and remittances who accumulated more than those who were trapped in the reserve areas.[38] Delius shows that the decline of reserve agriculture was partly a result of the shortage of male labour, but also due to many other factors: the increasing importance of education, changing youth aspirations, unemployment and shortage of money in the 1980s as 'land without the income to put it to productive use is of limited value', as well as climate.[39]

The policy of 'betterment' in the reserves is also given as a reason for agricultural decline. Betterment, which aimed to prevent further ecological decline in the reserve areas, attacked the agricultural and livestock base of many rural families through the implementation of cattle culling and villagisation.[40] Tightening urban influx control and implementation of segregation policies in the 1960s, combined with a refusal to grant very much more land for African settlement, further reduced the potential of reserve agriculture. 'Loose planning and rapid resettlement' meant that many families arriving in the reserves, as well as more marginal members of society such as widows, were denied even small plots of land for subsistence cultivation.

Other driving forces of rural transformation were the effects of native administration policies as well as laws such as the Native Administration Act of 1927 and Bantu Authorities Act of 1950 which bolstered of the power of chiefs, transformed the institution of chieftainship, and put into practice an imagined tribalism.[41] This also led to popular protests.

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[37] Beinart, Delius and Trapido *Putting a Plough*; Beinart, *Pondoland*, Harries, P. *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, 1860 – 1910.* London: James Currey, 1994; Delius, P. *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1996; Schirmer, 'The Struggle for Land'.

[38] P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* pp. 145 – 155.

[39] Ibid*,* pp. 223 - 224.

[40] Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* pp. 57 – 62, 142 – 147; C. de Wet, *Moving Together, Drifting Apart: Betterment planning and villagisation in a South African Homeland,* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995, F. Hendricks, 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resetlement: The Politics of Conservation and Control in Transkei, South Africa, 1950 – 1970' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 15 (2) 1989.

[41] S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa 1919-1936,* London: Macmillan Pres, 1989; I. Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle;* E. Ritchken, 'Leadership and conflict in Bushbuckridge: struggles to define moral economics within the context of rapidly transforming political

Ethnicity became increasingly important, culminating in the formation of ethnic homelands and the removal and resettlement of people based on their ethnicity. But the creation of ethnic identities cannot be seen only as a top-down imposition.[42] Pre-colonial societies ought also not be romanticised or imaged as isolated bounded cultures: they were socially differentiated, heterogenous, dynamic and responsive to historical changes.[43]

Some historians writing in the 1990s explicitly related these transformations to the potential of land reform policy to achieve the goals of reviving peasant agriculture, and achieving restitution without significant conflict. In 1996 Delius warned that if policymakers failed to understand the nature and trajectory of changes in rural society, 'their efforts – like those of their predecessors' were likely to be 'dogged by misfortune'.[44] Delius was critical of the Lipton's and the small family farm model, noting that in all likelihood if such a model were to be put into practice, it would lead to conflicts between men, women and youths.[45] Delius argued that it was problematic to categorise the population of Sekhukhuneland as rural peasants. Migrancy and linkages with urban areas and urban livelihoods characterised rural society, and had done so for 'a hundred years or more'. While the desire for land and cattle played a role in rural protest in the 1950s, by the 1980s youths wanted education so that they could enter into better paying work than their unskilled parents. By the 1990s, 'water, schooling, employment and clinics' were the burning issues identified by women and youths in community meetings regarding development, more land for agriculture barely featured. On the topic of agricultural schemes, women 'expressed anxiety that they would be subordinated or shouldered aside by officials or powerful local men should new resources

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economies.' Unpublished PhD thesis, Wits University, 1995; L. Vail (ed) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa,* London*:* James Currey, 1989.

[42] Delius, P. 'The Ndzundza Ndebele: indenture and the making of ethnic identity' in Bonner, P., Hofmeyer, I., James, D., *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989. L. Vail, (ed) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa,* London*:* James Currey, 1989.

[43] See S. Marks and A. Atmore, (eds.) *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa,* London: Longman, 1980; M. Hall, *The Changing Past: Farmers, Kings and Traders in Southern Africa, 200 – 1860,* Cape Town: David Philip, 1987. For an overview of some key debates: J. Wright, 'Turbulent Times: Political Transformations in the North and East, 1760s – 1830s' in C. Hamilton, B.K. Mbenga and R. Ross, *The Cambridge History of South Africa Vol. 1, From Early Times to 1885,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

[44] P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* p. 220.

[45] Ibid. p. 222.

be made available in this form.'[46] Delius puts government intervention in rural areas in broader historical context, and makes the point that

> State intervention accompanied by a rhetoric of 'development' and 'consultation' has a long and chequered history in the Northern Transvaal. The residents of the region have ample experience that declarations of good intentions are no guarantee against destructive or divisive consequences. Some will argue that the existence of a new political order nullifies this legacy. But there is reason for doubt. It might, for example, be supposed that the ghosts of the Native Economic Commission, rehabilitation and other reviled policies have long since been laid to rest. But the partial nature of the transition in South Africa means that the likelihood of old ideas flourishing amidst changed political circumstances is no less than elsewhere in Africa, where colonial models of agrarian transformation have proved remarkably tenacious in the decades since independence.[47]

Other historical realities, including severe cleavages between men, elderly women and youths, amongst others, make 'community' schemes and development projects unlikely to benefit all, and likely to be torn by tensions.

On the topic of land restitution and the role of chiefs, Levin warned that '"The chieftaincy will emerge as the key institution for filing successful claims" given that it provided bounded and substantial social units rather than the vaguely-defined, splintered and overlapping identities generated by family or clan-based claims.'[48] A number of scholars pointed out that land has changed hands many times in the last century or more, that in communal areas in particular land rights were layered and complex, and that there were different conceptions of ownership that could conflict with one another.[49] Thus, overlapping claims were to be expected, and unravelling them would 'provide work for a generation of historians.'[50] Some were critical of the model of smallholder family farming, arguing that it was not appropriate

[46] Ibid.
[47] ibid, pp. 220 – 221.
[48] D. James, *Gaining Ground: Rights' and 'property' in South African Land Reform,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007, p. 205, citing R. Levin, 'Politics and land reform in the Northern Province: a case study of the Mojapelo land claim' in M. Lipton, F. Ellis, M. Lipton and M. de Klerk (eds.) *Land, Labour and Livelihoods in Rural South Africa, Volume 2: Kwa Zulu Natal and Northern Province,* Durban: Indicator Press, pp.357-392.
[49] P. Delius, R. Kingwill and M. Chaskalson, 'A Historical Investigation of Underlying Rights to Land Registered as State Owned', document compiled for Tenure Reform Core Group, 11 December 1997; C. Murray, *Black Mountain: Land, Class and Power in the Eastern Orange Free State, 1880s – 1980s,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1992; Geoff Budlender and Johan Latsky, "Unravelling rights to land in rural race zones" in *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa,* Cape Town: Idasa, 1991.
[50] M. de Klerk, 'Restructuring the rural economy: A strategy for land access – editorial review' in *Development Southern Africa: Special Issue: Restructuring the rural economy: A strategy for land access,* 7, 1990, p. 415.

considering the social and economic context of rural reserves, and pointing to examples of specific farming projects in the Bantustans, which faced considerable constraints.[51]

From the 2000s when land reform projects began to fail, a number of scholars argued that overly simplistic understandings of the history of agriculture and dispossession, as well as problematic conceptions of 'community' and what 'communities' were capable of, were to blame for poor policy models and problematic implementation. For example, policymakers assumed that with the reduction of state support to inefficient white farmers, and the provision of land to black South Africans, 'land reform would bring into existence large numbers of competitive black landowners farming on a much smaller scale than white farmers'.[52] Schirmer argues that in fact, given the constraints to agriculture in South Africa, state support was essential for agricultural development, even in the 1980s which many analysts characterised as a time of freer markets. By liberalising agriculture to the extent that it did – even more than the World Bank had recommended – agriculture became far more risky, too risky in fact for emerging farmers.

With regard to redistribution, Schirmer and Delius wrote that the policy

> was flawed in that it assumed far too much uniformity on the ground and failed to understand the difficulties created by certain historical realities. This redistribution programme tried to give a large role to rural people but implicitly assumed that all rural inhabitants were living in harmonious communities ready to adopt agriculture as a way to overcome their poverty. These assumptions failed to understand the devastating effect that increasing poverty and inequality had on the ability of the rural majority to adopt any kind of farming strategy. Neither did the programme accommodate the vast differences in capacity and outlook that exist in the rural areas.[53]

Thus, policy floundered. There were economic costs to providing land to those without the capacity or interest to use it effectively. Programmes were also not accessible to all those

[51] C. de Wet and M. Leibbrandt, 'Land Reform and Regional Economy: A Ciskeian Case Study', in *Towards and New Agrarian Democratic Order,* South African Economic Research and Training Project, 1990; McIntosh and Vaughan, 'Enhancing Rural Livelihoods in South Africa: Myths and Realities' in M. Lipton, F. Ellis and M. Lipton, *Land, Labour and Livelihoods vol. two*, Durban: Indicator Press, 1996.
[52] S. Schirmer, 'Policy Visions' p. 143.
[53] Delius and Schirmer, 'Historical research', p. 10.

living within a complex and differentiated rural society, who may have wanted to put land to different kinds of use than those prescribed by policy.

James argued that the assumptions held by NGO workers and others implementing 'development' was at odds with the wishes of different members of the 'community' they wished to develop.[54] Looking at the example of the farm Doornkop, she showed how the historically unequal community, made up of landowners and tenants, Christians and 'traditionalists', was riven with cleavages post-apartheid. During restitution, community members had conflicting ideas about who belonged in the community and was entitled to restitution, and what the land should be used for. But the expectations of NGOs, and government officials, did not take into account the varying interests of land claimants. For example, 'communities reclaiming land may desire rapid, urban-style material advancement while their urban-based development partners envision them as committed to communalist ideals and simple, rural-style and 'appropriate' technology.'[55] James hinted that the renewed interest of the Department of Land Affairs in creating a black farmer class harked back to similar policy goals of the Tomlinson Commission, and would similarly overlook the real, expressed needs of rural people, such as a desire for 'secure access to residential land'.[56]

Walker argued that underpinning land restitution was a 'master narrative' that had pernicious effects not just on policy formulation, but implementation too. 'As a political fable' Walker wrote, 'the master narrative works very well, but as a basis for a programme of government the simple story of forced removals has proved to be increasingly problematic'.[57] One of the problems with the narrative was that it failed to take into account what happened to 'communities' following dispossession, and in this ignorance imagined that a 'return' to the land or reversal of legacies was possible. But the likelihood of dispossessed communities, or members of such communities, returning to the land was low. In the twenty to forty years or more since dispossession, 'major changes took place in the

[54] D. James, 'After years in the wilderness': The discourse of land claims in the New South Africa' *The Journal of Peasant Studies,* 27 (3), 2000; James, *Gaining Ground.*
[55] James, 'After years', p. 144.
[56] Ibid, pp. 159 – 160.
[57] C. Walker, *Landmarked,* p. 16.

social composition of dispossessed communities and households as well as in livelihoods and land use.'[58] This affected the outcome of land restitution, both in terms of justice and redress, as well as the economic outcome of farms that had been 'returned' to communities. Thus Delius, Schirmer, Walker and James all raised the issue that the goal of achieving both restitution *and* economic/community development in the same instance was hard to achieve, if not contradictory.

Walker also points out that the master narrative supports a racialized idea of symbolic redress, rather than taking into account the complexity of individual cases. Thus, any black person is seen as the victim, despite the fact that many black people benefited directly from apartheid. Similarly, and important in the context of competing claims, 'past conflict and competition for land within and between black communities is largely erased, along with any unsettling evidence of historical alliance or intrigue or mutual dependency linking black and white in more ambiguous relationships around land than are considered acceptable.'[59] White farmers (rather than for example CEOs of mines and industries) are given the brunt of blame for black poverty in rural areas, and land (as opposed to education and better paying jobs) is seen as the key determinant in what allows some to be wealthy and causes some to be poor. [60] But this fails to take into account that 'most of the wealth generated historically from the land is no longer invested in agricultural land' – farming is no longer where the money is.[61]

A number of scholars emphasised the continuing importance of chiefs and traditional authorities in local governance and the implications of that for rural development.[62] One of the problems post-apartheid was that 'neither the new constitution nor the new government provided a clear or effective definition of what the balance or boundaries of power and responsibility between these different forms of local authority should be.'[63] This

[58] Ibid. p.17.
[59] Ibid, p.40.
[60] Ibid, p.42.
[61] Ibid, p. 43.
[62] A. A. Costa, 'Chieftaincy and Civilisation: African Structures of Government and Colonial Administration in South Africa' *African Studies,* 59 (1) 2000; B.Oomen, '"We must now go back to our history"; Retraditionalisation in a Northern Province Chieftaincy.' Ibid; E. Lahiff, 'Land Tenure in South Africa's Communal Areas: A Case Study of the Arabie-Olifants Scheme' ibid.. J. Peires , 'Traditional Leaders in Purgatory Local Government in Tsolo, Qumbu and Port St Johns, 1990–2000', ibid; T. Fife, 'Local Government and Rural Livelihoods in the Western Cape' in Lipton, de Klerk, Lipton, *Land, Labour and Livelihoods.*
[63] Delius and Schirmer, 'Historical Research' p. 8.

could have consequences for how policy was implemented in rural areas, particularly as there was ample scope for conflict between chiefs and between different levels of local government.[64] Scholars are also critical of the ahistorical, rigid ideas of 'custom' being used by the government and traditional authorities to justify their ownership of communal land, and to justify the restitution of land to tribal authorities.[65]

While these scholars raise the issue of historical complexity and give examples of its salience in land reform, no-one has yet provided a systematic investigation of the history of land, settlement, community and agriculture in a particular area over a long period of time, to show in depth how history relates to land reform policy. Another limit of the literature is that it consists mainly of articles arguing about one particular aspect of land reform and/or rural issues, or it focuses on a range of issues but in relation to a single community or other type of political unit. Walker and James provide detailed and well-developed arguments about the complexity of land restitution and history, but do not provide deep and detailed histories of the areas and people they discuss.[66] There is far more discussion of land restitution than land redistribution or other rural development programmes which have begun to focus on smallholder irrigation schemes. There are no broad regional studies which focus on a large range of issues relating to land and agriculture, in a broad geographically (as opposed to politically) defined region, in which many types of 'community' and political organisation exist: white farms, state land, different communal areas and so forth. There is also a paucity of scholarship on the interior of South Africa, in particular Limpopo province, even though this is the poorest rural province and has amongst the most land claims. This thesis provides a systematic account of the history of Mopani district and how it relates to land reform. I engage with some of the key assumptions and arguments that have contributed to the particular visions of rural history and possible rural futures that remain prevalent in land reform debates. In particular I focus on challenging dominant explanations for why African agriculture failed, asking as Delius and Schirmer suggested, what factors pushed many Africans out of agriculture. I also show how people gained and lost access to land over the last century, challenging the notion that Africans lost

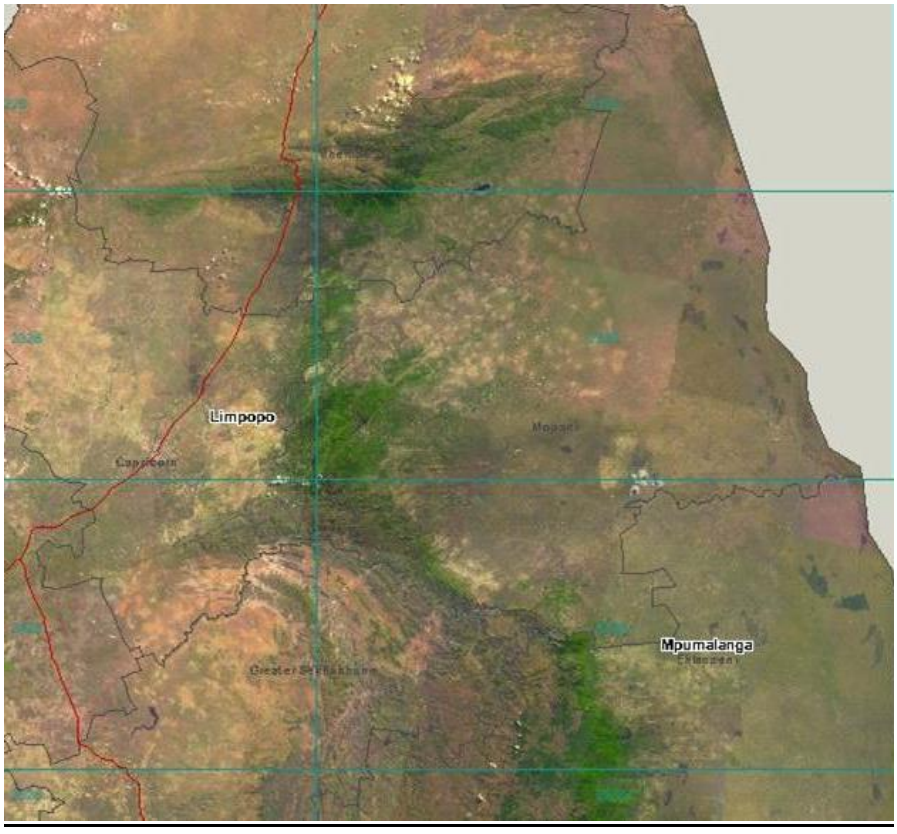
[64] See also P. Delius and S. Schirmer, 'Towards a Workable Rural Development Strategy' p. 16.
[65] Claasens, A. & Cousins, B. *Land, Power and Custom: Controversies generated by South Africa's Communal Land Rights Act,* Cape Town: UCT Press, 2008.
[66]

land as communities. I show what a deeper understanding of the history of a place can tell policymakers about agriculture and land claims.

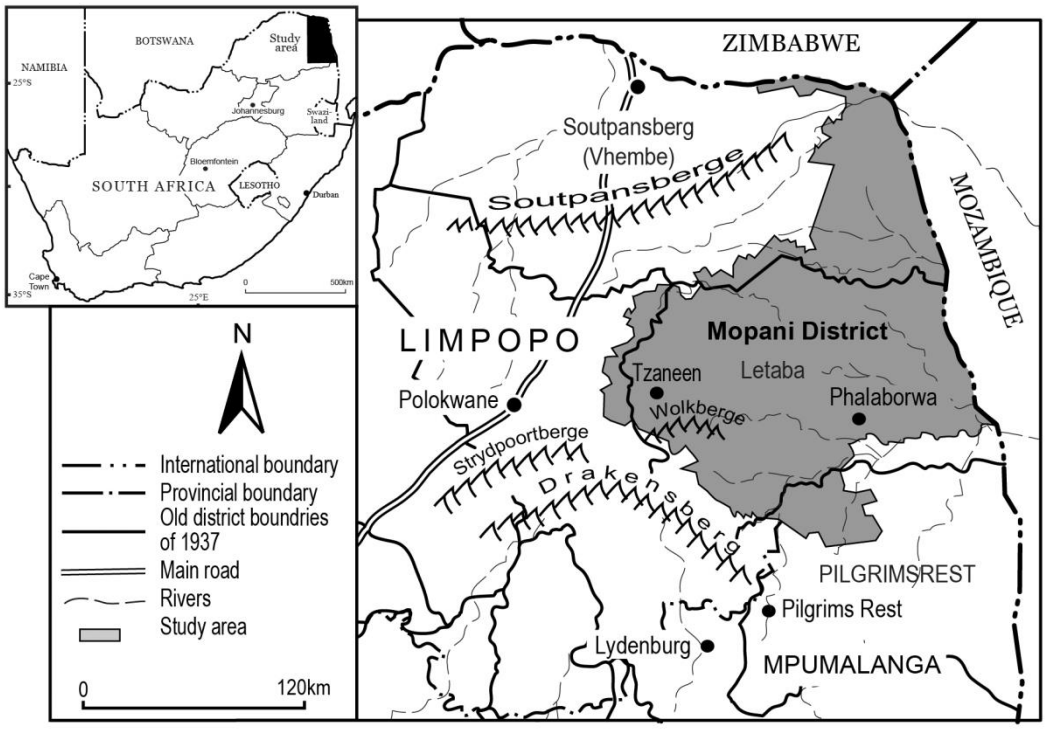
Area of study

I look at a region in Limpopo province which is hemmed in in the west and south by mountain ranges, and stretches out towards Mozambique in the east. The combination of secure mountain strongholds, fertile well-watered foothills and hot dry lowveld below with proximity to important trade ports in Mozambique makes this a peculiar geographical area, with a long history of mobility and interaction through trade, settlement and conflict. The region was divided into different administrative districts which have changed name and boundaries over the last century and more. What is now called Mopani district has in the last 100 years incorporated the districts of Haenertsberg, later called Letaba, and part of the homelands of Gazankulu and Lebowa. However, because the lowveld-escarpment region as a whole was so interconnected and shared a similar history, I will also use examples of what was happening further south, in the old Pilgrims Rest district.

Map 1: The geographic region



Map 2. Mopani district



The region is environmentally diverse. Rainfall and climate is enormously variable, and the geology and soil types of the region are complex. These environmental features mean that agriculture is not suitable in all parts of the district. In the west of the district, which has a sub-tropical climate, a commercial horticultural industry developed from the 1930s, as well as irrigated vegetable farming – South Africa's largest citrus estates and tomato farms are located here. In the east and north, the land is most suited to grazing, game farming or conservation. These land based industries, which form the basis of the economy of the district, have been affected by land reform. The variability of environmental conditions also means that the area is not suited to a one-size-fits-all model of land reform, in particular the vision of smallholder family farming that land reform was meant to achieve. The region is also home to a very large black population, which is amongst the poorest in the country. Very little land was set aside for Africans under the 1913 Natives Land Act, making this an interesting place to look at land restitution and the impact of the 1913 Natives Land Act and 1936 Natives Trust and Land Act which followed it.

There is a significant body of literature on the region which shows how remote its history is from the self-sufficient isolated farming communities imagined to have existed in the past. I draw on Delius who wrote about nearby Sekhukhuneland and the rural transformations described above. In work on nearby Bokoni, Schirmer and Delius emphasise the importance of pre-colonial regional trade links, and economic specialisation, noting that Bokoni agriculturalists traded with metal workers from Phalaborwa.[67] Boeyens and Wagner look at the pre-colonial economy of the Zoutpansberg region further north, and Eldredge looks at the slave trade at Delagoa Bay, and these places were deeply connected to the area I study.[68] They show the importance of slavery, indentured labour, raiding and hunting on the regional economy, and the connections between local African groups, local Boer settlers as well as wider Boer society in other parts of South Africa, the Swazi state and raiding groups, and Portuguese traders.

A number of historians provided more descriptive accounts of some of the important people and events shaping local history, as well as anecdotal descriptions of the area and interactions between the many people who visited and inhabited it.[69] The region is rich in archaeological sites and studies of these sites also yielded information on the economic activities and trade links in the region.[70]

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[67] P. Delius and S. Schirmer, 'Order, Openness, and Economic Change in Precolonial Southern Africa: A Perspective from the Bokoni Terraces' *Journal of African History,* 55, 2014.

[68] J. C. A. Boeyens, '"Black Ivory": The Indenture System and Slavery in Zoutpansberg, 1848-1869" in E. Eldredge and F. Morton, (eds.) *Slavery in South Africa,* 1994; E. Eldridge, 'Delagoa Bay and the Hinterland in the Early Nineteenth Century: Politics, Trade, Slaves and Slave Raiding' in E. Eldredge and F. Morton, (eds.) *Slavery in South Africa;* R. Wagner, 'Zoutpansberg: the dynamics of a hunting frontier, 1848 – 67' in S. Marks and A. Atmore, (eds.) *Economy and Society in Pre-industrial South Africa,* London: Longman Group Ltd. 1980.

[69] Allen, V., *Lady Trader: A Biography of Mrs Sarah Heckford,* London: Collins, 1979;
Barnard, C. (ed) *Die Transvaalse Laeveld,* Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1975; Bulpin, T.V *Lost trails of the Transvaal,* Cape Town, 1974 Cartwright, A.P. *By the waters of the Letaba,* Johannesburg, Cape Town, London: Purnell, 1974; Cartwright,A.P. *Phalaborwa: Mining City of the Future,* Cape Town, Johannesburg, London: Purnell, 1972 L. Changuion, *A Farm Called ZZ2: The Bertie van Zyl Story,* Polokwane: Review Printers, 2007; L. Changuion, *Haenertsburg 100: 1887 – 1987,* Pietersburg: Review Printers, 1987; O.J.O. Ferreira, (2013) *Diocleciano Fernandes das Neves: His residence in Mozambique and his visit to the Transvaal,* Gordons Bay, Jeffreys Bay: Tormentoso; De Waal, J.B. "Die Rol van Joao Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal" *South African Archives Yearbook*, 1953; Grimsehl, H.W. "Onluste in Modjadjiland, 1890-1894" *SAAYB,* 1955; Mouton, J.A. "Genl. Piet Joubert in Die Transvaalse Geskiedenis" *South African Archives Yearbook*, 1957 (1).

[70] A. Ekblom, L. Gillson, and M. Notelid, 'A Historical Ecology of the Limpopo and Kruger National Parks and Lower Limpopo Valley' *Journal of Archaeology and Ancient History,* No. 1, 2011; Evers, T. M. 'Iron Age Trade in the Eastern Transvaal, South Africa' *The South African Archaeological Bulletin,* 29 (113/114), 1974; Evers, T.M. 'Recent Iron Age Research in the Eastern Transvaal, South Africa' *South African Archeological Bullentin,* 30, 1975; Evers, T.M. and van der Merwe, N.J. 'Iron Age Ceramics from Phalaborwa North Eastern Transvaal Lowveld, South Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin,* 42, 1987; Klapwijk M. & Huffman, T.N

Harries, Ritchken and Mulaudzi have written about parts of the lowveld and escarpment region stretching east from the Soutpansberg and the Drakensberg towards the Mozambique coast, from the early colonial period to the transition in 1994. Harries showed how there has been a long history of trans-border migration from Mozambique to the South African lowveld and Highveld interior, and northern Natal.[71] He considers mobility and migration from a number of angles: in the context of political upheaval and transformation, environmental and ecological challenges and hardship, industrialisation and changes in the regional economy, opportunities available to Mozambiquans for the accumulation of wealth, advancement of status, and the importance of migrancy and mobility in masculine identities and cultural practices. Harries also looks at the shaping of ethnic identities in the northern Transvaal, in particular Tsonga or Shangaan identities.[72] Harries, Ritchken and Mulaudzi show the enormous political complexity of the chieftaincies in the region, and the fluidity of tribal and ethnic identities, from the pre-colonial period through to 1946 (Mulaudzi), the creation of Bantustans in the 1970s and the ethnic conflict this generated in the 1980s.[73] Mulaudzi and Ritchken both look at government intervention in agriculture, Mulaudzi at the formation of a white settler farming scheme, and Ritchken at the creation of irrigation schemes under the South African Native Trust. Ritchken focuses on the political implications of hosting these schemes on particular farms and under particular tribal authorities. Mulaudzi shows that early white agriculture in the region was challenging, and how the Levubu settlement/farming scheme for white settlers failed due to a number of constraints to agriculture. Nemutanzhela has written about the implementation of and response to Betterment in the Zoutpansberg further north, but he focuses predominantly

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"Excavations at Silver Leaves: A final report", *South African Archaeological Bulletin,* 51, 1996; Van Der Merwe, N.J. and Killick, D.J. 'Square: An iron smelting site near Phalaborwa' *South African Archaeological Society, Goodwin Series 3,* 1979; Van der Merwe, N.J. and Scully, R.T. 'The Phalaborwa story: archaeological and ethnographic investigation of a South African Iron Age Group', *World Archaeology* 1971.

[71] Harries, P. *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, 1860 – 1910.* London: James Currey, 1994

[72] P. Harries, 'Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The emergence of ethnicity among the Tsonga speakers of South Africa' in L. Vail (ed) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa,* London*:* James Currey, 1989; P. Harries, *Butterflies and Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries & Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa,* Oxford: James Currey, 2007.

[73] Harries, 'Exclusion'; E. Ritchken, "Leadership and conflict in Bushbuckridge: struggles to define moral economics within the context of rapidly transforming political economies." Unpublished PhD thesis, Wits University, 1995; Mulaudzi, M., ' "U Shuma Bulasi" Agrarian Transformation in the Zoutpansberg, District of South Africa up to 1946' PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2000.

on resistance, which is not a focus of this thesis, and the experiences here were different to those in Letaba district, so it has limited relevance to my research.[74]

A recent book on the role of Swiss Churches in South Africa under apartheid, contains some useful insights about tenants on mission farms in the Letaba and Sibasa districts, and the church's attitudes towards ethnicity and homeland consolidation.[75] However, the books' focus is on Swiss-South Africa relations and changing attitudes of the Swiss Mission rather than an in depth analysis of the area.

My thesis builds on this regional literature, and on broader literature on South Africa's rural transformations. I address a several important gaps, in particular the implementation and effects of the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, the development and performance of irrigation schemes and co-operative societies intended to create a class of smallholder black farmers from the 1940s to the 1980s. I also take a different perspective from others, by looking at the way that individuals and families within a wide region accessed land over the course of a century, rather than focusing in on specific kinds of groups, for example chieftaincies, ethnic groups, specific homelands and reserves or farm labour tenants.

Sources and Methodology

A number of anthropologists have written about people in the region: the Krige's about the 'Sotho' and the Lobedu, Stayt about the Venda, Van Warmelo about numerous groups (although in his short ethnological publications he provides more of a chronicle than a history, listing dates and major events such as war and succession, and the lineage of chiefs of tribes), and Junod about the 'Tsonga'.[76] This group of anthropologists all had different

[74] T. Nemutanzhela, *Ploughing Amongst the Stones: The Story of 'Betterment' in the Zoutpansberg, 1939 – 1944,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1999.
[75] Jeannerat, C., Morier-Genoud, E., Peclard, D., *Embroiled: Swiss Churches, South Africa and Apartheid,* Schweizerische Afrikastudien Etudes africainses suisses, 2012.
[76] E.J. Krige & J. D. Krige, *The Realm of a Rain Queen,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943; E.J. Krige, 'Note on the Phalaborwa and their Morula Complex' *Bantu Affairs* 1937; J.D. Krige, 'Traditional Origins and Tribal Relationships of the Sotho of the Northern Transvaal', *Bantu Affairs,* 1937; Junod, H. A. *Life of a South African Tribe, vol. 1,* New York: University Books, 1962; Junod, H. A. *Life of a South African Tribe, vol. 2,* New York: University Books, 1962; H.A. Stayt, *The Bavenda,* London: Oxford University Press, 1931; Van Warmelo, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa,* Pretoria: Government Printer, 1935; N.J Van Warmelo, 'The Ba Letswalô or Banarene'*, Department of Native Affairs Ethnographical Publications,* no.10 Pretoria: Government Printer, 1944; N. J. Van Warmelo, 'The Banarene of Sekôrôrô', *Ethnological Publication No.13,*

approaches to the discipline of anthropology and the notion of tribe. Some anthropologists have been criticised for being time-bound and ahistorical.[77] The description of 'tribes' can be problematic and is often more about the anthropologist or ethnologists desire to categorise people than a reflection of the identities of the people they describe.[78] To find out about the history and customs of 'tribes', anthropologists often relied on oral histories and accounts provided by powerful men and chiefs who had their own agendas.[79] These accounts are also vulnerable to 'misinterpretation informed by Western epistemology'.[80]

E.J and J.D Krige, whose work I use fairly extensively, were however more sensitive to historical change. When J.D Krige attempted to write about the different 'tribes' and movements of 'tribes' in the north-eastern Transvaal in the past, he found this extremely challenging given how complex and complicated these histories were. He took into account the mobility of groups and individuals and families within them (and separate from them), the assimilation of some groups into others, and the frequent splintering of groups. E.J and J.D Krige were similarly sensitive to the impact of the present (1930s) on 'traditional' practices such as land tenure and agriculture.[81]

Junod's description of the 'tsonga tribe' in his 'life of a South African Tribe' was largely an invention - the population he wrote about were scattered, heterogenous, spoke many different languages and had no nation or sense of common ethnic identity.[82] It was important for me to bear this in mind. Junod also tends to ignore aspects of what he calls 'Tsonga' culture that connect it to a wider world and processes of interaction and change.[83]

Pretoria: Department of Native Affairs, 1944; N.J Van Warmelo, 'The Bakoni of Mametša' *Ethnological Publications no. 15.* Pretoria, Department of Native Affairs, 1944; N.J Van Warmelo, 'The Bakoni ba Maake' *Ethnological Publications No.12* Pretoria: Government Publisher 1944 ; N. J. Van Warmelo, 'The Batubatse of Mašišimale' *Ethnological Publications No.16* Pretoria: Government Publisher 1944; N. J. Van Warmelo, 'The Bathlabine of Moxobôya' *Ethnological Publications No.11* Pretoria: Government Publisher 1944;

[77] W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa's Anthropologists, 1920 – 1990,* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1997, p.4; Harries, *Butterflies,* pp. 219 – 226.

[78] Harries, *Butterflies,* p.164; A.F Isaacman and B.S. Isaacman, *Slavery and Beyond,* 2004, also discussion of problems with ethnographical sources in S.P. Lekgoathi, 'Ethnicity and Identity: Struggle and Contestation in the Making of the Northern Transvaal Ndebele CA 1860 – 2005' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2006, p. 23.

[79] See for discussion of this issue, S. P. Lekgoathi, '"Colonial" Experts, Local Interlocutors, Informants and the Making of an Archive on the "Transvaal Ndebele" 1930 – 1989' *The Journal of African History,* 50 (1) 2009

[80] A. Mafeje, 'Anthropology and Independent Africans: Suicide or End of an Era?' *African Sociological Review,* 2 (1) 1998, cited by S.P. Lekgoathi, 'Ethnicity and Identity', p. 24.

[81] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen*.

[82] Harries, *Butterflies,* p. 156.

[83] Ibid*,* pp. 219 – 226.

For example, in a picture depicting hunting weapons used by 'the Tsonga', he omits guns, which had been used by Africans for hunting for over a century.[84] Nevertheless, Junod is informative about the types of agriculture and other land based activities people practiced, as well as practices relating to land tenure. For someone with a bias towards seeing 'tribal' behaviour, the fluid forms of tenure he described have some weight.

Scully, an archaeologist with an anthropological and historical sensibility, conducted an in depth study on Phalaborwa Oral Tradition, and his thesis is both a source of information about the pre-colonial past, trade, war, political fluidity and migration, and a critical reflection on the value and use of oral history.[85] The rich accounts of the travels of Diocleciano das Neves, a Portuguese trader, and Alexander Merensky, a Berlin Missionary, who both visited the region in the 1960s, were valuable sources.[86]

Government commissions of enquiry, including the Drought commission, Beaumont Commission, Eastern Transvaal Natives Committee, Native Economic Commission, Tomlinson Commission summary report, were useful in highlighting the concerns that various actors had at a particular point in time, in a particular context. Commissions are useful to get a sense of the positions that different groups took in relation to the issue being investigated – for example, attitudes towards 'detribalisation' in the Native Economic Commission. Government commissions of enquiry are criticised for being unrepresentative. Nevertheless, some of the individuals who gave evidence at some of these commissions had lived in the area for a very long time as landowners, company managers, Native Affairs Commissioners, or missionaries. While their agendas and attitudes certainly permeate their testimony, they do provide some insight into the nature of land settlement, farming practices and tenancy. These sources need to be supplemented with other views however.

At the national archives I looked at files from the Departments of Native Affairs (NTS), Bantu Affairs (BAO), Lands as well as the Registrar of Co-operative societies, amongst some others relating to specific farms, chiefs and land issues in Letaba district. Within the NTS files, I looked in particular at those relating to specific farms in what was then Letaba and Pilgrims

[84] Ibid, p.226.
[85] Scully, R.T.K. 'Phalaborwa Oral Tradition', unpublished PhD thesis, State University of New York, 1978.
[86] O.J.O. Ferreira, (2013) *Diocleciano Fernandes das Neves: His residence in Mozambique and his visit to the Transvaal,* Gordons Bay, Jeffreys Bay: Tormentoso,

Rest districts, and the population living on those farms, as well as files relating to the Native Affairs Commission which determined which farms should be included in the Released Areas and which should be excised.

When I initially began my research I thought that I would come across specific incidences of forced removals of communities, but I soon realised that the relations of individuals to community, land and the experience of dispossession or loss of land rights, as well as the attitudes of government officials and departments to setting aside land for Africans, was more complicated than I imagined. The files mentioned above were valuable in understanding the nature of farm populations; the extent of mobility; the nature of chieftaincy in this period and chief's requests for land; the process of buying land for the Trust; and the attitudes of NAD officials towards the 1913 Native Land Act, the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, and white landowners. Within the BAO files I looked at files relating to betterment and planning. The Department of Lands files on the sale of land to the Native Land Commission provided the perspective from white farmers. One of the most valuable files I used from the Registrar of Co-operative Societies related to the Bantu Farmer's Co-operative. These alerted me to the fact that black farmers were engaged in 'peasant' style agriculture long into the twentieth century, with support from the government. The files provided a detailed account of the performance of these schemes, identifying many constraints to this type of farming. All of the archival files mentioned above contained rich and detailed information that helped me identify key issues to discuss, and which formed the basis of a number of my chapters.

Another important government source was the annual reports of the Transvaal Native Affairs Department from 1902 to 1912. After 1910, reporting by the regional Native Affairs commissioners is fairly thin as regional reporting was put to an end and annual reports became more general, with a focus on the Transkei.

I used the old Gazankulu archives held in Giyani, and Lebowa archives held in Lebowakgomo. The Gazankulu archives were in fairly good condition although there were few finding aids. I was able to access files from the Department of Internal Affairs, which dealt with removals and resettlement, as well as individuals' request for residence, and chiefs' requests for land and recognition. I looked at files from the Department of

Agriculture, the annual progress reports of the Gazankulu Department of Agriculture and Forestry, the minutes of question and answer sessions for the Department of Agriculture and Forestry in the Legislative Assembly in 1991 (a critical time in thinking about the future of agriculture in the bantustans), copies of *Deeds* magazine – the magazine of the Tsonga-Shangaan Development Corporation – and finally a booklet celebrating 'ten years of Gazankulu'. These sources contained a lot of information on the ways in which the government was intervening to attempt to improve agriculture in Gazankulu, and the performance of agricultural schemes in the area. However, there were gaps for some years, and the information on the performance of farming projects was not particularly detailed.

The Lebowa archives were difficult to work in and I was not able to locate annual reports of the Department of Agriculture, or box files from the Department of Internal Affairs or similar. There are no finding aids in the Lebowa archives and many of the boxes and files are disorganised, sometimes in piles on the floor. I was fortunate to find some relevant files while looking at files from the Naphuno Magistrate, which the archivist recommended. Thus, chapter five deals mostly with agriculture in Gazankulu. Nevertheless, the report of the Lilley Commission into the efficiency of agricultural extension in Lebowa, and the attitudes of chiefs towards the extension service was enormously valuable. It contained minutes of meetings with various traditional authorities, extension officers and community members regarding agriculture and the extension service in Lebowa ca the late 1970s to the 1990s.

Finally, I also used the Historical Papers archive at Wits University. I looked predominantly at the Rheinallt-Jones and South African Institute of Race Relations files, which were particularly rich. Rheinallt-Jones was the MP for Africans and regularly travelled to and received correspondence from the Letaba district. In particular, he and his wife Edith were in contact with local chiefs and progressive black farmers who saw them as their ally. Edith Rheinallt Jones worked on issues such as farm labour, labour tenancy, and the maize board. Both were in favour of expanding the Released Areas (areas set aside for Africans under the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act) and were critical of the way the government was implementing the 1936 Natives Trust and Land Act. Thus, these files are a source of useful information, but their writing on certain topics does also tend towards polemic in some instances when they stand opposed to powerful groups such as white farmers.

Because of the wealth of information on specific farming projects introduced by the Union government, the National Party during apartheid, and the homeland governments, I decided that this would be a major focus on my thesis. I also decided to focus on this aspect of agriculture in the district because of its salience in the present – many policymakers and scholars today are enthusiastic about the potential of irrigation schemes to stimulate farming and reduce poverty in rural areas. The experiences of previous projects became pertinent in this context. Similarly, the fact that past governments put effort into creating irrigation schemes in the past, upsets the pervasive notion that African agriculture was intentionally underdeveloped, and that this led to its decline. This relates to questions about the existence of an African peasantry, the state's role in African agriculture, and the causes of the decline or lacklustre performance of African agriculture. By focusing in some detail on these schemes over a long period, I have spent less time on other aspects of agriculture, such as livestock keeping.

One of the advantages of relying fairly heavily on archival documents and government publications was that I could see what the issues around land were in earlier parts of the century, without the current rhetoric around land claims and loss of land (the master narrative discussed by Walker) influencing my perspective on the period. Conducting oral history interviews to find out about land issues, loss and evictions, 'community' and so on in the context of land restitution is challenging and full of obstacles.[87] Oral history is as much about present day concerns and agendas as it is about recalling past events. While archival material has its own challenges – the information contained within documents is similarly tied into the contemporary concerns and agendas of the people producing the documents – this in fact worked to my advantage. Reading documents and reports critically, and with an understanding of the biases of government officials and landowners, I was able to understand contemporary concerns far better than if I relied on a present day telling of past events. Furthermore, with archival material I was able to put together a more systematic and periodised account of changes in agricultural practices and government intervention in agriculture, while interviews alerted me to way in which agriculture, other economic activities, and education featured in people's lives over time.

[87] Mulaudzi discussed similar challenges he had conducting research for his PhD, Mulaudzi, 'U Shuma Bulasi' pp. 21 -22.

During 2011 and 2012 I conducted fieldwork and interviews in Mopani district, spending around 60 days there. I kept a research diary to record my observations during drives around the district, and discussions with people I met and spoke to informally and in interviews. Rather than approaching the topic of land reform through interviewing people around particular land claim 'case studies', I interviewed many people from different backgrounds and with different perspectives on land reform as well as the history of the area. The reason I did this was to get as broad an understanding of land issues and the history of the area as possible. However, I did also interview land claimants, including leaders of Communal Property Associations (legal bodies to which members of claimant communities belong) as well as beneficiaries and claimants with conflicting claims, while doing research on the historical validity of certain land claims in Limpopo and Mpumalanga with Peter Delius.[88] This experience of land claims research alerted me to how difficult it is to conduct oral history interviews in the context of land claims. I look at the process and problems of researching the historical validity of claims through oral history interviews in detail in chapter six, as it is a critical part of land restitution and an area where policymakers and implementers could learn not just from history but from historical methodology.

Nevertheless, interviews were an important source not only of information but of different perspectives and opinions. Interviews regarding land claims had some significant advantages – some people related their dissatisfaction with the process quite candidly, and others told me particular historical narratives of 'tribes' that they were using to justify their claim. Life histories of 'commoners' fill some of the silences of the archives and of the 'official' oral histories told by chiefs and powerful men and women. For the post-apartheid period, archival sources are not available, and so interviews with informed people are an essential source of information, analyses, and perspectives on land reform.

I spoke to a very wide range of people. They included a number of officials from the Land Claims Commission, including the former Chief Land Claims Commissioner, Mashile

[88] P. Delius, S. Delius and L. Phillips, 'Report on the farm Magdalena and the occupation of land by the baMaseke ba Phalaborwa' unpublished report, 2011; P. Delius and M. Hay, 'Report on the Validity of the New Belgium Land Claim' unpublished report, 2013; P. Delius and M. Hay, 'Report on Claims Lodged by Various Communities in the Sabi Sands Area' unpublished report, 2013; P. Delius, M. Hay, R. Douglas and N. Leontsinis, 'Report on the Historical Validity of Land Claims by the Moletele Community and Others Concerning Farms in the Maruleng Region' unpublished report, 2014.

Mokono; a number of white farmers in the area whose farms were under claim as well as those who had already sold farms to the Commission; extension officers at different government farms in the area; three chiefs from different parts of the district, and members of the Mokgolobotho CPA who had lodged a land claim near Tzaneen. These interviews were semi-structured to guide the talk to specific topics. I also interviewed elderly men and women from the communal areas about their lives and to speak more generally about land issues. Because of the contentious nature of land claims, and because individuals I spoke often expressed opinions about the government, the land claims commission and chiefs, I have kept the names of interviewees confidential when quoting them. The exceptions are Theo de Jager and Mashile Mokono, both public figures who gave me permission to cite them.

To interview people from the communal areas in the district I needed the help of a research assistant and interpreter who could speak Sotho and Shangaan. I was fortunate to meet Ripfumelo Mushwana, a local woman who shared an interest in history and who acted not only as a translator but a guide. With her assistance I conducted life history style interviews with a number of elderly people in a few of the townships and villages in the communal areas. Although some of the interviews were more open-ended, the first interviews guided me towards specific topics, in particular I realised how important it was to find out more about drought, and how people coped with it. These interviews alerted me to the way that migrancy, trading stores, government assistance and wild foods and resources were all tied into the local economy and coping with environmental risk. Ripfumelo Mushwana conducted a number of interviews by herself, with elderly women and men, to specifically talk about their experiences of agriculture and drought as they were growing up and through their lives.

Because of the richness of archival sources, secondary literature and interviews, I made fairly limited use of newspaper sources. Newspaper sources are helpful in learning about specific events, although they tend to contain inaccuracies and biases. I came across some useful newspaper sources which highlighted the pressing issues of the day. Newspapers pick up on events such as drought, protests, and the complaints of citizens against the government, government policies and certain other groups which are seen as threats – for example, newspapers reported on the complaints of white farmers about black farmers

producing tomatoes in the 1950s, the complaints of civic associations regarding land and chiefs in 1994, and of 'community members' anxieties about water supply in the 1990s to the present day. For the period from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, I looked at the Letaba Herald, the Northern Herald and Gazanbowa Times. Only some issues of these papers were available, others being lost in a fire at the newspaper's headquarters in Tzaneen. For the period since 1994 to the present, I looked at the Mopani Herald, the Sowetan and Timeslive online, mostly using keywords to narrow my search. The Mail and Guardian and the Citizen contain analytical pieces on land reform by intellectuals and academics, and I have used these more as secondary publications rather than primary sources. I also conducted desktop internet research to find research reports and annual reports of Nkuzi Development Association and the Department for Rural Development and Land Reform.

As mentioned above, since 2011 I have been involved in researching the historical validity of a number of land claims in different parts of Mpumalanga and Limpopo with Peter Delius. Doing this research we engaged with private landowners, the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Land Claims Commissions, claimant communities, families and individuals, traditional authorities and other leaders of claimant communities. This allowed me to get to know the viewpoints of different actors in the land restitution process. It also provided me with experience of how officials from the land claims commission, as well as consultants, conduct historical research on land claims. Through extensive use of archives and secondary material I became familiar with key issues relating to settlement patterns and mobility in the broader region, as well as the relationships that farm populations had with chiefs and other authorities.

Chapter Outlines

In chapter one I introduce Mopani district and provide an account of the local economy and society in the nineteenth century. I look at how the area supported a variety of economic activities that were based on mining and metal working, agriculture, ivory, hunting, trading, raiding and a regional slave trade in captured women and children. The political situation was dynamic, with people relating to chiefs in varying ways. Drawing on Harries and Delius in particular, I also consider the importance of mobility and migrancy in this region at this time. This provides a baseline from which to understand the changes of the twentieth

century and effects of government intervention in land settlement, traditional authorities and agriculture.

In chapter two I look at land settlement patterns from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1940s. I discuss the effects of the 1913 Natives Land Act and 1936 Native Trust and Land Act in causing dispossession and argue that in fact there are other more direct causes of land dispossession than these laws. Included amongst these are the unintended consequences of the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, including the challenges of buying land for African settlement. In this chapter I also discuss how people gained access to land and how this changed over time, and to what extent chiefs had control over land and people in this period.

Chapter three provides a description of African agriculture in the region from the 1900s to 1940s. I look at what a 'typical' African agricultural household looked like, and how agriculture tied into the local economy. This includes the important linkages between agricultural production, local trade and migrancy. I look at the extent to which there was 'peasant prosperity' in the first decades of the twentieth century, before the impact of large-scale land dispossession. I consider the many constraints to agriculture which made it risky, and how people coped with these risks.

Chapter four is about government policies to intervene in agriculture from the 1930s to the 1960s. I provide some background to the formation of the Department of Native Agriculture and its programmes, placing it in the context of widespread anxieties over food security and drought in the 1930s and 1940s, and the post-Tomlinson cynicism of the mid to late 1950s. I look at the formation of the Letaba Bantu Farmer's co-operative, which brought together a number of irrigation schemes in the area, and provide an account of its 'rise and fall'.

Chapter five is on rural transformations during the Bantustan era. In particular I carry through two of the main threads of the thesis from chapter two and four. I look at land settlement patterns, how people accessed land during this period and the relation between chiefs, land and people. An important theme of this section of the chapter is the increasing importance of ethnicity. I also look at the Lebowa and Gazankulu government's attempts to improve homeland agriculture, and consider how irrigation schemes in particular performed. As in the previous two chapters I consider the constraints to agriculture in this

period, with regard to the model of farming being followed, the economic and political context, and environmental constraints.

In chapter six and seven I show how policymakers' poor understanding of the history of South Africa's rural transformations contributed to the problems experienced in the implementation of land reform. I look at land restitution in particular, and argue that it has failed to bring redress for a number of reasons, fundamentally relating to problematic assumptions about the history of land settlement and relations between people, land and chiefs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I also look at how a lack of an understanding of historical methodology impacted on how the validity of land claims was researched.

In chapter seven I focus on agricultural changes after 1994. I look at the impact of land restitution on commercial farms in the area which have been transferred to Communal Property Associations (the legal body to which land claimant communities belong). Rather than only looking at land reform projects, I also consider some of the important continuities in agricultural policies, in particular the revitalisation of smallholder irrigation schemes, which tie into the romantic vision of Africans as smallholder farmers. As in chapters four and five, I contrast official (and in this case scholarly) explanations for and solutions to the failure of farming, with an account of the contemporary constraints to agriculture.

Chapter One:

From Early Times to 1903

The purpose of this chapter is to challenge the pervasive idea that before conquest, colonialism and capitalism African societies were naturally egalitarian, redistributive, and self-sufficient simply by relying on the land and Nature's resources. This vision of the past is used as a baseline for many who want to see a revival of self-sufficient rural communities. Similarly, the idea that in the past, chiefs ruled over kingdoms with clear boundaries and had little contestation of their authority over land and people, is used to support restitution of vast areas of land to chiefs today. The history of this region shows something entirely different to this romantic, static vision.

A region rich in resources

Arriving in what is today known as the Mopani district, the pre-colonial traveller had good reason to stay. Nestled in an arc of mountain ranges, the region contained an abundance of resources that not only helped people subsist, but offered the potential for accumulating wealth. The Drakensberg, Wolkberg and Soutpansberg mountains were the source of streams and rivers that wound through the lowveld towards the east coast: the Groot Shingwedzi in the north, the Groot Letaba and Klein Letaba Rivers through the centre of the region. The Olifants River, with its source further south, emerged through a gap in the Drakensberg Mountains and created the southern border of the area I will term the northern lowveld, and which later became the Haenertsburg and later still, Letaba district. South of that river is the eastern lowveld, referred to as 'below the berg' by white settlers and administrators in the twentieth century, which was first part of the Sabi district and later the Pilgrims Rest district. The Drakensberg Mountains form the escarpment separating the lowveld from the Highveld interior, where the majority of Boers settled in the nineteenth century.

The hills and valleys in the west and north, the coveted 'place of the gods', captured the clouds and produced the mists and rainfall for which the mountains and the rulers who lived

there were famous. Rulers with the power to make rain in an otherwise dry area were held in awe.[1] Modjadji, the Queen of the Lobedu, is the best known of these rainmakers, but was certainly not the only one. Powerful rainmakers such as Modjadji received tribute from groups near and far, who wanted to keep in her good grace, or consult over specific matters of drought affecting their area.[2] Less powerful rainmakers held prestige within their communities and immediate neighbouring groups.

The fertile foothills and slopes were excellent for grain production, and growing fruits and vegetables. In fact, the iron age 'Silver Leaves' site near present day Tzaneen contains some of the oldest evidence for grain cultivation in Southern Africa.[3] People living in the drier lowveld, or travellers and traders moving through the region, traded beads, cloth, copper, iron hoes, salt and all manner of items for the grain produced here. A huge variety of wild plants and fruit provided sustenance, medicine, costumes such as grass skirts for dancing, magical plants for rituals. [4] The richly forested mountain slopes provided an excellent source of firewood, timber for building, and wood for carving and making utensils, bows, arrows and spears. Timber was to become one of the most important commodities traded in the late nineteenth century, as well as gold buried in the seams of mountains.

The lowveld may not seem as promising a place to stay as the mountainous areas. It was hotter and drier, prone to drought and full of danger. Mosquitoes and tsetse flies carried malaria and sleeping sickness respectively. These diseases could prove fatal, or cause chronic fatigue and physical wasting. Lions, leopards, crocodiles and poisonous snakes killed the unwary and the unlucky. If the area was dangerous for humans, it was more so for cattle. Trypanosomiasis carried by tsetse fly was lethal to cattle and horse-sickness to horses, and these domesticated animals were also easy prey for predators. These factors,

[1] See R.T.K. Scully, 'Phalaborwa Oral Tradition', unpublished PhD thesis, State University of New York, 1978, p. 302.
[2] O.J.O. Ferreira, *Diocleciano Fernandes das Neves: His residence in Mozambique and his visit to the Transvaal,* Gordons Bay, Jeffreys Bay: Tormentoso, 2013, p. 20.
[3] M. Klapwijk & T.N Huffman, 'Excavations at Silver Leaves: A final report', *South African Archaeological Bulletin,* 51, 1996, p. 91.
[4] See for example, E.J. and J.D. Krige, *The Realm of a Rain-Queen,* Johannesburg, Cape Town: Juta & Company Ltd., 1943, pp. 45 - 50.

particularly disease, are the cause for the sparse settlement of the region, particularly by white settlers, up to the 1930s.[5]

But one would be mistaken in thinking that the area was unsuited to settlement. The alluvial soils along these rivers and their tributaries were good for cultivation. Numerous kopjes in an otherwise flat landscape provided the shade, shelter, and elevation necessary to avoid wild animals, mosquitoes, and the baking heat. It is likely that cattle could be kept in the area by some people at various points in time. In fact, the nineteenth century explorer, Elton, claimed that communities living in the tsetse fly zone along the Limpopo River 'did not regard this as a serious obstacle to cattle rearing, as tsetse only affected cattle when they had a low resistance owing to lack of grazing or water.'[6] However, this would not have formed a stable or particularly rewarding form of wealth, given the regularity of drought. Rainfall has been variable in the region, some centuries and decades drier or wetter than others, with consequences for settlement and the importance of agriculture in the region.[7] Although not as verdant as the mountainous regions, the lowveld offered plentiful wild foods and resources for people who understood the bush.[8] Mopani trees provided firewood and timber of an excellent quality, and it was the source of one of the most nutritious wild foods – mopane worms. Marula trees supplied tasty fruit and nutritionally dense marula nuts.

But most importantly, this area had valuable resources that made it a hub of commercial activity, hunting and metal production in the 19th century and long before. Game provided locals with a source of meat, fur and bone, which could be used for immediate needs but also gave them a commodity to trade locally in exchange for grain and other requirements. Furs, rhino horn and, most especially, ivory were important commodities in long distance

[5] A. P. Cartwright, *By the Waters of the Letaba,* Johannesburg, Cape Town, London: Purnell, 1974; R. Packard, '"Malaria Blocks Development" Revisited: The Role of Disease in the History of Agricultural Development in the Eastern and Northern Transvaal Lowveld, 1890 – 1960' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 27 (3) 2001, p. 611. Packard points out that white farming boomed in the area in the 1920s and 1930s, but notes that the perception that the lowveld was 'a white man's grave' inhibited the growth of white farming.
[6] A. Ekblom, L. Gillson, and M. Notelid, 'A Historical Ecology of the Limpopo and Kruger National Parks and Lower Limpopo Valley' *Journal of Archaeology and Ancient History,* No. 1, 2011.
[7] Ibid.
[8] E.J. Krige, 'Note on the Phalaborwa and their Morula Complex' *Bantu Affairs* 1937; H.A. Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe, vol. 2,* Neuchatel: Imprimerie Attinger Freres, 1913, p. 12.

trading networks for hundreds of years.[9] Critically, the northern lowveld was, for almost 900 years, an important mining and metal working region. The region has a unique geology, with seams of iron, copper, gold, phosphorous, corundum, quartz, mica among many other minerals. Being close to the surface, these minerals were easily accessible in small scale mining operations.

It was by exploiting ivory, iron and copper in particular that some local groups subsisted; and by tightly controlling its trade that more powerful chieftaincies, most notably the Phalaborwa ruling groups, grew rich.[10] Copper was smelted and formed into implements such as copper marale (objects shaped like a golf club, with protrusions on the head) or jewellery. Copper was important in long distance trade and was more valuable than iron. At one stage 'thirty marale… or 55 iron hoes were equivalent to one ivory tusk or about 8 to 10 head of cattle.'[11] Regionally, the north east lowveld was an important source of iron for African communities, including for the large Pedi polity to the south west.[12]

With its mineralised soil, this was also a good place for salt production. Salt, because of its importance in people's diets and its scarcity away from the coast, was an extremely important commodity regionally.[13] The Soutpansberg – literally, the Salt-pan mountains – was the source of much of the region's salt, but the northern lowveld, in particular the Rooiwater igneous complex, was also a source. Salt was very valuable – in the 19th century one man recalled exchanging 22 bags of kaffir-corn (sorghum) for two bags of salt.[14]

[9] T.M. Evers, 'Iron Age Trade in the Eastern Transvaal, South Africa' *The South African Archaeological Bulletin,* 29 (113/114) 1974, p. 33.
[10] Scully, 'Phalaborwa'.
[11] N.J van der Merwe, and R.T. Scully, 'The Phalaborwa story: archaeological and ethnographic investigation of a South African Iron Age Group', *World Archaeology* 1971, p. 192.
[12] P. Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, p. 70.
[13] Evers, 'Iron Age Trade', p. 35.
[14] Ibid.

Map 3: Detail of A. Merensky 'Original Map of the Transvaal or South African Republic', 1875, showing the northern and eastern lowveld and escarpment



Who lived here?

In the nineteenth century, the area was populated by many groups, some settled and organised and others more mobile and transitory. The nineteenth century was a very turbulent period politically and socially, so the chieftaincies recorded by ethnographers in the twentieth century do not reflect the full range and complexity of the population and politics of the nineteenth century and before. Ethnographers such as Junod, Stayt, the Kriges' and Van Warmelo, who between them conducted research on 'tribes' in the region between the end of the 19th century to the 1940s relied on oral traditions of the surviving

and largest chiefdoms.[15] Thus, 'there remains a large proportion of constituent groups in the tribe of which the ancestry is obscure, if not completely lost in oblivion'.[16]

The concept of chieftaincy, and the word 'chief' is confusing: 'chief' could refer to someone with direct lineage to an established royal family, who ruled over many people and villages; 'chief' was also used to describe an individual leading a small group, chosen by them based on leadership attributes, but who does not belong to a 'royal family'.[17] It is also important to note that chieftaincies and localities were not homogeneous, made up of people of the same background or even the same language.[18] There were many reasons why people might have chosen to join or leave a group, including the need for security, political factors such as war or succession disputes, trade opportunities, and environmental factors such as drought, amongst others.

Groups living in what became the North-Eastern Transvaal were very mixed. J. D. Krige for example described the complexity of the Sotho groups of the Northern Transvaal:

> The Sotho of the northern Transvaal are an enormously complex group of tribes. Very diverse as to ancestry, and lacking in the homogeneity of the Venda, they are divided into numerous small independent tribes… Each tribe consists of individuals of widely different ancestry, indicated by the tribal origin or foreign totem of the individual… This complexity and confusion everywhere appear to antedate the migrations of the nineteenth century, which have made their

[15] J.D Krige pointed out 'It is necessary to emphasise that the little we know of these tribes is limited to the nuclear ruling groups. Of the constituent groups of foreign origin within the tribe there is often no history at all.' in J. D. Krige, 'Traditional Origins and Tribal Relationships of the Sotho of the Northern Transvaal', *Bantu Affairs,* 1937, p. 327; Krige & Krige, *Rain Queen;* Krige, 'Note on the Phalaborwa'; H.A Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe, vol. 1,* New York: University Books, 1962; H. A. Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe, vol. 2,* New York: University Books, 1962; H. A. Stayt, *The Bavenda,* London: Oxford University Press, 1931. N.J Van Warmelo, 'The Ba Letswalô or Banarene'*, Department of Native Affairs Ethnographical Publications,* no.10 Pretoria: Government Printer, 1944; N. J. Van Warmelo, 'The Banarene of Sekôrôrô', *Ethnological Publication No.13,* Pretoria: Department of Native Affairs, 1944; N.J Van Warmelo, 'The Bakoni of Mametša' *Ethnological Publications no. 15.* Pretoria, Department of Native Affairs, 1944; N.J Van Warmelo, 'The Bakoni ba Maake' *Ethnological Publications No.12* Pretoria: Government Publisher 1944; N. J. Van Warmelo, 'The Batubatse of Mašišimale' *Ethnological Publications No.16* Pretoria: Government Publisher 1944; N. J. Van Warmelo, 'The Bathlabine of Moxobôya' *Ethnological Publications No.11* Pretoria: Government Publisher 1944.

[16] Krige, 'Origins', p. 327.

[17] Delius, *Land Belongs to Us,* pp. 49 – 50.

[18] J. Wright, 'Turbulent Times: Political Transformations in the North and East, 1760s – 1830s' in C. Hamilton, B.K. Mbenga and R. Ross, *The Cambridge History of South Africa Vol. 1, From Early Times to 1885,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 218. P. Harries, *Butterflies and Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries & Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa,* Oxford: James Currey, 2007, pp. 155 – 177.

> contribution to the inextricable tangle and to the difficulty of reconstructing historical interrelations.[19]

As an example, Krige looked at 'a small area of about five square miles in *Bolobedu*': here he found there could be 'approximately fifty unrelated constituent groups in this area'.[20] By constituent group he means 'accretions from outside… usually scattered all over the country of residence'.[21]

Van Warmelo described those living in the eastern Transvaal by the twentieth century in a similar manner:

> This area by reason of its geographical position eventually had to become the meeting place of the tribes from the East, the South, the West and the North-West, and that is what has actually happened. The result is a confused tangle of tribes and sections and scattered units, very often no larger than just a family, speaking several languages and following different customs. This is not least due to the circumstances that much of this immigration took place so recently that there was no room and no time for strife between the tribes, for the establishment of hegemonies or the consolidation of new groups and spheres of culture influence. As a result, we find today immigrants from all quarters of the compass, living side by side, and the boundaries of tribal influence intersecting and overlapping to an amazing extent.[22]

Harries' account of settlement patterns by the 20th century also reveals a fluid, diffuse pattern:

> By the early twentieth century East Coast immigrants were scattered throughout the northern and eastern Transvaal; many barriers divided them from each other and, although they tended to settle in low-lying areas and river valleys, no natural frontier separated them from their neighbours. Even where borders can be distinguished, immigrant communities were surrounded by wide belts of mixed settlement, and islands of linguistic minorities existed on both sides. In 1896 a northern Transvaal newspaper remarked of the immigrants from the East Coast that they were 'and admixture of refugees... they have no recognised king, but subject themselves to the most wealthy, who assumes the leadership under the title of induna or headman.[23]

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[19] Krige, 'Origins', p. 327.
[20] Krige, 'Origins', pp. 328 – 329.
[21] Ibid.
[22] N. J. Van Warmelo, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa,* Pretoria: Government Printer, 1935, p. 51.
[23] P. Harries, 'Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The emergence of ethnicity among the Tsonga speakers of South Africa' in L. Vail (ed.) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa,* London*:* James Currey, 1989, p. 85.

An example of how fluid this political situation was is evident from Merensky's diary of his travels to the area. One day a group camping on the banks of the 'Lechlabane' (Klein Letaba) river fled before Merensky and his party. They managed to catch up with one of the women and asked her 'Why do you flee?'

> She only said: 'I fear Manuele, I fear the chiefs.' We could however not establish who Manuele was. Upon being asked, our Makwapa explained that it was a very remote living Makwapa chief, which obviously did not give us any further insight either.[24]

They later learnt that 'Manuele' was 'a Portuguese', Immanuel.[25] Nevertheless, even if it is impossible to know all of the chiefs and groups that lived in the area, it is helpful to provide the names of those who became important in the twentieth century. In the dry and otherwise sparsely settled northern lowveld there were islands of settlement where people mined and worked copper and iron, and hunted. The area in the east became known as Phalaborwa, meaning 'better than the south', and numerous groups with different origins lived there.[26] Some competed to establish political dominance in this area, the Malatji Royal family at times maintained hegemony. Another group, the Batubatse of Mašišimale[27], also established themselves in the lowveld, sometimes able to assert their independence, other times drawn into tributary relationships with the more powerful Phalaborwa groups. Along the Olifants River and the foothills of the Drakensberg range were a number of chieftaincies including the Banarene of Sekôrôrô, Bakoni of Mametša, Bakoni of Maake, and the Bathlabine of Mogoboya up to the edge of the Wolkberg range. In the twentieth century the Chieftainess Mantjana broke away from Sekôrôrô and established herself as an independent chief nearby. In the valleys and hills of the Wolkberg, there lived the Baletswalo (or Mamathola), Magoeba (Magoebaskloof is named after him), and Modjadji, who ruled over the Lobedu and after whom Modjadjieskloof is named. In the north lived various Venda chiefs, secure in the Soutpansberg Mountains.

Amongst these groups, in both the lowveld and mountainous areas, lived people who came from the east and became known as Makwapa, Magwamba, Knobneusen, Gwamba, Shangaan and Tsonga at various periods of time depending on where in the east they came

[24] 'Merensky's Dairy', p. 86.
[25] Ibid, p. 96.
[26] Scully, 'Phalaborwa'.
[27] In this chapter I use the spelling of groups used by Van Warmelo.

from, when, and for what reason.[28] Arriving mainly in small groups, some settled near other chieftaincies and remained independent, some became integrated into Sotho and Venda speaking chieftaincies, some, such as the Nkuna and Baloyi, arrived with their own chiefs and established themselves more firmly as important chiefdoms. Muhlaba and Nwamitwa were two such chiefs and they lived in the lowveld in the west. South of here, in the eastern lowveld, were more Tsonga/Shangaan groups who lived under various chiefs, and in the more mountainous region were the Mapulana groups and the Moraba. Local groups engaged in dynamic processes of integration, alliance, and competition too complicated to go into here.[29] What is clear is that there were many rival political centres in this area which expanded and contracted, many skirmishes and wars, assimilation, marriage alliances and migrations. Immigrants from the east, including people known as Shangaan, competed with Venda and Sotho groups and sometimes maintained political control in some areas – this is important to emphasise given present day narratives that 'Shangaans' were only ever subject to Sotho and Venda chiefs.[30]

In the nineteenth century there were powerful rulers of the wider region who wanted to grow their power and wealth by controlling trade, as well as by demanding tribute from, or simply raiding, local people.[31] (It is important to note that the Pedi king grew powerful partly by offering protection to refugees fleeing more extractive and violent rulers[32] – although it is also clear as I show later that the Pedi were somewhat predatory towards some independent groups in the lowveld) Most especially, Swazi expansion and Soshangane's establishment of the Gaza Empire had an enormous impact on the region from the late 1830s to the 1860s, as did Soshangane's sons Mzila and Mawewe in the 1860s to 1880s and grandson Ngungunyane in the 1880s.[33] The Boers began expanding their

[28] See for example, Harries, 'Exclusion'; Harries, *Butterflies*, p. 156.
[29] See especially, Scully, 'Phalaborwa', Krige, 'Origins'.
[30] Scully, 'Phalaborwa'. Personal communication with Abigail Moffett (PhD candidate at UCT conducting research in Phalaborwa), see chapter 6.
[31] P. Delius, *Land Belongs to Us,* pp. 14 – 19; M. Mulaudzi, ' "U Shuma Bulasi" Agrarian Transformation in the Zoutpansberg, District of South Africa up to 1946' PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2000, Wagner, 'Zoutpansberg', p. 337; for an overview of these processes, J. Wright, 'Turbulent Times', pp. 211 – 252; N. Etherington, P. Harries, B. K. Mbenga, 'From Colonial Hegemonies to Imperial Conquest, 1840 – 1880' in Hamilton, Mbenga and Ross, (eds.) *Cambridge History;* pp. 319 – 391.
[32] Delius, *Land Belongs to Us.*
[33] P. Bonner, *Kings, commoners and concessionaires: The evolution and dissolution of the nineteenth-century Swazi state,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 114 – 116; Delius, *Land Belongs to Us,* p. 29;

influence in the area from 1848. [34] Albasini was another powerful figure - a prolific Portuguese trader, 'chief' and later tax (*opgaaf*) collector for the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek.[35] But while these powerful men attempted to control the region, launched raids and terrorised the local population, none ever sustained hegemony. Unlike the interior and coastal regions, the lowveld was protected from the worst of the political turmoil and warfare of the nineteenth century. The craggy and intimidating Drakensberg range separated the lowveld from the interior, the Lebombo Mountains and behind them a long, environmentally hostile expanse separated the lowveld from the coast. Numerous groups of refugees from zones of more intense conflict and dislocation moved to this area, adding to the mix of people, and the complicated politics of the region. This was an open frontier zone, where 'no authority [was] recognised as legitimate, or… able to exercise undisputed control over the area'.[36]

A good example of this political complexity is the history of Serobane, a 'makwapa'. Alexander Merensky, a Berlin Missionary based at the time in the Pedi kingdom, wrote an account of his trip to the north in 1862, during which he visited Serobane's kraal. Serobane told Merensky his story:

> He said that he had lived down at the Limpopo with his people in earlier times, Manekos had apparently driven him from there; thereupon he had moved further westward and there he made the acquaintance of Hendrik Potgieter, who invited him to go up with him against Moselekazzi. Afterwards he lived in the proximity of the Boers of the Zoutpansberg; they had placed him under the Portuguese ambassador Albasini, and since the latter demanded a lot of taxes from him, he finally fled away from there… After Serobane had… fled from Albasini, the Bapedi defeated him and confiscated his livestock. He fled westward, was in turn chased away from there in 1861 by the Boers and then subjected himself to the chief of Magakal [Mampuru].[37]

'Merensky's Diary of a Journey to the North from 14 July to 29 August 1862', p. 82. Scully, 'Phalaborwa', pp. 324 – 329.

[34] Delius, *Land Belongs to Us*; J. C. A. Boeyens, '"Black Ivory": The Indenture System and Slavery in Zoutpansberg, 1848-1869" in E. Eldredge and F. Morton, (eds.) *Slavery in South Africa,* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994, pp. 187 - 214.

[35] See J. B. de Waal, 'Die Rol van Joao Albasini in die Geskiedenis van die Transvaal' *South African Archives Yearbook*, 1953; Boeyens, 'Black Ivory', p. 196; E. Eldridge, 'Delagoa Bay and the Hinterland in the Early Nineteenth Century: Politics, Trade, Slaves and Slave Raiding' in E. Eldredge and F. Morton, (eds.) *Slavery in South Africa,* pp. 151 – 153.

[36] Boeyens, 'Black Ivory', p. 194.

[37] 'Merensky's Diary ', pp. 68 – 69.

In the area Serobane lived, the 'Baroka' and 'Makwapa' intermingled. The Baroka 'don't constitute one uniform kingdom, but many small chiefs live next to one another, and they, too unite their people minimally'.[38] Amongst the Baroka were skilled blacksmiths, metalworkers, hunters and traders. The Makwapa, 'too are not united into one kingdom. They live scattered on hunting and fishing… These occupations compel them to a nomadic life.'[39] The Makwapa and Baroka had lived in the region for a long time, between the Portuguese of the coast and Basotho of the escarpment. 'They had often been the objects of slave hunts and slave wars.' Many were traders, 'not so much for themselves, but more for the whites, from whom they receive the goods and then sell these for ivory among the more remote living indigenous people'.[40] During their travels in the same region, Merensky and his group visited large, secure villages, frightened groups of refugees fleeing 'Manukosi' (Soshangane) and his agents, and heard of isolated homesteads being forced by violent elephant hunters to carry their goods, and killed when they refused.[41]

Thus, in understanding the dynamics of the region it is useful to make a distinction between different forms of social organisation. There existed a local population living in homesteads, with varying degrees of association with other homesteads and with local chiefs. Some homesteads would have been very isolated, giving a group as much independence as they wanted or could defend, although they might have some kind of tenuous association with a local chief for ritual, defence, or other reasons. Others may have lived in larger villages, organised under the direct authority of a headman or chief. Within the broader region, there were powerful rulers of larger, expanding polities or states who vied for authority and control over a large area, its population, and its resources. Finally, there also existed a more anarchic population of hunters, raiders and illicit traders who were tied into complicated and often negotiable relationships with local and regional powers – or none at all.[42]

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[38] Ibid, p. 64.
[39] Ibid, p. 67.
[40] Ibid.
[41] 'Merensky's Diary', p. 96.
[42] See for example, R. Wagner, 'Zoutpansberg: the dynamics of a hunting frontier, 1848 – 67' in S. Marks and A. Atmore, (eds.) *Economy and Society in Pre-industrial South Africa,* London: Longman Group Ltd. 1980, pp. 313 – 349. Wagner shows this with regard to the tenuous relationship of elephant hunters to the Boers in Zoutpansberg, and the Venda in the north. Similarly, the 'Bakgema' or cannibals who raided in the area in the 1930s held allegiance to no-one and existed within a vacuum of power and control caused by the disturbances of the Difiquane.

Mobility and integration

Serobane's story shows how mobile people could be in the nineteenth century, due to political reasons. An important feature of the history of the region is that groups and individuals living here were mobile for economic and cultural reasons too, and integrated into broader networks of trade, alliance, rivalry and raiding.[43] These were not isolated and self-sufficient 'tribes', living in one place since 'time immemorial'.

Trade facilitated mobility and cultural exchange.[44] Based near the trading port of Delagoa Bay, 'Thonga' people in the eighteenth and nineteenth century traversed the lowveld and Highveld to bring trading goods to communities living in the interior.[45] These carriers travelled widely. When Merensky made his trip to the north in 1862, he engaged with 'Malima, a Lekwapa' who, 'like almost all Makwapa, had been around widely as a carrier of trading goods. He was well known in Inhambane and Delagoa, even to Moselekazzi.'[46] They stayed for various lengths of time in the lowveld, sometimes marrying local women and settling there.[47] This movement was not only in one direction. People from the Bakoni ba Mametsa chieftaincy for example bartered with traders who came from Delagoa Bay, but also 'used to march down there themselves'.[48]

Local women also engaged in trade and traversed the region, sometimes in female-only groups, bringing their children along.[49] Women from the Phalaborwa area for example traded salt and red oxide in Bolobedu, and travelled as far away as Sibasa in Venda. They frequently married men in neighbouring and distant chieftaincies, where they then stayed.[50] The marriages were sometimes coerced, as suggested in the story of Mwanyone, an unimportant chief staying in the Bolodebu area who, when a group of women traders came to the area, 'saw a beautiful girl and said this is my wife and took her.' Unfortunately for

[43] Delius, *Land Belongs to Us.* Harries looks at the many reasons for migrancy in the Mozambique region, and also shows how labour migrancy formed masculine identities. P. Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Workers in Mozambique and South Africa, 1860-1910,* London, James Currey, 1994.
[44] Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity,* p. 31.
[45] A. Smith, 'Delagoa Bay and the Trade of South-Eastern Africa' in R. Gray and D. Birmingham (eds.) *Pre-Colonial African Trade: Essays on Trade in Central and Eastern Africa before 1900,* London: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 287 – 289; Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity,* p. 15.
[46] 'Merensky's Diary', p. 60.
[47] Smith, 'Delagoa Bay' p. 289.
[48] Van Warmelo, 'Bakoni Ba Mametsa', p. 48.
[49] Scully, 'Phalaborwa' pp. 338 – 339.
[50] Ibid.

Mwanyone, the beautiful girl was the wife of the powerful Phalaborwa chief Makikele, who subsequently had Mwanyone killed.[51]

Drought and famine, too, caused mobility.[52] In the lowveld, the harsh climate and poor soils in many places made it necessary for homesteads to move fairly regularly when their gardens and lands became depleted of minerals. During periods of drought in Mozambique, Harries noted that people may not have moved far – simply to a nearby hillside or a place where they could pick wild fruits or vegetables.[53] Or some individuals would '*kondza* to a distant chief, whose patronage allowed them to grow wealthy and famous; having succeeded in life, they sometimes return to their village of origin.'[54] Scully showed the importance of marriage alliances between people living in the dry metal producing lowveld and those in grain-supplying areas in coping with the reality of drought and famine, and maintaining important trade links.[55] Even without family connections, people in the lowveld migrated towards the better watered mountain slopes to produce grain for themselves and their families in times of drought and famine, or to seek the services of rainmakers.[56] This caused consternation for the Lobedu and other local groups because these periodic settlers would not always subordinate themselves to local chiefs, a potentially threatening situation.[57] Sometimes this was a temporary move, but often people chose to move away permanently from dry areas towards better watered areas. As I further explore later, in the nineteenth century labour migrancy to mines and white industry became another way of coping with famine.[58]

What work did they do?

Often, wealth in pre-colonial African societies is understood in terms of people's ability to acquire and grow cattle herds, whether they laboured in fields to produce food for other people's grain stores, or whether they could benefit from the labour of others. But the

[51] Ibid.
[52] Diana Wylie provides a detailed discussion of how people dealt with drought and hunger in Bechuanaland and Pondoland. D. Wylie, 'The Changing Face of Hunger in Southern African History 1880- 1980' *Past and Present,* 122, 1989, pp. 159 – 199.
[53] Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity* p. 17.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Scully, 'Phalaborwa' pp. 309, 338.
[56] Ibid. p. 89.
[57] Krige, 'Origins' pp. 337.
[58] Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity,* Scully, 'Phalaborwa', p. 307.

range of economic activities people engaged in in this region was wide. Looking only at internal social processes – the 'life of the tribe' – is inadequate in understanding the full range of experience of local people.

Mining and metal work

The Phalaborwa region became famous for its mining and metal work. The region produced and exported iron hoes, spears, and even guns.[59] The pre-colonial metal working industry involved many people in different roles. Metal smelting and working required specialisation, which involved apprenticeship, a deep knowledge of a craft, and rites and rituals to initiate people and ensure their success. At the bottom end of the social hierarchy, some people were labourers in iron-age mines or smelting operations.

Some of the mining that took place was very small scale, decentralised and scattered around the district.[60] But larger mining and iron production sites, such as that on the farm 'Square', dating to the nineteenth century reveal that someone had significant control over the labour required to mine on a larger scale.[61] After the harvest each year, when labour was available, a group of about 200 people from a number of dispersed settlements came together for iron forging operations that would run over 11 to 22 days.[62] Young girls squeezed down extremely narrow shafts at Phalaborwa, to chip away at rock that had been cracked by fire.[63] Groups of women then carried over 670 headloads of the mined iron ore up to 25km away to the smelting site, a journey on foot which could take two days.[64] Men chopped and carried the 230 trees that were necessary to fuel the fires. The chief was entitled to a percentage of the finished product, which led to conflict between different chiefs who wanted to control the sources of metal.[65] During his reign (just before 1820 to possibly around 1867) Makikele expanded his domain and maintained a monopoly on the sources of iron within that area, but this still left space for others to accumulate. For example 'the Hlame of Sekgopo Hill, whose ancestry and cultural bias was linked with the

[59] Scully, p. 319.
[60] Van der Merwe & Scully, 'Phalaborwa story', pp. 182, 191.
[61] Van der Merwe and Killick, 'Square: An Iron Smelting Site near Phalaborwa', *South African Archaeological Society, Goodwin Series 3,* 1979, p. 91.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Van der Merwe & Scully, 'Phalaborwa story', p. 181-182.
[64] Van der Merwe and Killick, 'Square', p.86.
[65] Scully, 'Phalaborwa', p. 319.

east, were middlemen exporting spears and other produce to the Swazi and presumably other areas in both the east and on the escarpment.'[66]

Periods of warfare, particularly before the mid-1850s, may well have helped the Phalaborwa leader Makikele to benefit from the increased demand in weapons.[67] But this boom was not to last. Pre-colonial mining and metal working went into decline from the 1850s. In 1852 the Portuguese opened Lourenço Marques to foreign trade. Portuguese traders imported cheap and good quality metal products such as iron hoes, to be traded in the interior. Traders operating from the Cape and Natal also moved into the interior from the south and west.[68] This undercut the local and regional production and trade of iron hoes from the Phalaborwa/lowveld region to grain growing areas. [69] However, Scully suggests that 'The caravan traffic from Lourenco Marques to Spelonken in the Zoutpaansberg [sic] passed through Phalaborwa in the winter bringing new forms of wealth to replace that lost with the decline of the local metals industry'.[70]

Hunters, traders and carriers

Nineteenth century accounts of traders and travellers, oral traditions collected by anthropologists, and the writings of historians particularly Delius, Wagner, Harries and Boeyens provide a sense of how individuals in the region were connected to a wider world, and engaged in economic activities away from the homestead and village.[71] Junod wrote that, 'Before there was a question of any currency, when hoes were not yet procurable, or the *ritlatla* bracelet brought by the whites, or the copper stick called *lirale*… they knew how to buy and to sell.'[72] Trade increased with the arrival of white and Muslim traders in Delagoa Bay and other places along the east coast.[73] Traders, carriers and hunters travelled the region seeking wealth and prestige – sometimes they succeeded and sometimes they failed to overcome the dangers they encountered.

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid, pp. 318 – 319.
[68] Delius, *Land Belongs to Us*, p. 70.
[69] M.H interview with Hendrick Malatji, Katherine Mokgadi (Kgoshigadi Shai), Joseph Monyele, Johannes Shai, Mashishimale location, 27 August, 2011, Van der Merwe, and Scully, 'Phalaborwa story', p.191.
[70] Scully, 'Phalaborwa', p. 307.
[71] Boeyens, 'Black Ivory'; Delius, *Land Belongs to Us*; Wagner, 'Zoutpansberg'; Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*.
[72] Junod, *Life, vol.2,* p. 140.
[73] Ibid.

Amongst the Tsonga speaking groups Junod described at the end of the nineteenth century, professional hunters called *Maphisa*, or *amapisi* roamed the area and were 'recognised as a kind of superior caste'.[74] They were known to use magic to charm and kill their quarry, as well as more conventional weapons – guns, spears, bows and poisoned arrows. Hunters competed with each other. Junod described how 'some of them try to destroy the power of a rival by securing a part of an animal killed by him,' administering a special treatment, 'after which they are convinced that their rival will no longer be able to dispute game with them.'[75] The *amapisi* maintained links with their communities, some of them in the east, near Delagoa Bay, but travelled far afield for long stretches of time. They were integrated into a variety of trading networks, and became wealthy and powerful figures in the wider region.[76] In contrast, some hunters, such as the *batimba,* named after the art or 'special science' they possess that gave them powers over hippopotami, lived along certain rivers and hunted near to their kraal.[77]

The Phalaborwa were well placed for taking advantage of the growing demand for ivory in the early to mid-nineteenth century and Makikele became an 'ivory despot' imposing a tax of a tusk of every elephant killed.[78] But this was not without resistance and contest. For example, Albasini, Buys, and their 'Magwamba' (Shangaan) followers competed with Makikele in the 1840s and 1850s and raided local groups here and around the Skukuza area further south.[79] But by the end of the 1850s ivory had become scarce in the northern lowveld/Phalaborwa area. The seat of the ivory trade shifted to the Zoutpansberg and Spelonken area.

In 1848 the hunting town of Zoutpansberg, also known as Schoemansdal, was established in the Spelonken area by Boers moving north. Boers had been hunting elephants on horseback in the bushveld outside of the tsetse fly zone. Meanwhile, in the east, around Lourenco Marques, elephant herds that had been hunted by local Shangaan and Tsonga hunters were also depleted. Boers tried to control the trade from Zoutpansberg, negotiating a system whereby the dangerous job of hunting for elephants on foot was taken by 'swart skutte'

[74] Ibid*,* p. 59.
[75] Ibid*,* p. 63.
[76] Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity* pp. 14 – 17. Wagner, 'Zoutpansberg'.
[77] Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* p. 68.
[78] Scully, 'Phalaborwa', p. 332.
[79] Scully, 'Phalaborwa', pp. 330 – 335;

(black marksmen) and their entourage, while the products of the hunt accrued to the Boers, who owned the guns.[80] However the negotiating position of the 'swart skutte' increased over time as more guns went into circulation. After a brief attempt to control the ivory trade in the Zoutpansberg, Boers were ousted from the area in 1867 by Venda chiefs, and the hunting grounds fell under the control of African chiefs.[81]

The way through the lowveld was dangerous for traders as roving bands under instruction from rulers, or on their own initiative, attempted to intercept caravans and relieve traders and porters of their goods.[82] Das Neves who used the route through the lowveld refused at one stage to carry large amounts of ivory through the region out of fear of attack.[83] He remained in Zoutpansberg to wait for English traders who came there to trade in the winter months. Besides fearing for his ivory, Das Neves feared for his life, with good reason.[84] Being so lucrative, ivory was a dangerous trade. By the late 1860s to early 1870s elephants were so scarce that the ivory trade had dwindled.

But hunting did not end, and continued to be very important for Boers and Africans not only for subsistence but for trade in furs, meat and other products. While Boers only used guns, Africans made skilled use of a wider range of weapons, including guns, bows and poisoned arrows, spears and traps. In some areas massive game pits were used by groups of hunters. Junod described this particularly profitable method of hunting:

> All the members of the clan were summoned; they built a strong fence as much as two kilometres in length, leaving about ten openings at equal distances; at each of these gates was dug a game pit. In the afternoon the men assembled and prepared torches which they lighted in the evening; and with loud shouts they chased the game towards the fence into the pits…. The result was sometimes marvellous; the pits were soon full and the animals coming behind ran over their comrades and escaped; the men followed closely and stabbed the antelopes in the neck.[85]

Nevertheless, while still important, hunting as a profitable venture was in decline for the rest of the century. Elephants were scarce from the 1850s and other wildlife was also

[80] Wagner, 'Zoutpansberg', p. 331.
[81] Wagner, 'Zoutpansberg', p. 337.
[82] See for example, Junod, *South African Tribe, vol. 2,* p. 144.
[83] Ferreira, *das Neves,* p. 49.
[84] Ferreira, *das Neves,* pp. 42-43.
[85] Junod, *Life vol 2,* pp. 58 – 59.

diminishing. From 1846 the Transvaal government, under Boers and then British, introduced a series of laws aimed at regulating hunting. These laws were exclusionary – 'reserved first for Voortrekkers alone, then for whites and subsequently for the wealthy or landowning white elite', but it was possible to contravene them and ultimately they failed to achieve their end.[86] Africans, who were prohibited from hunting and owning guns, continued to hunt and own guns, with more discretion. The 1896-1898 rinderpest epidemic, which killed Boer's cattle herds and threw Boer families into poverty and destitution, compelled the government to suspend their already fairly ineffective wildlife protection laws.[87] The South African war from 1899 to 1902 threw the country into turmoil and game laws became a dead letter. The effect was that game continued to diminish rapidly. By 1903, when Stevenson Hamilton, the warden of the Sabi and Singwitsi Game Reserves, informed what he thought was 'the last' Boer hunting party[88] that the area from which they were returning was a protected reserve, they 'professed themselves amused at the idea' since 'there was nothing left to preserve'.[89]

Raiding and the Slave Trade

The region had long been affected by slavery and slave trading.[90] The practice of slavery has a long history in southern African societies, and the lowest rungs in the social hierarchy of chiefdoms were occupied by slaves, normally people who had been captured in raids and war.[91] A number of powerful groups in the region expanded their numbers by incorporating captives taken from villages they raided. [92]

The most well-known form of slavery in the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek was the 'indentured labour' system of the Boers. Children, called 'inboekelings' because their names were recorded in a book, were kept by Boer families to provide additional labour. Boeyens points

[86] J. Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History,* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995, pp. 11 - 18.
[87] Carruthers, *Kruger,* p. 18.
[88] which 'consisted of four typical Boer hunters with their families; two large buck wagons and oxen; a number of obviously excellent shooting ponies, and some useful looking rough dogs', and which was certainly not the last.
[89] J. Stevenson-Hamilton, *South African Eden,* London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1937, pp. 87-88
[90] 'Merensky's Diary' p. 67; Scully, 'Phalaborwa', pp. 150, 325; Eldredge, 'Delagoa Bay', pp. 127 – 166.
[91] Wright, 'Turbulent Times', pp. 218, 250 – 251.
[92] For a discussion of these processes in South Africa see P. Delius, 'Recapturing Captives and Conversations with Cannibals' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 36 (2), 2010, pp. 8 – 15.

out that although Boers tended to call this system an 'apprenticeship', it 'in practice often graded into a form of slavery, in particular with regard to the manner in which so-called "apprentices", predominantly young children, were obtained and bound to their white masters'.[93]

In the 1850s and 1860s many Boers in the eastern Transvaal acquired children through exchange with the Swazi and other African auxiliaries who took captives from the groups they raided. The Swazi captured children 'in order to cement the political alliance that was developing with the Boers'.[94] The slave trade became economically important for Boer settlers in the town of Zoutpansberg from the 1850s. With hunting, ivory and metal in decline, Zoutpansberg became an even more active node in the South African slave trade, capturing and exporting 'black ivory'. [95] Here, white settlers grouped into commandos played a more central role in capturing children themselves as they did not have powerful African allies such as the Swazi further south who had the capacity to capture large numbers of captives.[96] However, Boers were assisted by 'Swaart Skuts', probably VaTsonga allies under João Albasini and Michael Buys, who actively sought to capture children.[97] Even the more powerful chiefdoms were not safe from these raids. Modjadji's chiefdom was attacked by the Swazi who captured slaves in the 1830s, and in 1861 Boers from Zoutpansberg raided Modjadji's chiefdom and captured 'a great number of oxen, sheep, and goats…also some 400 children.'[98] Captive children were sold to Burghers in other parts of the Transvaal, the Orange Free State and as far away as Cape Town.[99] Some were also sold to traders at Delagoa Bay.[100] Women were also captured in these raids, and they were often given to African auxiliaries as reward.[101] The peak of the inboekeling system was from about 1845 to 1870.

[93] Boeyens, 'Black Ivory', p. 193.
[94] Delius and Trapido, 'Inboekselings and Oorlams', p. 228.
[95] Ibid, pp. 229 – 230; Boeyens, 'Black Ivory', pp. 204,
[96] Boeyens, 'Black Ivory', pp. 195 – 196.
[97] Ibid, p. 196; Eldridge, 'Delagoa Bay', pp. 151 – 153.
[98] Ferreira, *das Neves*, p. 89.
[99] Boeyens, 'Black Ivory', pp. 187, 202
[100] Eldredge, 'Delagoa Bay', pp. 151 – 152.
[101] Boeyens, 'Black Ivory', p. 201.

The collection of *opgaaf* and demands for *dienste* by the Boers was associated with the procurement of slaves. *Opgaaf* was tribute collected from African chiefs and headman, and tribute could take the form of people, often children.[102] *Dienstoende* groups were those which were under the obligation to provide Boers with labour. When they refused, certainly before 1860, they could be raided, and women and children were captured, along with cattle, sheep, goats, hoes and grain.[103] This was discouraged however, as it was self-defeating for the Boers who relied on local African labour.[104]

But based on contemporary evidence and oral tradition it seems it was not only the Boers and their allies who captured slaves in the area, and captives did not only find themselves in Boer households.[105] It is important to note that slavery as practiced by the Boers built on older African systems of slave-owning.[106] What is clear is that people in the lowveld and escarpment were surrounded by some of the most prolific slave-capturing and raiding polities, not only Boers from the north-west, but also Ngungunyane and his sons Mzila and Mawere from the east, and Swazi from the south.[107] According to one of Scully's informants from Phalaborwa, 'Swatzi and Shangaans used to steal children and some are still in Swaziland and Mocambique....They used to come at midnight and enter into villages. The people realised this and began closing entrances to villages and killing them.'[108] Also in 1861, the Berlin missionary Merensky travelled through the region and described how the 'restless and hurried' 'Baroka and Makwapa' who lived in small scattered and shifting settlements in the lowveld 'were objects of slave hunts of stronger tribes.'[109]

It was not only powerful groups that terrorised the local population. From the 1820s to the late 1830s, the bakgema, or cannibals, arrived in the area, at some stage settling where the present-day farm 'Turkey' is situated. The Bakgema were a dislocated group of people fleeing war and famine in the interior, who had learnt to survive by 'eating others'. This

[102] Ibid, pp. 195 - 197.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid, p. 197.
[105] P. Delius, 'Recapturing Captives and Conversations with Cannibals' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 36 (2), 2010, pp. 14 -15, Eldredge, 'Delagoa Bay', pp. 151 – 153.
[106] Delius, 'Recapturing Captives', p. 14.
[107] Eldredge, 'Delagoa Bay', p. 141.
[108] Scully, 'Phalaborwa', p. 325.
[109] 'Merensky's diary', p. 78.

probably referred to a life based on raiding others rather than actually eating human flesh – although vivid stories of cannibals eating human flesh exist.[110] Small bands of men raided villages, or attacked locals as they ventured out to collect wild foods and hunt small game.[111] In a later period, Merensky described the fear with which families living in isolated kraals held the elephant hunters, who used whips made from rhinoceros hides to force local people to carry their equipment and bounty. Refusal to do so could incur the lethal wrath of these skilled hunters. [112]

Indentured labour was imposed on defeated chiefdoms in the last decades of 19th century, for example the Nzdundza in 1883.[113] At the end of the 1894 war between the Boers and Modjadji, Magoeba and other chiefs in the Wolkberg area, the punishment meted out to chiefs and their followers was exceedingly brutal. Magoeba was captured and beheaded on the spot without trial. Mamathola, Mogoboya, Modjadji, Mashuti and their headmen were taken to Pretoria as prisoners of war. They and their followers forfeited cattle, money and goods to the amount of thousands of pounds and thousands of head of cattle to defray the costs of war.[114] A portion of the penalty went to the government, the rest was divided amongst the Boer commando. Mashuti's followers were sent to the Lydenburg district where they would live and work as labour tenants on white farms, in groups of no more than five families (under the Squatters Law).[115] Some of Mamathola's followers were indentured to farmers in the Hammanskraal area.[116] Mamathola's people were forced to move to a small location assigned to them. Boers burnt to the ground between 600 and 700 huts that had been built outside of Modjadji's location.[117] (Africans' refusal to accept the new, constricted, boundaries of the location had been one of the causes of the war).

Some groups managed to resist raiders and subjection throughout the period. With their own cache of weapons, secure in fortified kopjes, and using special magic to fool the Swazi

[110] Delius, 'Captives', pp. 16 – 17; Scully, 'Phalaborwa', pp. 320 – 324.
[111] Scully, 'Phalaborwa', pp. 322 – 323.
[112] Merensky's diary. p.96.
[113] P. Delius, 'The Ndzundza Ndebele: indenture and the making of ethnic identity' in Bonner, P., Hofmeyer, I., James, D., *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989.
[114] H. W. Grimsehl, 'Onluste in Modjadjiland, 1890 – 1894', *Archives Yearbook,* 1955, pp. 245 – 250.
[115] Ibid, p. 246.
[116] Van Warmelo, 'The Ba Letswalô or Banarene', p. 9.
[117] Grimsehl, 'Onluste', p. 249.

into leaving their settlements alone, some of the stronger Phalaborwa groups were better able to resist raiders. In the 1830s, at Sealeng where Chief Makikele lived, the Swazi were killed, 'the corpses… were skinned, beheaded and impaled on poles around the hill as a warning and to frighten the enemy.'[118] The Phalaborwa also resisted Albasini, who tried to raid them. The Mašišimale – one of the Phalaborwa groups – paid tax for the first time only in 1902 or 1903.[119]

Tribute and Tax Collection

Tax raids were part of the pattern of building wealth and power through extraction. Tax raids often ended in people being captured as part of the *opgaaf* tribute demanded by Boers. Many of the groups living in the lowveld were taxed from the 1880s, in the north they paid tax to Albasini, in other areas they paid tax to different officials. Tax collection in this period was characterised by 'whimsy and corruption', and conducted by 'ruthless and energetic' 'amateurs'. [120] It was possible for smaller chiefs and groups to avoid paying taxes by hiding from tax collectors. But the violent style of extracting tax – which included tying people to wagon wheels and flogging them – certainly instilled a sense of fear of the might of the Boers.[121]

The Pedi also tried to raise tribute amongst groups on the lowveld side of the Drakensberg, up till the 1870s.The Letswalo people refused and were attacked, the Letswalo chiefs managed to avoid paying tribute by hiding. Mosothi, a renowned warrior who had purchased a gun after working for Europeans, who was in line for the Letswalo chieftaincy, formed an alliance with other groups and attacked the Pedi and drove them off.[122] After this he gained independence from the broader Letswalo or Narene group.

The Mosothi example shows how fluid the political scene was at this time. Tribute and tax collection implied subordination to a more powerful ruling group. The small chieftaincies and groups living in the region responded in different ways, sometimes maintaining

[118] Scully, 'Phalaborwa', p. 328.
[119] Van Warmelo, 'The Batubatse of Mašišimale', p. 51.
[120] J. Krikler, *Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below: The Agrarian Transvaal at the Turn of the Century,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 146.
[121] See for example P. Delius, (1986) 'Abel Erasmus: Power and Profit in the Eastern Transvaal' in W. Beinart, P. Delius, S. Trapido (eds.). *Putting a Plough to the Ground* Johannesburg, Ravan Press, pp. 176 – 217.
[122] Van Warmelo, 'Ba Letswalo', pp. 7 -8.

independence, sometimes not. In 1882 when a Republican Native Commissioner known as *Sexwataxwatane*[123] came to collect tax from the Bakoni of Mametsa, 'He did not want to recognise all the chiefs as independent and required some of them to consider themselves the subjects of others.' Two chiefs he met on this occasion agreed, on fear of violence, to subject themselves to Sekôrôrô. Another, Sekoko, refused. 'Even after a flogging, he still refused, so they left him alone.'[124] They had their own rainmakers and so did not get rain from Modjadji like many other groups, which gave them another element of independence. Nevertheless, at some time they recognised 'for safety's sake, and in a vague way, they supremacy of the *Maxakala* tribe (*Mafefe's).*[125]

Agriculture

Parts of the area, in particular the foothills of the Drakensberg and along the major rivers, had enormous agricultural potential. Agriculturalists traded grain with local iron-producing communities, and with itinerant traders and travellers. But agricultural productivity depended on political circumstances. Periods of warfare and intensive raiding were enormously destructive for agricultural production.

The abandoned stonewalled settlements and terraced fields of Bokoni, an area further south of that studied here, but connected to the area through trade, are perhaps the most striking examples of the effects of war and raiding on people's ability to prosper in agriculture and pastoralism.[126] The settlements, which stretched over 150 kilometres along the eastern escarpment north to south, and 50 kilometres east to west, had thrived from about the 1500s, specialising in agriculture. By 1830 they were 'almost entirely abandoned and the terraces slowly fell into disrepair'.[127] The fall of Bokoni was most likely due to the rise of centralised, predatory states, and the creation of 'a new order built around the logic of extraction and war'.[128]

[123] Unfortunately I have not been able to find out his European name.
[124] Van Warmelo, 'The Bakoni of Mametša', p. 45.
[125] Ibid, p. 48.
[126] P. Delius and S. Schirmer, 'Order, Openness, and Economic Change in Precolonial Southern Africa: A Perspective from the Bokoni Terraces' *Journal of African History,* 55, 2014; A. Schoeman, P. Delius, T. Maggs, *Forgotten World: The Stonewalled Settlements of the Mpumalanga Escarpment,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014.
[127] Delius and Schirmer, 'Order' p. 41.
[128] Ibid, p. 37.

Evidence from the lowveld and northern Drakensburg region suggests a similar decline in agriculture in periods of warfare. People became scared to work in isolated fields and to collect wild food away from fortified villages. They protected themselves from raiding parties or those attempting to extract tribute by retreating to mountain valleys and caves, and moving closer to one another in order to be able to assemble quickly into defensive groups. Smaller isolated households used their superior knowledge of the area to melt into the bush and run from attackers. This pattern of retreat and fear was a recurring one at different stages through the century.

In 1899 Grandjean recalled the impact of the raids and battles of Mawewe against people in the eastern lowveld:

> Ten years of battles and of "razzias" from which the country has still not recovered. Initially there were five years of continual wars when one could not even think of working in the fields. People survived on roots and branches of palms. Women and children followed armies to get their part of the meagre booty. For the next five years there was less fighting but people were ceaselessly on the lookout. Each year Mawewe's people came back to ravage fields and burn villages.[129]

Speaking to Van Warmelo in 1942, elders recalled how 'in the past' women spaced their children by five years so that, when needing to flee from enemies, the other children could run while their mother carried her infant.[130] Thus, van Warmelo suggested 'in pre-European days the tribes were small, and the few inhabitants hardly noticeable in the vast space of bush, through which only narrow footpaths marked the ancient routes of commerce and travel.'[131] By the late 1890s, white occupation farmers, too, were in poverty, 'broken by the almost continual commando service demanded by a decade of wars mounted by Pretoria against the northern Transvaal chiefdoms.'[132]

In 1903, a combination of drought, and difficulty in obtaining oxen and ploughs (which was probably due to the impact of war) led to poor crops in many parts of the district. The Commissioner for Native Affairs, Godfrey Lagden, also attributed the poor crop to the

[129] E. Ritchken, 'Leadership and conflict in Bushbuckridge: struggles to define moral economics within the context of rapidly transforming political economies.' Unpublished PhD thesis, Wits University, 1995, p. 41.
[130] Van Warmelo, 'Banarene of Sekôrôrô', p. 34.
[131] Ibid, p. 35.
[132] Harries, 'Exclusion', p. 93.

quality of seed, writing that 'the same seed has been used without change for a considerable period of time.'[133] A famine gripped parts of the country, including the Northern Division (the official term for the region including the Zoutpansberg, escarpment and lowveld). This shortage of food was met by 'local traders and transport riders, who carried grain to all parts of the District where it was wanted'[134]- an event remembered by Shinangana, an old Tsonga man whose chronicle of history was recorded by Junod: 'Mugayo! Ndlala! The mealie flour bought from the Whites on account of the famine!'[135]

War and drought was not the only impediment to agricultural productivity. The combination of distant markets, poor roads and slow transport was also an issue. In 1860 the Portuguese trader das Neves explained that the reason Boers did not 'bring forward the hidden wealth of the soil' of Zoutpansberg was not through indolence or ignorance of the great fertility of the land, but because there was no good road linking the area to the sea ports.[136]

A critical shift in the agricultural economy took place in 1896 – 1898, when the country was devastated by Rinderperst. While the rinderpest destroyed existing herds, it had a different effect in the northern lowveld. Until the rinderpest, the area was not suited to cattle. After the rinderpest, which wiped out trypanosomiasis-carrying buffalo, cattle-keeping became viable.[137] Thus, it was possible to introduce cattle into the lowveld, which changed the role of agriculture in the lowveld economy.

Increased Labour Migrancy 1870s

The long tradition of leaving home and going on promising hunting or trading expeditions gave way to new patterns of labour migrancy, as old opportunities shut down and new ones opened up. People living in the region were not insulated from broader processes of economic and political change. Thus, the Phalaborwa chief Makikele, a supplier of iron weapons and controller of the local trade in ivory from the 1830s to 1850s, was succeeded by his son, Lebado, the first man to allow Christian worship in Phalaborwa, and who worked

[133] Transvaal Colony Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1903-1904, p. 11.
[134] Ibid, Native Commissioner's Annual Report, Northern Division, p. 20.
[135] Junod, *Life vol. 2*, p. 546.
[136] Ferreira, *das Neves,* p. 56.
[137] A. P. Cartwright, *Phalaborwa: Mining City of the Future,* Cape Town, Johannesburg, London: Purnell, 1972, p.5.

as a migrant labourer for European industry from the 1870s: 'an experience which may account for his rise in prestige as a big man and culture broker in his time.'[138]

From the 1870s new opportunities arose, locally and further afield. In 1867 white settlers moved to the Woodbush and began exploiting timber. In 1870 - 1871, diamonds were discovered in what later became Kimberley. In 1867 white settlers arrived in the Houtboschberg (Woodbush) Mountains and began to exploit local timber. In 1871 the Houtboschberg goldfields were discovered, and in 1887 the town of Haenertsberg was founded. In 1889 the lowveld town of Leydsdorp was established as diggers rushed to the Selati goldfields in the Murchison range.[139] In 1873 gold was discovered in what became Pilgrims Rest, in 1886 in the Witwatersrand. The towns of Pietersburg and Trichardtsdorp (Louis Trichardt) were founded in 1886 and 1899 respectively, and were based primarily on agriculture and trade. The development of a mining and timber industry in South Africa, the growth of a white settler population and the services set up for them led to an increase in labour opportunities available to Africans.

Junod remarks with regard to a decline in African traders and trading expeditions by 1913 that Tsonga traders preferred wage labour to going on trading expeditions 'which brought less money and were attended by more danger'.[140] This marked a shift in patterns of mobility. Furthermore, 'the fashion of going to the Transvaal mines has become so universal that a Thonga would think he had in some sort failed if he had not made a stay in town.'[141] Although Junod may have specifically been referring to the Tsonga living in Mozambique, it is highly likely that this was a broader pattern in the northern and eastern Transvaal too.

By 1903 labour migrancy was an important part of the local economy in the Northern division of the Transvaal. In that year 20,892 passes were issued, 'practically all were to leave the [northern] District for the mines and elsewhere'. The mines were not the only major employers,

> A large proportion of Natives belonging to the Tshangaana tribe living in this country seem to have an aversion to going to the mines. This does not preclude them, however, from going to

[138] Scully, 'Phalaborwa', p. 342.
[139] L. Changuion, *Haenertsburg 100: 1887 – 1987,* Pietersburg: Review Printers, 1987, p. 14.
[140] Junod, *Life vol 2,* p. 147.
[141] Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* p. 147; also see Harries with regard to Mozambique, ,

> Pretoria and elsewhere for domestic and other service, and this they do in considerable numbers.[142]

Establishing hegemony

A series of wars, ending in the South African war, changed the political landscape. Imperial wars against the Zulu and the Pedi from 1878 to 1879 led to the defeat of 'the two most powerful independent polities in the region'.[143] British Imperialism also penned the Swazi 'back inside their borders'. Thus 'When Britain withdrew from the area in 1881, she left behind an immeasurably stronger S.A.R. [South African Republic]'[144]

It would be another two decades before the political situation in the north eastern Transvaal was finally resolved. An important part of this process was, as in other areas, the slow encroachment of white settlers onto land surveyed under a new property system. After the evacuation of Zoutpansberg in 1867 when unrest in the region threatened the town, it was only in the 1880s, with the Occupation Law, that white settlers came back to the region in significant numbers. The Occupation Farm Law was intended to extend the government's control over land into the northern areas of the country that had not yet been settled by whites and continued to be held under the de facto authority of African chiefs, or independent groups. The occupation law 'entitled any white male eighteen years or older to a farm of between 500 and 1,500 morgen in the Zoutpansberg (and Woodbush) areas, under the condition that they be "beneficially occupied" either personally or by a white substitute.'[145] A further condition of acquiring a farm under the Occupation Law was that landowners had to provide military service to the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek (ZAR), in order to 'counter the perceived threat from African populations' in these frontier areas.[146]

Thus, from the late 1880s, people living in scattered kraals in the mountains close to Pietersburg found their lives disrupted when settlers arrived in their wagons and announced they were the owners of the land. Sometimes referred to as chiefs by the people they

[142] Transvaal Colony Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1902-1903, p. 21.
[143] Delius, *Land Belongs to Us*, p. 246.
[144] Bonner, *Kings, Commoners* p. 221.
[145] M. Mulaudzi, 'U Shuma Bulasi', p. 54.
[146] Ibid.

subordinated, these landowners made it clear that to remain on the land, families had to pay rent, or provide labour. Landowners were part of a complicated hierarchy, they engaged with subordinate headmen on the farms, who became the point of contact between landowners and tenants. Landowners were involved in complicated relationships, sometimes conflictual, sometimes friendly and symbiotic, with local chiefs.[147] Tenants rarely gave in easily to the demands of the new landowners for rent and labour, feeling that the land they lived on belonged to them. But if they refused to accede to the demands, they were evicted. Eviction, undertaken by local farmers, sometimes with the assistance of police, involved burning down tenant's huts, often with their belongings still inside. Even Sarah Heckford, the 'lady trader of the Transvaal', friend of Modjadji and nicknamed 'Mamusagiana' (meaning 'the kind woman who has quick movements'), threatened to burn down her tenants huts should they continue to refuse to pay 10/- rent, or provide twenty days labour.[148] In this tense situation, both landowners and tenants sometimes resorted to violence, either to exert, or resist control.

The Boer wars against Modjadji, Magoeba, Mamathola and other chiefs led to their defeat in 1894, and they were forced to accept their new locations and the fact that land was now privately owned by white settlers and companies. The South African War seemed to promise a reverse of this defeat. Africans were encouraged by the British to take up arms against the Boers, to appropriate Boer cattle and loot their houses. Many African auxiliaries were well paid by the British, and were promised a share in the cattle they looted.[149] For the Africans defeated by the Boers in the past, and especially for those living under onerous conditions of tenancy under their landlords, 'the war against the Boer commandos must have been associated indissolubly with an escape from bondage and the restitution of a world of which they had been dispossessed.'[150] Many Africans in the northern Transvaal, particularly the Haenertsburg and Spelonken area, returned to or continued living on their

[147] See M. Mulaudzi for further discussion of this topic, and of Sarah Heckford' s complicated relationship with her tenants, chiefs and white authority. Mulaudzi, 'U Shuma Bulasi', pp. 48 – 51.
[148] V. Allen, *Lady Trader: A Biography of Mrs Sarah Heckford,* London: Collins, 1979, pp. 185, 197.
[149] Krikler, *Revolution*, p. 15 – 17.
[150] Ibid, p. 14.

land, under the impression that they were once more masters of their own land, and the Boers would be 'expelled'.[151]

When the South African War ended in 1902 the British Crown and the Colonial Government became the supreme power in most of South Africa. The widespread belief amongst African groups that the Boers were gone and the land was theirs was soon dispelled. Despite initial 'restlessness and unnatural excitement' as Africans were made to understand the truth of the matter – 'that the country was not theirs; that we had not fought to give it to them, and most of all that the owners went back and still owned the farms the Natives now imagined to be theirs'[152] – the government was able to exert its authority over the enormous African population. For a few years they struggled with some Venda chiefs who still claimed independence. Resistance to Boer and colonial rule in the Zoutpansberg, and the strength of Makhado in particular, meant that some Venda groups had remained 'de facto' independent, until 1898.[153]

The government passed the Disarmament Act, the Native Tax Ordinance, and the Game and Pass Ordinances, and made significant progress in getting people to comply within a few years. This they did partly through diplomatic skill rather than bullying in persuading people to comply.[154] Being terribly understaffed, with 25 officials doing the work that 150 officials had done, quite inefficiently, under the ZAR, the Native Affairs Department was also reliant on the co-operation of chiefs and 'native police'.[155] The staff contingent for the 'Northern Division, a vast area of 25,000 square miles carrying a population of 200,000 Africans, was five sub-commissioners in 1903.[156] Native Commissioner for the Northern Division, C. A. Wheelwright, made special thanks in his annual report to chiefs and indunas for encouraging Africans to surrender their arms in 1903. He noted in the same report, 'that the Chiefs liked the collection [of taxes] to take place close to their Locations is shown by the manner in which they interested themselves in making the people pay up.'[157] Finally, the government used 'brute coercive force': time in prison with hard labour, excessively large

[151] Ibid, p. 21.
[152] Transvaal Colony Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1902 – 1903, p. 18.
[153] Mulaudzi, 'U Shuma Bulasi', p. 36.
[154] Krikler, *Revolution,* pp. 45, 51.
[155] Transvaal Colony Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1902 – 1903, p. 2.
[156] Ibid, p. 3.
[157] Ibid, p. 21.

fines, and lashing.[158] For example the courts passed 'exemplary sentences'[159] on Africans who were caught breaking Game Laws, which acted as a powerful disincentive, or at least encouraged greater discretion in 'poaching'. Native Commissioners were given 'judicial powers' 'at least equivalent to the powers of resident magistrates in civil and criminal cases between Natives', and they could fine Africans up to £10, imprison them for up to six months and evict them under the Squatters Law.[160]

In some parts of the district where Boers and other whites had not settled, where most land was crown land, or owned by companies and other absentee landlords, the impact of the South African war was not as great as in other parts of the country. Furthermore, the extent to which chiefs were incorporated into the system of governance was still limited, particularly in areas where chiefs did not have locations (the granting of which I discuss in the next chapter), which was a large part of the Transvaal. In the Northern Division in 1904, 63 chiefs were listed in an ethnological table, an unknown number more were not listed, simply alluded to as 'various' Venda and Shangaan chiefs, but there were only 18 formal locations.[161]

Transformations by the turn of the century

By the end of the nineteenth century, wars and slave raiding had ceased, with important consequences for the region. People no longer needed to fear working in the fields, they could move down from the mountains. This may have allowed them to engage more productively in agriculture, although other factors prevented hugely profitable engagement with the colonial market for those living in the lowveld. (Which I will look at in chapter three) Populations could increase, which on the one hand meant that more labour could be available in a household, but also resulted in increased pressure on land. With peaceful conditions, people no longer had to seek protection of chiefs from raiders and soldiers in exchange for their loyalty, labour and tribute.

Powerful chiefs had been conquered by Boers and British, land had been taken by white settlers, and this undermined the ability of chiefs to exert control over people. For many

[158] Krikler, *Revolution,* pp. 47 – 48, 53.
[159] Transvaal Colony Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1902 – 1903, p. 44.
[160] Krikler, *Revolution,* p. 58.
[161] Transvaal Colony Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1903-1904, pp. 63, 70 - 71.

people the authorities with most control of their lives were farmers, landowners or company agents who demanded rent and labour, the local Native Commissioner and his police who demanded various forms of tax, and their employers who stipulated the conditions of their labour, but paid wages in return.

Mines, timber plantations, factories and the towns that sprang up around these industries introduced a variety of new economic activities in which people could engage. Wages helped pay for the onerous taxes that the Boer and later colonial government introduced. They also allowed people further independence from chiefs.

Wages, the government and traders, played an increasingly important role in alleviating famine, which had in the past caused people to migrate or *khonza* to a chief. Employers paid wages, wages circulated in rural areas, traders met demand for maize when there was a shortage, and the government attempted to ensure that in such times, maize was not exorbitantly priced. Sometimes, the government brought in maize itself to distribute to starving people.

The imposition of tax laws is often given most of the credit for 'forcing' rural Africans – described often as 'peasants' into the migrant labour system.[162] Certainly it affected people's ability to save money from wages or spend money on consumer items, for example Sarah Heckford, trading with African communities in the Zoutpansberg, was told by Chief Makapaan that she would have to accept maize as payment for her wares rather than cash, which people needed to keep aside for tax.[163] But as I have shown in this section, the local economy had been in flux, agriculture had not been a mainstay for some people. Needing to pay taxes gave people more reason to work for wages, but it was not the cause of labour migrancy.

Conclusion

The view of rural society offered in this chapter stands in sharp contrast to the portrayals offered by historians such as Bundy and Krikler, who see the state and capital destroying a self-sufficient egalitarian peasantry by 1913, or earlier. Krikler for example provides a static image of a classless peasant society with full access to the land for their needs and

[162] Krikler, *Revolution*, p. 7.
[163] Allen, *Lady Trader*, p. 134.

accumulation. There are no 'exploiters' in African society, and the tribute expected of families by chiefs is only really a form of 'insurance', like taxes to a benevolent welfare state.[164] It is only the Boers in this portrayal who seize 'captives and booty in wars against black rural communities' and impose 'forced labour and 'tax raids' which often took the form of massive exercises in armed robbery'.[165]

This region demonstrates particularly effectively that Pre-colonial African societies were rarely static, inward-looking and self-sufficient. Migrancy of various forms was common, and a way to accumulate wealth and prestige. Agriculture was important for rural societies, but there were many constraints to production, including war and drought. Some homesteads routinely produced few crops and relied on trade for their supply of grain. Markets long preceded the colonial economy.

African societies were socially differentiated, and to romanticise about 'egalitarian' communities is to misunderstand pre-colonial and colonial economies and society. Demands for tax and tribute was not the reserve of the Boers and British alone – it was a much older form of extraction that some powerful rulers attempted to impose on smaller groups.

The idea that a group lived in any one place since 'time immemorial' or even for the majority of the nineteenth century, is deeply problematic. Populations and politics in the nineteenth century were fluid, territories contested, groups mobile, and this has implications for any programme of restitution which seeks to discover who the 'true owners' were of land.

[164] Krikler, *Revolution*, pp. 6 – 7.
[165] Krikler, *Revolution,* p. 8.

Chapter Two

Living on the Land: Authority and Land Settlement 1902 to 1947

Turning land into property

The Boers introduced a new property regime in South Africa in the nineteenth century, but turning formal title into concrete reality was a long, slow and often violent process. In 1846 the Swazi ceded to the Boers all the territory between the Olifants River in the north and the Crocodile and Elands River to the south. This included the area of the eastern Transvaal that later included the districts of Sabi and Pilgrims Rest, but excluded what later became the Letaba district. Delius makes the point that in this period 'there was no uniform legal system or notion of property to which all the parties subscribed':

> The Swazi rulers ceded land beyond the heartland of their kingdom. They exercised a loose, if occasionally dramatic, hegemony over some of the population settled on this land. The Maroteng [Pedi] ceded rights of occupation but clearly did not believe that they had surrendered ultimate control. The Trekkers believed that the land had been transformed into their property and set about distributing it as private property amongst the members of their community. Which view would ultimately triumph would be determined by the ability of those who held it to enforce it on those who did not. The stage was set for conflict.[1]

Boers began to settle along the escarpment and in the mountains surrounding the lowveld. Here, Africans experienced the impact of the arrival of white settlers much earlier than those in the lowveld. In 1844, Grootfontein became one of the first farms to be settled in what became the Pilgrims Rest area. It was later bought by P. J de Villiers, who, as a *veld kornet* responsible for acquiring labour and tribute, took control of a large part of the area, a right that was legitimised by his claim to be owner of the land. [2] A number of Mapulana chiefs and a scattered population were amongst the first in the region to experience the overlordship of a Boer landowner:

> The people are very pressurised by P.V. [P.J de Villiers] In return for their staying there they have to give him taxes every year which he collects himself by coming with the wagon and the people have to give him maize. If they refuse, he takes the first best piece of livestock.

[1] P. Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us,* Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984, p. 33.
[2] P. Delius, M. Hay, R. Douglas and N. Leontsinis, 'Report on the Historical Validity of Land Claims by the Moletele Community and Others Concerning Farms in the Maruleng Region' unpublished report, 2014, p. 58.

> Moreover, when he goes on a hunt or into the bush to fell wood, they always have to be at his service without remuneration. Whoever does not come when he calls has to pay maize or livestock. One of the people of Korann always has to guard his horses which graze there. … Thus the people are very depressed and long for liberation and are intent on moving away from there completely.[3]

Those chiefs living in the shadow of Boer control had limited authority over their followers. [4] Aside from the Boers, local Mapulana chiefs also feared the Pedi paramount, Sekhukhune, as well as the Swazi. As a result, some chiefs and their followers lived in the valleys and inaccessible parts of the Drakensberg and Blyde River Canyon, trying to maintain some independence from the powerful groups encircling them.[5]

In 1848 the town of Soutpansbergdorp or Schoemansdal had been established, but was abandoned in 1867 – the Boers were unable to maintain their authority in the region. In the Wolkberg and Woodbush mountains, just east of Pietersburg, the first whites began to arrive in the late 1860s. Some of the white settlers who evacuated Soutpansbergdorp in 1867 'moved to the Woodbush, where they established themselves as woodcutters', the village they set up was known as Houtbosdorp.[6] By 1881 the population of Houtbosdorp had grown to 42 families.[7] In 1886 the ZAR government, in an attempt to establish control in the Zoutpansberg district established the town of Pietersburg and promulgated the Land Occupation Law No. 8 of 1886, which offered free land to white settlers in the area. The settlers arrived in the Koedoesvalley, the Woodbush Mountains, in the lowveld near Duiwelskloof and near Heanertsburg. A brief gold rush in the late 1880s brought more prospectors and settlers to the area.[8]

The northern and eastern Transvaal lowveld was the last frontier in South Africa. It was home to numerous chieftaincies which had maintained a shaky independence from Boer, Swazi and Pedi control, aided by complex and changing alliances and occasional retreat to mountain refuges. As I discussed in the previous chapter however, the power of the most dominant chiefs was broken by the British and Boers, and the weaker chiefs were forced to

[3] G. Trümpelmann, 'A journey to the Mapulana' *Berliner Missions Berichte,*1870, p. 101
[4] Trümpelmann, 'Mapulana' pp. 97- 104, cited in Delius et al 'Moletele', pp. 56 – 59.
[5] Delius et al, 'Moletele', pp. 56 – 62.
[6] L. Changuion, 'Haenertsburg 100: 1887 – 1987' Pietersburg, Review Printers, 1987. p. 8.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid, pp. 9 – 12.

accept the authority and demands for taxation by the government, at risk of heavy fines, imprisonment and lashes. During the South African War the British won some support from local African groups who despised the Boers, and who expected the British to allow them to take back their land. This did not happen. Nevertheless, when the British took control in 1902, they were able to exhort their dominance by ordering disarmament, imposing new rents, hunting ordinances, and the dog tax, and extracting tax more efficiently. But it was a slow process to gain administrative control.

Even so, and even in a period when the British government was doing what it could to create a submissive tenantry that would serve Boer masters, or work in the mines:

> Of all the administrative regions of the Transvaal, it was the north – i.e. the gigantic Zoutpansberg District, 'an area almost as large as the kingdoms of Belgium and Holland added together' – whose peasantry on private property most probably enjoyed the greatest independence from landlords. Although over 300,000 black people lived in this overwhelmingly rural area, the size of the landowning class there was smaller than in any other area of the Colony. The Zoutpansberg's total white population was less than 6,000 persons, and of this number a relatively low percentage was constituted by landowning families.[9]

Many of those whites in the northern Transvaal were 'migratory'.[10]

Thus, while the new government established fuller control over the large scattered population of the eastern and northern Transvaal in terms of getting rents and taxes, most of those in the northern Transvaal and lowveld would not experience the full effects of white settlement until well into the twentieth century. Malaria, sleeping sickness and horse-sickness deterred white settlers.[11] In 1904 the white population of the entire region comprising Barberton and Pilgrims Rest districts was 6,799 people, of which 1,214 lived in the town of Barberton. [12] By 1921 the white population of Letaba district was 1,732, and Pilgrims Rest district 1,678, of which the combined population of the towns of Sabie,

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[9] J. Krikler, *Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below: The Agrarian Transvaal at the Turn of the Century,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993*,* p. 109.
[10] Ibid.
[11] R. Packard, '"Malaria Blocks Development" Revisited: The Role of Disease in the History of Agricultural Development in the Eastern and Northern Transvaal Lowveld, 1890 – 1960' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 27 (3) 2001, pp. 598 – 605.
[12] T.J.D Fair, 'Population' in *The South Eastern Transvaal Lowveld: A Survey of the Resources and Development of the Southern Lowveld Region of the Eastern Transvaal,* Lowveld Regional Development Association, 1954, p.49.

Graskop and Pilgrims Rest was 697.[13] In 1917 when the Chairman of the Eastern Transvaal Natives Land Committee asked Stanford, the sub Native Commissioner for the Haenertsburg district, whether, if low lying areas were free from malaria 'there would be serious objection to either black or white being settled in the lower lying parts?' Stanford answered:

> For many years to come it will be an absolute impossibility. The greater portion of the malarious territory is heavily watered. Pools are left in which the mosquito can breed… Then, again, the greater portion of the country to the east of Thabina and north of the Letaba is intensely hot – 120 degrees in the shade, and in, addition to malaria, there is blackwater. Every white man who has ever trekked into the harmony block and remained there for any length of time is dead. On Burgersdorp 7 white men died.[14]

In 1921, potential settlers on the land north of the Olifants Rivers and south of the Groot Letaba were described as 'pioneers' who would face 'considerable difficulties' in terms of settling there. Surveyors of the area wrote, '[d]uring the summer season the heat is excessive… residence during the summer months can only be continued with considerable risk of contracting fever…Lions and small carnivore are plentiful and will prove a handicap to settlement… No local markets exist.'[15] The government and land companies were the primary owners of land, along with some individual absentee landowners. Large parts of the district were only surveyed in 1922.[16] By 1936 the population of Letaba district had increased to 3,600, and Pilgrims Rest to 5,518.[17]

Although old paths used by traders criss-crossed the region, these were not developed enough to make transport by wagon easy or quick. In 1921, 'The road from the farm Neukmaarop to the Oliphants [sic] River and on to the Selati… leaves little to be desired. The road from the farm Farrell along the north bank of the Selati is a hunters [sic] road and no part thereof is good and some parts very bad.'[18] The main road to Gravelotte was, relatively speaking, 'in reasonably good order', although in 1927 the roads beyond Thabina, heading east towards the Letaba estate ranch and the Kruger Park was described as 'more or less a

[13] Ibid; Packard, 'Malaria', p. 597.
[14] U.G 32 – '18 'Eastern Transvaal Natives Land Committee', 1918, p. 89.
[15] SANA LDE 1093 20741, Report on Inspection of Government Land District of Pietersburg, Ward Low Country. 13 September 1921.
[16] Ibid, Survey of Land Between Groot Letaba and Olifants Rivers and South West of the Selati Railway Line District Pietersburg, 4 July 1922.
[17] Packard, 'Malaria', p. 597.
[18] SANA LDE 1093 20741, Report on Inspection of Government Land District of Pietersburg, Ward Low Country. 13 September 1921.

mystic maze…'and the main road 'very difficult to follow all the way from Rubbervale.'[19] The Delagoa Bay railway was extended to Tzaneen in 1912. In the Pilgrims Rest district, 'Kowyn's Pass' linking the Highveld to the lowveld was only completed between 1927 and 1932.[20]

These conditions also made administration very difficult. Government officials could only visit the region in winter, and spent much of their time travelling to distant kraals on foot given the poor condition of the narrow footpaths and the dangers of horsesickness. When horses were used, horsesickness was common, and administrators working in the district regularly fell ill with malaria.[21]

Thus, in this portion of the lowveld, the implications of the new property regime were felt relatively late – only really beginning in the 1920s, and becoming more serious in the 1930s.

Pattern of Land Distribution

The first thing to note about the pattern of land distribution was that most people settled along the foothills of the escarpment, where there was more water and better soil. But over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century the lowveld had also been increasingly settled by groups moving west from Mozambique. Some of these immigrants settled under existing chiefdoms in the better watered parts of the region, others settled in small scattered units on otherwise uninhabited land. They were able to do so because they brought with them drought resistant crops, methods of cultivation adapted to this kind of environment, and a relative immunity to malaria.[22]

Until 1905 it was difficult for Africans to purchase, or otherwise acquire land in the Transvaal.[23] Some Africans were able to purchase land in the names of missionaries or officials, but this was mainly in the western Transvaal. At the Retrocession in 1881 a Native Locations Commission was established to demarcate 'Native Locations' to the 'large Native

[19] Wits Historical Papers (WHP), A1505 Bateman, General Notes re: Letaba Ranch, 1939.
[20] NTS 1780 78/276, Report on Natives of Pilgrims Rest District, Assistant Native Commissioner, Pilgrims Rest, to The Chief Native Commissioner, Pretoria, 13 January 1933.
[21] See for example Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1905-1906, p. 45.
[22] For these processes see P. Harries, 'Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga Speakers of South Africa', in Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* London, James Currey, 1989, pp. 82 - 85; E. Ritchken, 'Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge: Struggles to Define Moral Economies Within the Context of Rapidly Transforming Political Economies' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1995, pp. 37 – 48.
[23] Transvaal Colony Native Affairs Department (TCNAD), *Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs relative to the Acquisition and Tenure of Land by Natives in the Transvaal*, Pretoria: Government Printer, 1904, p. 22.

tribes' which they could 'occupy in peace'.[24] Only two of the many chiefs from the Letaba District were granted locations, namely Sekgopo and Modjadji in 1890 and 1892 respectively. In 1893 a further resolution was passed instructing the government to offer locations to chiefs for whom no location had yet been demarcated. In Zoutpansberg District as a whole, between 1884 and 1896 18 'tribes' were granted locations, while a further 22 'tribes' were promised locations.[25] In 1904 the British government revived the Native Location Commission and promised locations to many more chiefs in the area. In the Haenertsburg district only four government locations were 'actually defined or established' in 1904, the rest were only demarcated in 1907/08. This reflected the relatively slow incursion of white settlers into the district (one of the reasons for demarcating locations was to provide a place for 'tribes' to live in the face of white settlement). In the Bushbuckridge/Pilgrims Rest area further south east, no locations at all were promised or granted to chiefs.

By 1903, not a single black individual out of over 300,000 Africans owned land in the entire Northern Division, an area of 25,654 square miles. In 1904, two farms were owned by Africans. About 47,245 Africans lived in the 18 'tribal' locations which were 519,731 acres in extent, 146,254 Africans lived on 196 privately owned farms covering an area of 858,702 acres, and 126,520 Africans lived on 405,362 acres of government or Crown land, 1596 lived in towns.[26]

Thus, private landowners were the principle authority over land for 45.7 percent of the entire African population in the northern Transvaal, although outside of the more heavily populated white areas around Haenertsburg, Pietersburg, and the Spelonken, the extent of their authority was usually at most to collect some rent, where they could.[27] In the Haenertsburg district, although there were only four locations, forty-four farms were occupied by Africans and termed 'undefined locations on private land' and there were six more 'undefined locations on government farms or crown lands'. [28] Most of the land in the

[24] Ibid, pp. 33, 46.
[25] Ibid, p. 73.
[26] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report 1903 – 1904, Appendix I Native Population Return, p. 62.
[27] See Krikler, *Revolution,* p. 109.
[28] Transvaal Native Affairs Department, *Acquisition and Tenure of Land by Natives in the Transvaal*, pp. 80, 86-89, 94.

region was uninhabited – without dams or boreholes providing access to water, it was uninhabitable. Those inhabited farms and locations were relatively densely occupied. In government locations in the Northern division there were about 72.4 people per square mile, in 'undefined locations' on private farms 50.1 per square mile, and on government farms or Crown lands, 76 per square mile. In the remainder of the division, there were only 1.09 people per square mile.

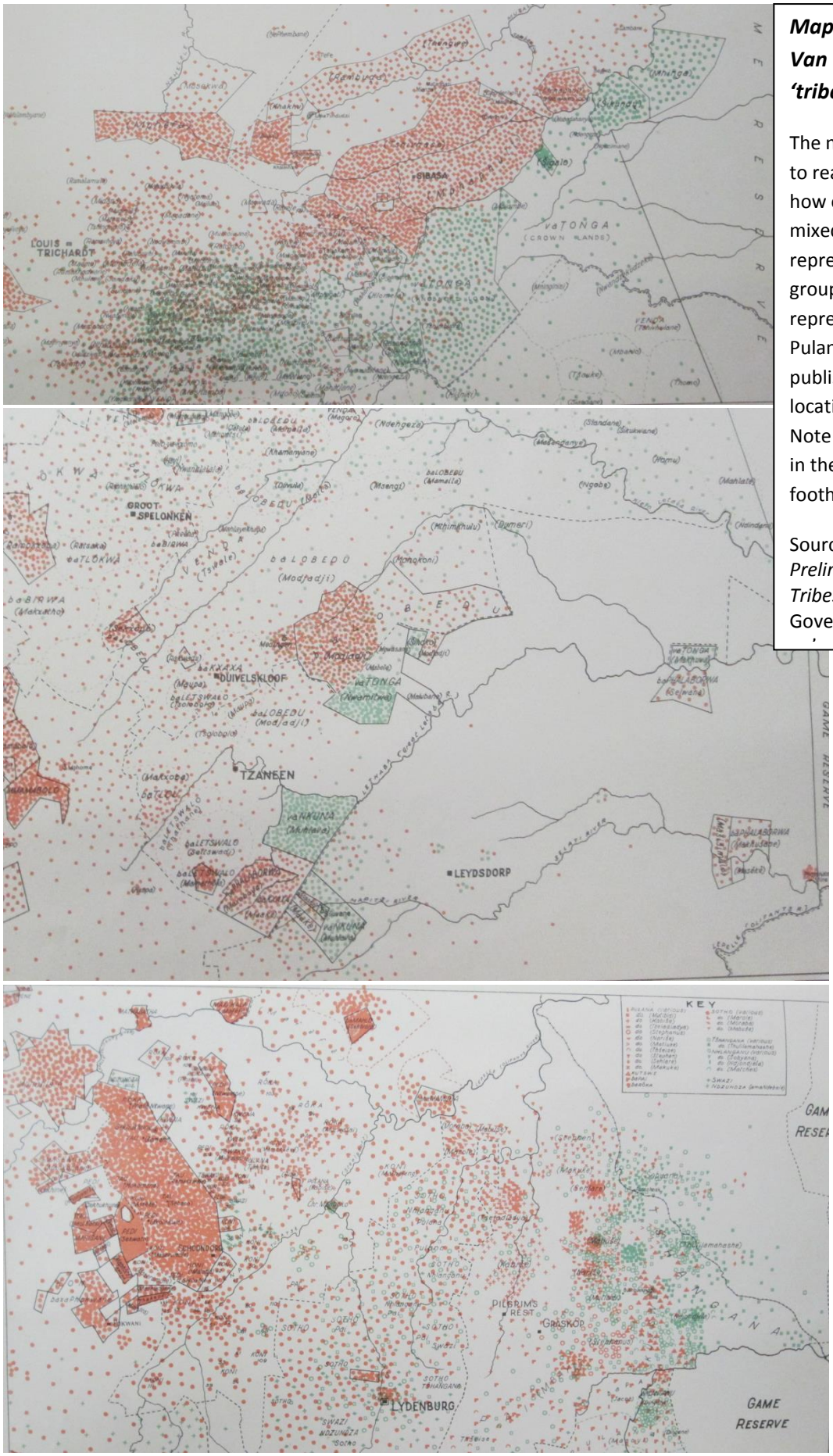
Much later, in 1935,van Warmelo's map of the area shows a similar pattern (see chapter 1). Nevertheless, the distribution of people in the district changed somewhat when boreholes and dams were built on farms. Areas that had long been totally uninhabitable because of the lack of water, became habitable. One farmer P. B de Swart, made this simple point to the Beaumont Commission in 1914, 'I bought a dry farm with no natives on it; I made dams, and now there are natives there.'[29]

What did this pattern of land distribution mean for Africans living in the region?

Locations and the waning power of chiefs

The locations demarcated in the area ranged in size. Mamathola's was the smallest by far, in 1907 officially only 200 morgen. [30] Most people who considered themselves followers of chief Mamathola lived on private land. The size of the population that followed chief Mamathola had been reduced at the end of the nineteenth century, many having been indentured in Hammanskraal in 1894. After this a section of the Mamathola chieftaincy were given a small location in the lowveld and many who moved there died from malaria.[31] Even so, there were purportedly 4,125 people to the measly 200 morgen given the 'tribe', allowing 0.048 morgen per person (which was clearly impossible, and most of this population lived on private farms). At the other extreme was Mabins (also known as Mamitja's) location, with 4.3 morgen per person.[32] These figures do not tell the whole story of course, as the quality of land varied substantially between different locations, and some locations included quite mountainous and rocky areas which were largely uninhabitable. Mamathola's location was in a well-watered, fertile part of the district, Mabin's was drier.

[29] U.G. 22-'14, Beaumont Commission, 1914, p. 397.
[30] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1907 – 1908, Appendix 3 Native Locations, p. 44.
[31] WHP, AD 843/RJ/ Sb.3.116. Tzaneen. J. D. Krige, 'Historical Notes on Mamathola's Tribe' 1937.
[32] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1907 – 1908, Appendix 3 Native Locations, p. 44.



Map 4. Composite Map of N.J Van Warmelo's maps of 'tribes'

The names of chiefs are too small to read but this map illustrates how ethnically and politically mixed the region was. Green represents various 'Shangaan' groups and Swazi, and red represents Sotho, Venda, Baroka, Pulana and Pai. This map was published in 1935 and shows the locations that existed by then. Note also distribution of people in the mountainous areas and foothills.

Source: Van Warmelo, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa,* Pretoria: Government Printer, 1935, map

Certainly not all chiefs were given locations. According to Harries, 'Land alienation, together with tenant and freehold forms of African land tenure had undermined the chief's major source of political power: their ability to control the distribution of land'.[33] This was a part of it, but once land was distributed by a chief he had very little say in what happened to it. Newcomers usually approached a headman to get access to land, or simply appropriated it with little formality, which I will show later. Nevertheless, without locations, chiefs and their followers were vulnerable to the demands for labour by, and expectation of obedience to, white landowners.[34] They could be evicted at short notice. The land no longer belonged to them.

As a general rule, those chiefs that were given locations had a stronger basis of authority than those that were not given locations. They were recognised by the government as important leaders in the area, and took on an administrative and judicial role. People who were evicted from white farms and wanted to avoid labour tenancy contracts sometimes chose to move to locations where they might experience a greater degree of independence. The conditions on private farms and locations varied in terms of cost of rent and conditions of tenure, and this changed over time. People moved in all directions: from locations to private farms, from farm to farm, from chief to chief, to seek a greater degree of independence, and access to better quality land.[35]

Ethnographies of the 1920s and 1930s reveal fairly informal systems of land tenure even within locations. They show how in places the chief had limited involvement in distributing land, which was frequently taken up at will. Among the Lovedu, for instance:

> All the old Lovedu cultivation was on the hills or along their slopes and, generally speaking, close relatives, not necessarily relatives through males, had all or some of their fields in large blocks (*demo*). Unlike the Tswana custom, these blocks stood in no relation to the social organisation; the land was not pointed out by the chief and its size was not predetermined, but depended upon the energy of the individual cultivators. [36]

[33] Harries, 'Exclusion', p. 99.
[34] This can be seen particularly with regard to the Mapulana chiefs in the Pilgrims Rest district, Delius et al, 'Moletele', pp. 69 – 136.
[35] See Harries, 'Exclusion', p. 93 – 95.
[36] E.J Krige and J.D. Krige, *The Realm of a Rain Queen,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943, p. 40.

This had changed by the 1930s however. People's agricultural lands, which previously were cultivated in large blocks, were also becoming more scattered. This was partly because the Lovedu were inspired by the example of the Shangaan-Tsonga to cultivate in the valleys rather than hillsides:

> To-day, a man must take land where he can find it, and though the Lovedu still live on the hills, they have their lands scattered all over the country. Indeed, since it is easier to plough on level ground, the hills are liable to be neglected, though wisdom dictates that it is best to have fields in two different environments. The result is that a man's fields are widely separated, sometimes being as far as ten miles apart.[37]

Similarly, among the Tsonga-dialect speaking baNkuna, where land was scarce around villages, Junod noted in 1914:

> The women look round for fresh arable land and may, wittingly or unwittingly, encroach on the ground of another numzane [headman].There is, indeed, a neutral zone, vaguely defined, of which no one has as yet taken possession, as it has not been needed: the wild fruits growing there are common property; anyone who likes can gather them. When the population increases, the inhabitants of the more congested districts go and appropriate this land without any kind of formality.[38]

This individual autonomy should not only be seen as a response to increasing pressure on land and a breakdown in social organisation. Eileen Krige, who wrote about the Phalaborwa in the sparsely populated east of the district, suggested, in 1937, that this was 'one of the few areas in South Africa where, owing to a sparse population, one can see in full swing the old Bantu system of land tenure':

> There is no allocation of land except as a formality to newcomers. Land is plentiful and can be taken up at will by anyone… A field once cleared cannot be taken from its owner even in his absence… Freedom to take up new lands without let or hindrance to-day extends even to areas outside the jurisdiction of one's own chief.[39]

Aside from the fact that there were new owners of the land outside of locations, other aspects that had formed the basis of chief's power over people had been eroded. With peaceful conditions, it was no longer necessary for people to tie themselves to a chief for

[37] Ibid.
[38] H.A. Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe vol 2.* New York: University Books, 1962, p. 8.
[39] E.J. Krige, 'Note on the Phalaborwa and their Morula Complex' *Bantu Affairs* 1937, p. 362.

protection as they had in turbulent periods in the past. The anthropologist, Stayt, who studied the Venda in the late 1920s noted how,

> Before the present peaceful conditions were established the BaVenda lived in large villages. Each village was ruled by a chief or petty chief and formed a strong, compact community, living inside an enclosure and ready at a moment's notice to mobilize in full strength to protect itself against surprise attacks of enemy invaders. These large villages exist no longer…In some places dozens of homesteads are built in fairly close proximity to the chief's kraal, while in others an isolated kraal may be separated by many miles from its nearest neighbour. There is an increasing tendency for individual families to live farther from the chief, where they are more independent of him and can live their lives as they please, only attending the chief's village when specially summoned by him. [40]

Colonialism, industrialisation, and the spread of Christianity brought new forms of social advancement, of identity, that were not linked to chiefs or tribes. Chiefs were no longer the key brokers for access to land, physical and economic survival, and economic or social advancement.[41] Magistrates, schools, churches, stores, employers, landowners, were increasingly important sources of law, education, spiritual guidance and security, food and other items, the money needed to purchase them, and land.

In 1904 Wheelwright noted that circumcision lodges, which had normally been 'summoned by Chiefs of standing in the country, such as Magato or Modjadji' were now held by smaller groups of people, 'when and how they pleased'.[42] In 1905-06 according to Wheelwright:

> The native is in a state of transition, the final development of which cannot be expected for very many years. The craving for education is universal…A feeling of restlessness grows, and the semi-educated native breaks away from his tribal and kraal control and joins a somewhat disorganised class, claiming in his own mind a superiority over his less enlightened breathren… [Progress towards civilisation] can be seen in numerous small ways, such as a desire on the natives' part to break away from tribal control and live independently, the use of European clothing, ploughs, etc.[43]

In 1909 the Native Commissioner of the Northern Division wrote that although 'strict adherence to native laws and customs continues unabated':

[40] H.A Stayt, *The Bavenda*, London: Oxford University Press, 1931, p. 29
[41] Harries, 'Exclusion', pp. 99 – 100.
[42] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1903-1904, p. 37.
[43] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1905-1906, p. 44.

> Still, in minor details, there is a marked tendency to depart from tribal control, as immediately affecting the dweller of a kraal, for instance, and also to live independently of both chiefs and indunas. This is attributable to a diminution of the chief's influence as existed hitherto, unrestricted freedom, the choice of more congenial surroundings, and the absence under tribal jurisdiction of any methods tending to his general welfare.[44]

In 1910 the Sub Native Commissioner in the Haenertsburg area wrote that although chiefs were trying to maintain power 'they are, except in the case of chiefs with strong personalities, rapidly losing all semblance of power, autocratic or otherwise.'[45]

In later years, particularly from the late 1920s, the government began to panic about the 'detribalisation' of Africans, because they feared the rapid urbanisation of Africans and the growth and influence of new political organisations.[46] This led them to consider propping up the waning power of some chiefs. Until the 1920s however, the Native Affairs Department (NAD) had a more ambiguous attitude towards chiefs. Native Commissioners wanted to keep the power of chiefs in check, fearing their potential to rebel and resist the government.[47] They preferred a strategy of 'divide and rule' which would break the influence of more important chiefs.[48] Officials in the NAD also saw themselves as part of an 'imperial civilising mission', and 'a hardliner modernising faction within the NAD, keen to see the "natives" "progress" towards "civilisation", explicitly aimed to abolish the chieftainship, albeit in an evolutionary manner.'[49] While officials held contrasting views about 'tribalism', what was perhaps most important was their own ability to keep control of the African population and assert themselves as the supreme rulers – even chiefs had to show deference to them.[50] There was also an anxiety that, should changes occur in the governance of the African population, this should not interfere with the 'organic; basis of

[44] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1909 - 1910, p. 38.
[45] Ibid, p. 23.
[46] S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid, 1919 – 1936,* London: MacMillan in Association with St Antony's College Oxford, 1989, pp. 12 – 13.
[47] P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1996, pp. 16 – 17.
[48] Ibid.
[49] E. Ritchken, 'Leadership and conflict in Bushbuckridge: struggles to define moral economics within the context of rapidly transforming political economies.' Unpublished PhD thesis, Wits University, 1995, p. 59; Dubow, *Segregation,* p. 80.
[50] I. Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 178 – 181.

'tribal society'.[51] More practically, chiefs were critical in assisting a small NAD govern a massive African population.

The role of Native Administrators in affecting the influence – or lack of influence – of chiefs should not be overestimated however. Between 1910 and 1924 the department was small, understaffed and overworked, and did not have the time or influence to meddle significantly in what was happening on the ground.[52] According to Ritchken who looked at the development of Tribal Authorities in the Bushbuckridge area (which at this stage was called the Pilgrims Rest district in the eastern Transvaal), 'Residents retained a large degree of choice regarding their affiliations to a chieftainship. Ultimately, recognition gave the chiefs very little practical bureaucratic power beyond what respect they were able to command from their followings'.[53]

So while locations remained ostensibly bastions of chiefly control, the actual extent of a chiefs' authority over people beyond and even within these circumscribed areas was limited. This is not to say that the institution of chieftaincy did not remain important for many people. Chiefs and headmen, along with other forms of association, were sometimes 'critical in defending the interests of the weak, enlarging their political horizons, and enabling to establish leverage in a new context… Chieftaincy could be a focus both of resistance and of ethnic expression'.[54] But the way in which people accessed land in the district, and the way they experienced economic life, had little to do with their living in 'tribes', on land under the custodianship of chiefs.

Privately owned land

Until the 1930s most of the land in the region was owned by the government and land-owning companies. The farms owned by individuals were only slowly and unevenly being put to commercial use. This, and the tiny size of the tribal locations relative to the size of the

[51] Ibid, p. 166.
[52] Dubow, *Segregation,* p. 77.
[53] Ritchken, 'Leadership and conflict', p. 63.
[54] W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 96 – 97.

African population, affected the way that the major land laws – the Squatters Law of 1895 and the Natives Land Act of 1913 – were implemented in the area.

The Republican Squatters Laws of 1887 and 1895 were designed to force 'squatters' off Crown lands (other than locations) where 'informal locations' existed. 'Informal location' was the name given to farms where very large groups of African families lived under some kind of social organisation. The law was intended to ensure that labour was distributed amongst white farmers. The initial implementation of this Act had been unsuccessful in the parts of the North-eastern Transvaal that it was applied: Africans refused to become tenants on Boer farms and large numbers moved to the Zoutpansberg Mountains and the lowveld.[55] In the lowved the law was impossible to implement because there were a huge number of 'squatters' and too few locations. Those locations that existed were too small, and the area was unhealthy for white settlement anyway, so there was little point in implementing the law here.[56] G.Y Lagden, the Commissioner for Native Affairs in 1904, noted that an attempt to enforce the Squatters law would most likely lead to mass emigration to neighbouring countries. Thus, the law would not only fail to ensure a supply of labour to the farms: it could result in the loss of an ultimately productive population. Africans on private and Crown lands 'contribute a considerable amount of labour' and 'produce a considerable amount of cereals', the Native Commissioner wrote.[57] Moreover, because there were very few locations, 'The first difficulty to be encountered by the natives so ordered to remove, and by the officers so ordered to remove them, would be to know where they were to go'. All things considered, Lagden argued, 'We should…not fear to hesitate in attempting anything that will not ensure success and will not avoid disaster'.[58] In other words, they should not enforce a policy that would not work, and might be counterproductive. Thus, up to 1908 the NAD avoided implementing the Squatters Law.

In 1908 this changed. The 1907 election had brought to power a government that represented wealthy white farming interests, a constituency with an interest in enforcing

[55] Harries, 'Exclusion', p. 93.
[56] G.Y Lagden, 'Memorandum on the Subject of the Squatters' Law' 22 February 1904, in Department of Native Affairs Annual Report, 1904, pp. 17 -19.
[57] Ibid, p. 18.
[58] Ibid.

anti-squatter measures.[59] Wealthy white farmers hated the existence of 'informal locations' on private farms, where African tenants could live independently without needing to serve as labourers. They wanted a more even distribution of labour tenants. Also, in 1908 government locations were demarcated for the major chiefs in the northern Transvaal, and Africans living outside of these locations were warned that, under the Squatters Law, many of them would have to move. For those who already lived within the areas now demarcated as locations, this was a boon as they were exempted from Crown lands rent.[60] A first glance at the table below would suggest that in the Haenertsburg district over 12,000 people were removed from Crown lands to locations, but this is misleading.

The figures can partly be explained by the fact that there were already six 'undefined' locations on government land which were then formally demarcated, meaning that a large number of people may have remained where they were – hence the massive decrease in the number of people registered on government or Crown land. In the Groot Spelonken the increase in the number of people in locations was not matched by a decrease in numbers on Crown or Private land, and in the Pilgrims Rest district there were no locations. Ultimately, the number of people living on private farms in the region increased over the entire period.

Nevertheless, while its effects may not have been extreme, by 1910, the Squatters Law had been enforced on 179 farms, most of them in the district of Zoutpansberg.[61] By 1911 this had increased to 186 farms, leading to the removal of 5,000 families in the whole Transvaal.[62] But in general, the NAD's stated policy in 1912 was to avoid 'interfering' with families already living as rent tenants on private farms, but to prevent new families from settling on farms 'where there are more than the legal number already.'[63]

[59] Harries, 'Exclusion', p. 94.
[60] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1908 – 1909, p. 49.
[61] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1909 – 1910, p. 7.
[62] Report of the Native Affairs Department, 1911, p. 10.
[63] Report of the Native Affairs Department, 1912, p. 8.

Fig. 1. African Population Returns, 1906 - 1910[64]

African Population Returns 1906-1910

	Population	In Townships and Municipal Areas	In Defined Locations	On Government Farms and Other Crown Lands	On Private Farms
Haenertsburg					
1906	40,030		4,604	17,086	18,340
1908	42,740		3,140	16,920	22,680
1909	45,834		17,999	4,800	23,035
1910	52,100		22,800	6,000	23,300
Groot Spelonken					
1906	62,557		11,766	4,337	46,454
1908	66,629		14,582	4,890	47,157
1909	68,817		15,093	4,581	49,143
1910	73,498		20,660	4,637	48,201
Pilgrims Rest					
1906	34,011	100		1,400	35,419
1908	38,769			9,580	29,189
1909	40,136			9,636	30,500
1910	43,640			4,200	39,440

[64] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Reports for the years 1906 to 1910, excluding 1907 (unavailable) 1906: p. 71; 1908: p. 33, 1909: p. 58; 1910: p. 74.

The 1913 Land Act has been given credit for profoundly transforming the South African countryside.[65] It certainly marked an important step in formalising South Africa's policy of racial segregation. The Act had three main elements. Africans were forbidden from buying land outside of 'scheduled native areas', which made up about 7 - 8 percent of the country. Africans were also forbidden from entering into sharecropping or cash tenancy arrangements on farms outside the native areas, and they had to provide 90 days service a year to landowners if they lived on farms outside the native areas. Finally, the Act called for the establishment of a commission to recommend further areas to be 'released' from the provisions of the Act and included in the 'native' areas.[66]

The Act was provisional. Beinart and Delius have argued that it did not have the immediate effect of causing a 'great dispersal' as described by Plaatjie in the Southern Highveld. [67] Rather, the intention of the Act was to 'maintain the status quo of land occupation and ownership' – it was a 'holding operation and a statement of intent about segregation on the land'.[68]

In the Haenertsburg, Pilgrims Rest and Letaba district (from 1937), where an enormous African population lived but where very few locations or reserves had been demarcated, the most significant part of the Act was that it called for the establishment of a commission to report on the land situation in the country, and make recommendations for further areas to include in the 'native' areas. These areas were to be known as 'Released Areas'. The commission was called the Beaumont Commission. Its' recommendations were published in 1916, but there was an outcry over the findings, and so further regional commissions were established, including the Eastern Transvaal Natives Land Committee, which reported in 1918. In the Letaba district about 34.8 percent of land in the district was included in the Released Area and purchased by the government by 1959.[69] Released land in the Letaba

[65] W. Beinart and P. Delius, 'The Historical Context and Legacy of the Natives Land Act of 1913' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 40 (4), 2014, pp. 667 – 668.
[66] Ibid, p. 670.
[67] Ibid, p. 668.
[68] Ibid.
[69] M. Hay, 'Buying Naboth's Vineyard: The Challenges of Land Transfer under the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act' *African Studies,* 71 (3) 2012, p. 364.

district tended to adjoin existing locations, and was situated in some of the most heavily populated – and thus well-watered – parts of the Letaba district.

The 1913 Land Act itself did not have very much effect in the Haenertsburg and Pilgrims Rest districts. Until land was 'released' for African settlement, and purchased for them by the state, Section 6c of the Native Land Act prevailed:

> Until Parliament, acting upon the report of the said [Beaumont] commission, has made other provision, no native resident on any farm in the Transvaal or Natal shall be liable to penalties or to be removed from such farm under any law, if at the commencement of this Act he or the head of his family is registered for taxation or other purposes in the Department of Native Affairs as being resident on such farm, nor shall the owner of any such farm be liable to the penalties imposed by section five in respect of the occupation of the land by such native; but nothing herein contained shall affect any right possessed by law by an owner of lessee of a farm to remove any native therein.[70]

Under this section, Africans registered on land at the time of the promulgation of the Act, who were to become known as 'pre-statute tenants', had special protection from the conditions of the Act which restricted African settlement on white land. However, as the final line implies, landowners could still evict tenants should they desire. Section 1 of the Act, which prevented Africans from entering into new rent tenancy and leasing arrangements with landowners in white areas, was softened with the line *Except with the approval of the Governor General* – approval which was regularly sought and granted in the region, particularly on areas recommended for inclusion in the Released Areas.

Thus, the government allowed rental contracts to continue on white-owned farms, even those not included in the Released Areas. Africans who wanted to avoid labour tenancy contracts were able to escape to farms included in the Released Area, where they could rent land. (In this regard Jamie Cockfield has made the point that 'the longer term aims of the Act were advanced by breaching its provisions').[71]

In 1932 a circular was sent to all districts in the Transvaal, preventing Commissioners from allowing black families to settle under rent tenancy arrangements either within or outside the Released Areas. But this was revoked in the Pilgrims Rest district in 1934 when it proved

[70] Act No. 27 of 1913, Section 6(c).
[71] Cited in Beinart and Delius, 'Historical Context', p. 678.

untenable. While there were many evictions, there were not enough 'legal' options for resettling evictees and other 'drifting' families.[72] After the circular was revoked the NAD was once again able to make concessions for private landowners, allowing them to accept rent tenants on their farms.

The 1936 Native Trust and Land Act repealed Section 6c of the 1913 Land Act which protected 'pre-statute' tenants. But the position on the ground still made it imperative that the rights of pre-statute tenants be continued. Circular 30 of 1937 noted that although 'strictly speaking, the approval of the Governor General… is required to legalise the continued residence of such tenants on farms in the area in question':

> It is realised, however, that the Natives affected, cannot under any circumstances be displaced until other land is made available for their accommodation and that the Governor- General's approval would have to be obtained. This would involve a very considerable amount of extra work, which, under the circumstances, hardly seems justified.
>
> It has accordingly been decided to dispense with this formality and to allow these Natives to remain on the properties upon which they were residing at the date of the repeal of Section 6 of Act No. 27 of 1913, until such time as the provisions of Chapter IV of Act No. 18 are applied.[73]

Thus, the 1913 Land Act was not the primary cause of evictions and dispossession of people who had been living on the land since before 1913.

The Act did of course have damaging effects for people who wanted to access land under more independent conditions, either as rent tenants or owners. One example comes from the farms Coblentz, Keulen, Berlin, Bonn and Sedan, in the Letaba district. In 1932 one Papenfus wanted to sub-divide the farms into small-holdings and make them available for purchase by Africans.[74] However, this application for a general scheme ran into trouble, firstly because the 'native areas' had not yet been fixed, and because the 1913 Natives Land Act required each and every sale to be approved by the Governor-General, who required

[72] Ritchken 'Leadership and Conflict' p. 72. Delius et al, 'Moletele', p. 80.
[73] SANA KTZ 2/1/7 N2/8/3/3/2, Circular No. 30 of 1937, Pre-statute Tenants on Farms Outside Scheduled and Released Areas, To all Native Commissioners, Additional Native Commissioners and Assistant Native Commissioners in the Transvaal, 15 November 1937.
[74] SANA NTS 3608, 969/308, Papenfus to The Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA), 18 November 1932.

names and particulars.[75] Africans also needed to be able to pay one half of the purchase price in cash before transfer.

For the mobile and growing population of tenants and their descendants who were not 'pre-statute' tenants, the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts contributed to the shutting down of their ability to access land independently as rent tenants, but only significantly from the 1930s. Until the 1930s many tenants were rent tenants – for example in the Pilgrims Rest district 80 per cent of tenants on privately owned farms within the Released Area were rent tenants.[76] In the 'eastern low country', including Letaba district, Menne, a land agent, pointed out that he had little choice in whether or not to accept more African tenants on his farms:

> Say you refuse a man, you later on find him trespassing in all probability. If a native wants to go on to a farm he will squat there and you cannot turn him off. You cannot use physical force, and if you turn him away today, he will be there again next year. For that reason we take the line of least resistance, and if a native wants to reside there, he makes the usual application, or we do it for him, and if it is granted he remains.[77]

Rent tenancy was more popular than labour tenancy, because it allowed households a greater degree of independence. But from the 1930s in particular, as the white population grew and put more land under commercial production, landowners wanted the African populations on their farms to become labour tenants. The lowveld experienced an economic boom starting from around the 1920s in the Pilgrims Rest/Sabi areas, and the 1930s in the Letaba district.[78] In the eastern Transvaal this boom was based on citrus, cotton and tobacco. Commercial farming boomed in the Letaba district in the 1930s. The subtropical climate and fertile soil were exceptionally good for farming, and the potential for winter irrigation meant that farmers could supply urban centres with fruit and vegetables all year

[75] Ibid, SNA to H. B Papenfus, 'Proposal to sub-divide Farms…' undated; SNA to The Director, Harmony Lands and Minerals Limited, 16 February 1933.
[76] WHP, AD843/B 44.7 SAIRR. Released Areas. Pilgrims Rest, Report on the Natives of the Pilgrims Rest District, 1933 p. 11-12.
[77] WHP, AD 1438 Native Economic Commission, Pietersburg, Menne, p. 284.
[78] Packard, 'Malaria', pp. 597 - 598; Fair, 'Lowveld Survey', Standard Bank Archives and Historical Services, ARCH 1/1/TZAN, L. T Myburgh, 'The Standard Bank of South Africa Ltd in Tzaneen' updated February 2012, pp. 5 – 8.

round. A few farmers had been experimenting for a number of years, but it was only in the 1930s and 1940s that large numbers of white farmers were drawn to the district, and existing landowners tried their hand at commercial farming.[79] It was only really in conjunction with the economic changes occurring on the land that the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts had an effect on reducing the independence of tenants.

For mobile, young, able-bodied men this was a point at which their freedom to access land under rent conditions was drastically curtailed. For example the response to an application from one Johannes Matimelane to move from Grootfontein to Vaalwater in the Letaba district under rent tenancy terms was:

> As the applicant is a young and able-bodied farm labourer, who does not want to do any further farm service, his application is not recommended…. I may add that there is quite a large demand for labour tenants, and that the applicant can quite easily obtain occupation as a labour tenant.[80]

For young men, their options were to move to a location (where they were faced with tribal levies) or to an urban area, or to serve the three months' labour service now demanded by farmers. The situation for unattached women, widows and disabled people was even more precarious. Those who were evicted from farms in the 1940s and early 1950s, before the SANT had purchased enough land to settle the 'surplus' population, had nowhere to go: there was little room in locations and they would 'never be taken in as a squatter on European farms'.[81]

Other factors, apart from the 1913 Land Act, led to a fairly high rate of evictions in the region from the 1920s onwards. One such factor was the unexpected consequences of purchasing land for Africans by the South African Native Trust under the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act. This was ironic; an outcome of government policy designed to provide more land for African settlement, where Africans could live under more secure tenure. But the

[79] Packard, 'Malaria', p. 597.
[80] SANA, NTS 7108, 253/323, Assistant NC Groot Spelonken to Additional NC Pietersburg, 7 July 1931.
[81] M. Hay, 'A Tangled Past: Land Settlement, Removals and Restitution in Letaba District, 1900 – 2013' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 40 (4), 2014, p. 754.

ways in which people lost access to land were too complicated to be attributed to the effect of a single law or racially discriminatory practice. An example may help to show this.

Strassburg was an excellently situated farm, in the foothills of the Drakensberg in the Heanertsburg District. In the early nineteenth century, possibly even before, the Bokoni ba Mametša settled on the land. For a period possibly in the 1830s they fled from the farm, fearing the Bakgema 'cannibals' and the Swazi.[82] They returned and lived there for generations, until 1912. In this year, one Mockford (probably Frank Pemberton Mockford) bought the farm, and the entire community were evicted by him (unfortunately no reason is given why).[83] Over the next two decades the farm was populated again, and Strassburg was included in the Released Areas. In 1938 Mockford informed the Natives Land Commission that he wanted to sell the farm to the Trust.[84] Over the next six years he repeated his offer, but to no avail. In 1944, on his deathbed, he sold a portion of the farm to white farmers who promptly evicted 200 African families living there. His nephew, as executor of the estate, again offered the rest of the farm to the Trust, explaining in a letter to the secretary for Native Affairs that:

> You will appreciate that from my point of view . . . I cannot refuse an opportunity of disposing the land, but at the same time I wish to give consideration to my aunt's desires which are to dispose of it in such a way that it will not interfere with the natives already living on the farm . . . it appears to me that the Native Trust although I understand that they are not buying during the war period might under the circumstances be interested in acquiring the 3,768 morgen remaining in order to prevent any injustice to the natives . . .[85]

Yet in 1947 this farm, and a number of others in 'released area 33' which were offered to the Trust, were sold by their owners to white prospectors and/or farmers. These new landowners stood to prosper commercially if they got the arable land under production, or gain financially if the state was forced to buy their land. The owners evicted a further 800 Africans from the farm. By 1956 the NAD was still in the process of negotiating to purchase

[82] N.J Van Warmelo, 'The Bakoni of Mametša' *Ethnological Publications no. 15.* Pretoria, Department of Native Affairs, 1944, p. 43.
[83] Ibid, p. 45.
[84] SANA NTS 3727, Investigations Native Affairs Commission, Letaba District, Tzaneen, 12 August 1937.
[85] SANA NTS 3728 1993/308, Col NS Mockford to Col DL Smit, 8 April 1944.

Strassburg, one of the difficulties was that the farmers were asking very high prices for the land.[86]

This example illustrates a number of things: the Squatters Law, the 1913 Land Act and 1936 Land Act had little to do with the eviction of hundreds of residents from the farm. Rather, the arrival of white farmers, first in 1912 and then later in 1947, and the decision to put the land under commercial production was the most direct cause of evictions. There was no one act of dispossession of this farm from Africans living there. Tenants were allowed to live on the farm after the initial eviction of 1912, and it was over thirty five years later that another large scale eviction took place.

Furthermore, from 1936 the NAD on behalf of the Trust wanted to purchase Strassburg, and Mockford wanted to sell to the Trust in order to protect the African tenants living on the farm: in crude terms, there was a willing seller and a willing buyer. The failure of the NAD to purchase Strassburg quickly, thereby allowing white farmers to purchase it during the delay, was an indirect but significant cause of eviction. This pattern, whereby the NAD was delayed in purchasing a farm meant for the Trust, leading to its purchase by white farmers, caused evictions from many farms around the Transvaal.

What was the cause of this failure? It certainly was not an unwillingness of white landowners to sell their land. When the Native Affairs Commission visited the Letaba District in 1937 to discuss the purchase of land in the released areas, they received little opposition from individual landowners. During the course of the 1937 investigation, and in further correspondence, 76 farms were offered for sale, including 31 farms out of the 32 in the released areas, and nine out of 11 of the farms adjoining the released areas which were recommended for sale to the Trust by the commission.[87]

Rather, the NAD's problem was that it could not buy all the farms offered to it immediately, or even in the medium to longer term. There are many, interconnected, reasons for this.

[86] SANA NTS 3729 1993/308, Voorgenome Annkoop Namens die Suide-Afrikaanse Naturelletrust van die plase Strassburg 167 en Metz 165, Letaba Distrik, 2 May 1956.
[87] Hay, 'Naboth's Vineyard', p. 368. .

Because of the policy of racial segregation, and the need to avoid creating 'black spots' or 'white islands' the NAD could not buy what land was offered to it. As a result, the NAD was at times forced to negotiate with more reluctant sellers, even when there were others keen to sell. Secondly (and compounding the first problem), any land offered in exchange for the released areas had to be of an equal agricultural and pastoral value. If not, then the land could not be bought. But even without such restrictions, the NAD would have been unable to buy land in the first phases of the programme, because of the advent of war, and the number of challenges that stemmed from it.[88]

Almost before the process really got underway it was delayed. The Second World War started, and a moratorium was placed on buying land for the Trust.[89] One key issue was lack of funding. There are numerous letters from the NAD to willing sellers declining offers of farms due to 'shortage of funds', and it should without doubt be seen as a significant impediment to the implementation of the programme. However, shortage of funding was a chronic problem not specific to the war years, and the delays experienced during the war years cannot be reduced to a funding problem. Another impact of the war was to diminish the administrative capacity of the NAD. Staff numbers decreased, leaving the NAD 'appallingly understaffed'.[90] In the Letaba District this led to general delays in the resolution of local queries, and long waiting queues in the local commissioner's offices.[91] After the war, ex-soldiers were frequently recruited over more suitable candidates, with the result being that 'service delivery' was sometimes slow or inefficient.[92] This must have impacted on the capacity of the NAD to enter into complex negotiations with sellers, undertake investigations and other necessary duties in the implementation of a complicated, ambitious programme. Finally, bureaucratic procedure itself was time-consuming, particularly in more heavily contested areas such as 'released area 33' or 'released area 29' in the Letsitele Valley. To understand why, one needs to consider the different 'stakeholder interests' in the land.

[88] Ibid.
[89] R. Horwitz, *The Political Economy of South Africa,* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967, p. 144.
[90] WHP, AD 843/RJ Sb3.34, E Rheinallt-Jones to TR Masethe, 29 July 1941.
[91] Ibid; WHP, AD 843/RJ/Sb3.63, Assistant Native Commissioner, Tzaneen, to JD Rheinallt- Jones, 21 August 1942.
[92] SANA HKN 1/1/3, 1/15/5(1), Native Commissioners Conference, 1946.

One of the objectives of the 1936 Act was to deal with the shortage of land for African settlement, as well as the environmental problems experienced in the reserve areas, which were associated with the land shortage and frequently ascribed to 'traditional' or 'unsustainable' agricultural and pastoral practices. The Trust was tasked with managing the land in a sustainable way, and creating a smallholder 'peasant' class of African producers. The conviction that more land was needed for African settlement, and that this had to be good land, underlay the decisions and recommendations of the Native Affairs Commission, and can be seen in the correspondence of NAD officials. The Trust, Native Affairs Commission and NAD, working in conjunction, had a powerful mandate, including powers of expropriation, as their task was considered to be in the public interest.

Other government departments had conflicting interests, which were also deemed to be for the public good.[93] The Department of Lands was responsible for creating settler schemes for white officers returning from the First World War, irrigation schemes to benefit poor whites, cattle ranches to be developed by aspirant farmers, as well as the Kruger National Park. The Department of Forestry was responsible for developing and protecting forests in water-source areas. Each of these programmes was backed up by their own logic and rationale, and at times trumped the interests of the NAD. An obvious example is the eviction of thousands of tenants in the Levubu area (north of the Letaba district, in Sibasa district) in order to create a settlement farming scheme for poor whites.[94] Another example is that from 1919 to around 1922, Africans were evicted from the farms Munchen, Dusseldorp, Luxemburg and Pretoria in the Letaba District when the farms were purchased with the approval of the Department of Lands by the Officers' Colonial Land Company, formed by a group of retired British Regular and Indian army officers.[95] When the farms were included in the proposed Native Areas/Released Areas by the Beaumont and Eastern Transvaal Natives Land Commissions, the farmers wanted them excised, which was agreed to.[96] In

[93] For more on the tension between the NAD and Lands Department over land in Released Areas see Dubow, *Segregation,* pp. 88 – 90.
[94] M. Mulaudzi, '"U Shuma Bulasi" Agrarian Transformation in the Zoutpansberg, District of South Africa up to 1946' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2000, p. 273.
[95] SANA NTS 7085, 2/323, Sub Native Commissioner, Haenertsburg to The Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, 'Settlement of Natives:- Harmony Block, 12th March 1919; Sub Native Commissioner, Haenertsburg to SNA, Pretoria, date unclear, 1922; D. Hilton-Barber, *Footprints – On the Trail of those who shaped Tzaneen's history,* Johannesburg, Porcupine Press, 2011, p.117.
[96] SANA NTS 7085, 2/323, Lawyer [name unclear] to The Minister for Native Affairs, 23 January 1922.

1902 to 1903 two to three thousand Africans were evicted from the Sabi Game Reserve[97], and thousands more from 1926 (after a period during which African tenants in the Park were thought to aid the conservation effort for a number of reasons).[98] Between 1927 and 1932, the Department of Forestry took over 18 properties in the Pilgrims Rest District, which led to 'some five thousand individual evictions'. [99] This general trend was summed up in the Native Affairs Commission's 1936 report on the Pilgrims Rest district:

> The Commission has been impressed, in its inspection of this area, by the prevailing absence of any appreciation of the national Native policy in several of the Departments of State, which has not only complicated a very difficult position, but has placed an insupportable burden on the Department of Native Affairs and a responsibility for other Department's actions which seriously militates against effective Native administration.
> [for example, in the Pilgrims Rest area]
> ….Ten farms have been purchased or acquired by the Forestry Department in the Released Area, most of them since the Joint Select Committee adopted the schedule. This appears to have been done without any consultation with the Native Affairs Department and apparently without its knowledge; the Department's function has been to make desperate efforts to provide a home for the displaced Natives. …
> ….It was stated in evidence before the Commission that 100 of the Natives who were evicted by the Forestry Department on the farm Salique died from malaria as a result of their enforced migration to the Low Veld to which they were unaccustomed. The Native Affairs Department has found it an impossible task to find accommodation for all the Natives threatened with eviction by the action of the State, e.g., the Forestry Department had a Native population of 8580 on its 14 farms in 1934 and the Native Affairs Department was expected to provide accommodation for that though it owned not a single morgen of land. At the same time the Lands Department was pressing for accommodation for Natives which it intended to evict from Crown land on its allotment to Europeans…[100]

[97] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1903, p. 44.
[98] J. Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park, A Social and Political History,* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995, pp.92, 99.
[99] SANA NTS 1780, 78/276, Report on Natives of Pilgrims Rest District, Assistant Native Commissioner, Pilgrims Rest, to The Chief Native Commissioner, Pretoria, 13 January 1933.
[100] Native Affairs Commission Report on Pilgrims Rest, 7 December 1936 p. 3, cited in Delius et al 'Moletele', p. 81.

Farmers' associations also took a very different line to the NAD. Their attitude was that good land should be kept for white farmers who would 'develop' it, and that Africans were degrading the land and ought to be removed, particularly when they lived in ecologically sensitive areas. Referring to the public interest, Mr Cilliers, the local member of parliament (MP), tried to convince the government to excise certain farms from the released areas because, 'this area was one of the most important in the country, as it can supply the cities, principally Johannesburg and Pretoria, with produce during the winter which could not be produced in any other part of the country.'[101]

The assumption too was that African agriculture was undeveloped, and that pastoralism was more important to them than cultivating the land. 'Why must natives always be given the foothills when there is ample land in the flats much more suited to the Natives method of living and "husbandry"?' the secretary of the Ofcolaco Farmers' Association asked at one stage.[102] One of the primary points of conflict between the NAD and the farmers' associations (backed by the Department of Lands) was around the protection of water sources. The farmers' associations, concerned not only for those whose land was included in the released area, but for those who would neighbour the reserve areas in future, frequently used a degradation narrative to argue for the need to excise farms in the Drakensberg foothills and Letsitele Valley in particular, and to remove certain African locations.[103]

How did these different interests impact on the implementation of the land buying programme? Immense pressure could be brought to bear by farmers' associations on individual landowners. In the neighbouring Pietersburg district, for example, a number of individuals wanted to sell as soon as possible, as, 'there was no object in continuing to occupy and improve their land with this threat hanging over them'. On raising this proposal with the Pietersburg Farmers' Union however:

[101] SANA NTS 3728 1993/308, 'Native Trust Farms' *Bantu World* 24 February 1945.
[102] Ibid, J.A Hood, Secretary Ofcolaco Farmers' Association, to Assistant Native Commissioner, Leydsdorp, 4 November 1944.
[103] Hay, 'Naboth's Vineyard', p. 369.

> This proposal was literally howled down and the moderate elements in the Union were treated to an outburst of racial eloquence that would have done credit to any orator in Nazi Germany. The farmers who had offered their ground to the Trust were labelled 'Kaffir Boeties' and every possible type of pressure and intimidation was brought to bear on farmers who had offered their land in an effort to get them to withdraw. [104]

But to assume that individual farmers, or the NAD, gave in to the might of farmers' associations would be misconceived. Firstly, the NAD was no great fan of farmers' associations. In a report by John Wright and others on the 'Purchase of Land in the Pietersburg District by South African Native Trust' they were scathing about the Farmers' Union, pointing out that:

> The Farmers Union, repudiated the interests of their members who wished to sell and therefore cannot be regarded as competent to give evidence on an unbiased basis, nor can their evidence be regarded as in the interests of the community as a whole. Their representatives have never visited the area concerned, have no knowledge of the state of affairs in the native areas, and furthermore are unable to offer any solution to the problem. Their whole attitude is simply 'not another inch of land to natives in the Pietersburg District', irrespective of the national interests involved or the well being of those of their members who are affected . . .[105]

Rather than give in to farmers' associations, the NAD opposed them. Secondly, farmers' associations were not as united as they appeared. Dubow shows how some white farmers, particularly wealthy farmers, took a different view from the commonly held 'not another inch for natives'.[106] They were worried about the congestion in African locations and supported Native Commissioner Wheelwright that 'it was a moral obligation to uphold the promises of the 1913 Land Act', and, as Dubow suggests, 'they were no doubt conscious of the need to preserve some semblance of the state's legitimacy among Africans.'[107] Individual farmers stood to gain much more from selling contested land than they did from holding onto it, particularly with the threat of expropriation hanging over it, and they frequently put out feelers to the Trust. Sometimes, they argued that their position on the

[104] SANA NTS 3728 1993/308, Memorandum by John Wright & Others: Purchase of Land in the Pietersburg District by South African Native Trust, p. 2.
[105] SANA NTS 3728 1993/308, Memorandum by John Wright & Others: Purchase of Land in the Pietersburg District by South African Native Trust, p. 3.
[106] Dubow, *Segregation,* p. 61 – 62.
[107] Ibid*,* p. 62.

land was untenable, with neighbouring Africans grazing their cattle on the land, cutting fences and stealing things. The NAD was also not obliged to include farmers' associations in negotiations with individual farmers, except when the farm concerned was outside of a released area.[108] Gradually, farms were bought one by one, despite the attitude of the farmers' associations changing little.

The problem with farmers' associations lay more in the need to negotiate with them when issues of national interest were raised. Farmers' associations made requests to excise commercially developed farms, farms which had enormous potential to contribute to the national economy, or farms in ecologically sensitive areas. These arguments had to be taken into account, if reluctantly, by the NAD and certainly by the Department of Lands and MPs. But to excise land from a released area, alternative land of equal agricultural and pastoral value had to be found. NAD officials at the national level followed a procedure of asking the farmers' associations, as well as the Department of Lands that interested itself in certain cases, to suggest alternative farms for the Trust to buy. These suggestions, often a long time coming, led to further investigation, by the Native Affairs Commission or the Land Board to determine its suitability.[109] The Department of Lands, whether intentionally or not, hindered progress in acquiring land.[110] The effect of all of this was frequently to leave the NAD hamstrung.

These delays had the effect of strengthening the position of the farmers' associations, and this further affected the ability of the NAD to buy farms for the Trust. The delays contributed to an escalation of demands by white farmers' associations and a hardening of the position of some towards what needed to be done to protect water sources. While many were prepared to accept in principle the NAD's assurances in 1938 that the Trust would take care of water sources, by 1950 when nothing had been done in this regard and

[108] Hay, 'Naboth's Vineyard', p. 371.
[109] SANA NTS 3728 1993/308, Die Kontroleur van Naturellenedersetters: Plase Balloon, Strassburg ens. Distrik Letaba, 1945 (provides a summary up to 1945 of the steps taken to buy certain farms; another 13 years of this kind of process can be read in the files).
[110] Ibid, SNA to Secretary for Lands re suggested excision of farms from released area no.33: Letaba, 18 November 1947.

more Africans lived in the sensitive mountainous areas, they were less prepared to accept this argument.[111]

While an ongoing investigation prevented the Trust from buying land, it could not prevent landowners from selling their land if they so chose. Determined white farmers, attracted to the potential profits of farming in the area and perhaps feeling assured that the apartheid government and farmers' associations would ultimately protect them, did not need to wait for an Act of Parliament to buy land in a released area, and to remove the African families living there. Once these farmers were themselves the occupiers of the land, they proved unsympathetic and uncooperative negotiators.[112] Even they, however, eventually sold to the Trust, although usually at inflated prices, a 'verlies en ongerief' (loss and inconvenience) fee of 20 per cent of the purchase price, and after years of further negotiation.[113]

Similar processes occurred in the Pilgrims Rest and Sabi area, but there was perhaps more resistance from landowners in the better watered parts of the district with regard to selling to the Trust. They had more of a vested interest in the land, which was considered, by them at least, to be potentially very valuable. For example, when the Department of Native Affairs tried to purchase a block of land from the African and European Investment Company, they were asked for an inflated sum, because the Department of Forestry had recently purchased land from the company at a very high price.[114] The value of land also increased for some landowners due to the indirect effects of evictions from other farms – landowners accepted larger numbers of tenants onto their farms and the rental they paid made their land more profitable.[115]

Regardless of the difficulties in purchasing land for the Trust, the situation in the Pilgrims Rest and Sabi Sands area was generally more precarious for tenants than in the Letaba District, and the relations between tenants and landowners more acrimonious. In contrast

[111] SANA NTS 3729 1993/308, Trichardtsdal-Boerevereniging: Memorandum insake onderhandelings tussen die Dept van Naturellesake en Trichardtsdal Boerevereniging, 4 March 1954, p. 4–5.
[112] Hay, 'Naboth's Vineyard', p. 372.
[113] Ibid. SANA NTS 3729 1993/308, SNA to Joint Secretaries Leydsdorp District Farmers Association, Re: Strassburg, Metz and Lorraine, Letaba District, 22 Dec 1954; Voorgenome aankoop namens die suid-afrikaanse naturelletrust van die plase Strassburg 167 en Metz 165, Letaba Distrik, 2/5/1956.
[114] Native Affairs Commission report on Pilgrims Rest, 7 December 1936 p.4, cited in Delius et al, 'Moletele', p. 86.
[115] Delius et al, 'Moletele', p. 86.

to the Letaba District, white landowners here made their presence felt fairly early – the mountainous areas were controlled by whites from the nineteenth century, and from the first decades of the twentieth century a number of farms in the lowveld were purchased by landowning companies, the mines and white landowners/businessmen who used the farms partly as their own private labour reserves for local mines, timber and sugar plantations in Natal, and farms in the Nelspruit area.[116] Tenants were also required to provide labour for road building. Owners who did not want labour from tenants wanted rent. Should tenants refuse to provide either, they were evicted with little hesitation. Because tenants could not escape to locations (there were none in the Pilgrims Rest/Bushbuckridge district), landowners could evict tenants with impunity, knowing that they had little option but to move to another private farm. In this context, landowners colluded with one another to force Africans to accept labour tenancy. In 1916 the Acting Sub Native Commissioner of Graskop described the 'unsatisfactory state of affairs, which at present exists in this District, between the natives below the berg and the whites both on Company and private farms.' This is worth quoting at length:

> Large numbers of Natives have been given three months notice to quit and I have been requested to evict them at the expiration of their notices. The farmers and the Companies' Agents have formed a sort of ring. When a native has been turned off a farm, in many instances, for sheer personal reasons, a sort of circular letter is sent round to all the farmers who are instructed to refuse the native residence on their farms. Today, native Tahakhati…who was turned off Neumeyers farm, reported to me that he had been to five farmers and one Land Agent below the berg, who had all refused him residence. Native Mjono… has been turned off a Company's farm because he has not paid his rent, his wife has been so ill for a considerable time, that he has been unable to leave her to go in search of work in order to earn his rent money. Natives Padishi…an invalid, Manjanja, extremely old, and Nyati, blind, all holding Government certificates of exemption, are turned off on account of not paying their rent or for timber cutting. These natives have practically no means of livelihood and are deserving of the Company's and the Government's consideration.

[116] Ibid, p. 72 – 74. P. Delius and Michelle Hay, 'Report on Claims Lodged by Various Communities in the Sabi Sands Area' unpublished report, 2013, p. 8; A. Mabin, 'The Land Clearances at Pilgrims Rest' *Journal of Southern African Studies,*13 (3) 1987, p. 403. D. Bunn, 'Comparative Barbarism: Game Reserves, sugar plantations and the modernization of the South African landscape' in K. Darian-Smith, L. Gunner and S. Nuttall, *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia,*London: Routledge, 1996, pp.43, 46.

> The famine below the berg is becoming very acute. I shall be glad to be informed where I am to put these natives. They are coming to me daily, and state that they look to me, as representing the Government, to assist them. My position is becoming extremely awkward.[117]

Although tenants exercised their agency by leaving farms when conditions became too onerous, their situation was dire. With increasing white settlement from the 1920s, the growth of the population, and the length of time it took the NAD to purchase land for the Trust, it only became worse.

Evictions and flight from farms where landowners made onerous demands for labour contributed to the development of a large, scattered, extremely ethnically/culturally heterogeneous population. This population had relatively loose ties with chiefs, and chiefs had limited control over them.[118]

Mobility, the make-up of farm populations, and chiefs

But evictions were not the only cause of mobility. Poor soils and limited water supply in the lowveld, meant that people had to move their kraals fairly often. Similarly, people moved to search for better grazing land. In 1930 the Assistant Native Commissioner at Leydsdorp gave evidence to this effect, describing how people select a new place to begin farming, moving onto private farms and 'quite a lot of them' into locations.[119] He also described the 'tribal' situation to one of the Commissioners, Mr Lucas:

> Mr Lucas: Does that mean a tribe moves from one location to another?
>
> JvR: Not a tribe, but individuals.
>
> Mr Lucas: I am not sure of the position, but do they set up new tribes and then get a location?
>
> JvR: No, they get the one tribe; you have a member living in one tribe there transferring his allegiance from one to another, and he goes there. [120]

[117] SANA NTS 7084 9/323, Natives on Properties of the Transvaal Estates and development co., Actg Sub Native Commissioner, Graskop to The Native Commissioner Lydenburg re Natives Evicted from Company and Private Farms, 30 September 1916.
[118] Delius et al, 'Moletele', pp. 91 – 92, Ritchken, 'Leadership and conflict' pp. 63 – 64.
[119] AD 1438 Native Economic Commission, evidence, Duiwelskloof, Janse van Rensburg, p. 377.
[120] Ibid.

The NAD lacked the capacity to control this mobile African population, even under the auspices of the 1913 Land Act. A report by the Sub Native Commissioner of Pilgrims Rest district wrote in 1919 reflects this reality:

> In my report of the 14th September 1918, certain remarks were made [about] the inability of the soil to maintain for any length of time its fertility and productiveness. The search for fresh lands after the old fields become worked out is therefore an important factor governing the causes for the never ending and ceaseless moving about of Native families.
>
> The applications put forward for permission to settle under the above act do not represent approximately 10% of [unclear] unauthorised removals which take place. Where time and opportunity allow prosecutions are instituted, orders made for ejection, ejection in some instances actually carried out, but to no good purpose, as when once removal is determined upon by a Native family nothing short of placing a Native Constable continually on guard to prevent removal will have effect. So inured has the local population become in the past to freedom of movement as to render the small efforts of my office to apply the above almost futile.[121]

In 1934, sixteen years later and under a better-equipped Department of Native Affairs, the registration of tenants of company owned farms was significantly inaccurate – more people were registered on company owned farms than actually lived there. This was:

> due to the fact that many native youths who leave their homes on company owned farms for industrial centres, invariably submit the names of the farms on which their parents are domiciled when first tax payments are made. Some of these natives remain away for a number of years while others return after the domicile of their parents have been changed to live with them or establish their own homes elsewhere without notifying this office.[122]

Increasing pressure on land in locations, dissatisfaction with chiefs or other authorities, variable rents and taxes, periodic drought, depleted quality of land, a desire to move to places where there were more economic opportunities, and preference for rent tenancy, all encouraged mobility.[123]

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[121] SANA NTS 3646 1243/308, Pilgrims Rest Native Area, Hook, Sub Native Commissioner, Graskop, to SNA, Re Application of Land Act 27 of 1913, 30 June 1919.
[122] SANA KTZ 2/1/7 N2/8/3/3/2 Assistant Native Commissioner Duivelskloof to Native Commissioner, Letaba, 15 August 1934.
[123] Mulaudzi, 'U Shuma Bulasi', pp. 238, 253; Ritchken, 'Leadership and Conflict', p. 52; Harries, 'Exclusion', p. 93; James,'"After Years in the Wilderness": The Discourse of Land Claims in the New South Africa', Journal of Peasant Studies, 27, 3, 2000, p. 154.

Although fragmentary, evidence from files that deal with 'squatter rights' on a number of farms in the area also show fairly consistently that on many farms (although not all) people arrived originally as single households, led by a single taxpayer, rather than as a group.[124] As the family became established, additional relatives might join them. These files also reveal that the population on farms generally had very mixed origins. There were many reasons why people moved to white farms: to avoid labour tenancy contracts elsewhere, to gain access to better grazing land, to join family after a period away, or, in the case of migrant workers, to place their wives under the control of other family members. On the farm Metz, for example, Willie Lewele moved to the farm in 1925, leaving his mother who lived on Alsace; he was joined later that year by a large group.[125] In 1932 Madumi Mokoni arrived from Toul, 'to live with friends'; Motetimedi Tramp arrived after his eviction from Alsace, while Mamadinabo Fish came from Strassburg to live with relatives. In 1934 Masotya Makabele came from Sekororo's location where there was a shortage of grazing land. In 1935 Headman Motlabi requested permission for himself and 15 followers to live on Metz, after he had fallen out with Chief Johannes Sekororo.[126] Metz was later purchased by the Trust and put under the authority of the Mamathola tribal authority.

The mobility of the population, the relative availability of land, and the lack of authority either in the form of a chief or a landowner living on the farm may have led to very informal systems of land allocation. A 1933 'Report on the Natives of the Pilgrims Rest District' stated that:

> The natives in this area do not live in stads, but their huts are broadcast over the countryside, and the same can be said of their fields. On the Government and Company farms no special portion is set apart as pastoral and arable lands…This system is also the cause of continual disputes amongst neighbours owing to the stock causing damage to the crops, or disputes as to the rights of individuals to cultivate certain portions of ground.[127]

[124] For some examples, SANA NTS 7107 247/323, Letaba, Natives on Blinkwater; NTS 7109 276/323, Natives on Morgenzon; NTS 7108 253 323, Natives on Vaalwater; NTS 7108 251/323, Natives on Klaarstroom; NTS 7137 681/323, Natives on Olifantshoek; NTS 7134 607/323, Natives on Zeekoefontein.
[125] SANA NTS 7114 350/323, Sub Native Commissioner, Pietersburg to SNA 11 March 1925.
[126] Ibid. Assistant Native Commissioner, Leydsdorp to The Native Commissioner Tzaneen, 8 February 1935.
[127] WHP, AD843/B 44.7 SAIRR. Released Areas. Pilgrims Rest Report on the Natives of the Pilgrims Rest District, 1933 p.15.

In the meantime, another, critically important process had started in the region, and that was the increasing emphasis being placed on the need to reinforce the power of chiefs over land and people. 'Detribalisation' was a major concern of government officials who feared losing control of a rural population that was on its way to demanding more freedom and rights.[128] The African population was growing, and African urbanisation was occurring at a greater pace than before, these processes led to 'the growth of urban slums and the emergence of working-class radicalism, as well as a growing awareness of the rapid dissolution of the 'tribal system' and the inadequate agricultural capacity of the reserves'[129] Along with these concerns, politicians fed and responded to fears about racial miscegenation and public health, and another image – that 'Africans were "naturally" part of the land' – made it important for the government to begin taking segregation more seriously.[130] The 1927 Native Administration Act was a key turning point in the rural areas with regard to how people could access land and law. The Minister for Native Affairs was:

> Styled the "Supreme Chief of all Natives" throughout the Union, except in the Cape Province. It permitted the minister to devolve his vast powers to any administrative official; it recognised "Native law and custom" as the legal medium for resolving disputes in which the "interests of the Native predominated"… Collectively, the effect of these provisions was to bring Africans under tighter state control by "retribalising" them; as critics pointed out at the time, the uniform application of the act meant that all Africans were subjected to a tribalist juggernaut.[131]

Evans' wording is an overstatement – the importance of the Act was more in its intent and long term effects rather than immediate consequences. In some parts of the region, particularly the Pilgrims Rest district where there were no locations, 'all attempts to integrate the chieftainship into the state floundered on the fact that all the recognised chiefs lived on privately owned land and, as such, were at the mercy of individual farmers.'[132] Farmers sometimes afforded chiefs no respect, and at times actively tried to subvert them, such as when a particularly harsh landowner, Travers, 'made a chief kneel before he gave the chief permission to address him.'[133] The 1936 Land Act was in part concerned with providing land to extend the tribal locations. More land was needed to

[128] Harries, 'Exclusion' p. 97 – 99.
[129] Dubow, *Segregation,* p. 31 – 32.
[130] Ibid, pp. 31 – 33.
[131] Evans, *Bureaucracy,* p. 168.
[132] Ritchken, 'Leadership and Conflict', p. 77.
[133] Ibid.

develop reserve areas, and providing more land to chiefs would bolster their authority and their ability to administer the rural African population according to the regulations of the Trust. Chiefs in Letaba district were specifically asked to inform the Native Commission of which farms constituted their 'ancestral lands', in order for those to be returned to the 'tribe'.[134] But the 'ancient tribal land' which chiefs claimed was the stage upon which a different story was unfolding.

Ethnographic and historical literature on labour tenancy in other parts of the country shows how in the 1930s tenant households on white-owned farms were relatively independent of the authority of recognised chiefs.[135] Although some may have retained partial links to chiefs in order to take part in customary rites such as circumcision, they were otherwise divorced from their authority.[136] In the light of this, some commentators were sceptical of the creation of reserves and bolstering of the institution of chieftaincy, recognising that 'chieftaincy as an institution had been transformed; and…chiefs were no longer the sole political representatives of the African population'.[137] However, by this time, tribalism had come to represent the main lens through which the NAD viewed the identity of Africans and the way in which they should be governed.

Archival records and interviews with elderly men from the area provide further insight into the twin processes of the development of an independent and fairly mobile rural population, and chiefs increasing claims to 'tribal' land, encouraged by the government.[138] Each story is different but they contain some common threads: the newness of communities on some of the farms; changing dynamics as farm populations grew; household mobility, and complicated links with local chiefs. Samuel Mathale recalled how his father had left Maake's location in the early 1920s, after a dispute with the chief (presumably the Regent

[134] SANA NTS 3727 1993/308, Report, Native Affairs Commission, Letaba District, Native evidence, Leydsdorp area, 14 August 1937; Native evidence Tzaneen, 12 August 1937; Native Evidence Duivelskloof, 13 August 1937.
[135] M. Hunter, 'The Bantu on European-Owned Farms', in I. Schapera (ed.), *The Bantu Speaking Tribes of South Africa,* Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1937; H. Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924–1930,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, pp. 47–8.
[136] Hunter, 'The Bantu on European-Owned Farms'.
[137] Harries, 'Exclusion' p. 99.
[138] Samuel Mathale, interviewed by Michelle Hay (hereafter MH) and Ripfumelo Mushwana (hereafter RM) in Dan Village, 2 October 2012; Morris Mashele, interviewed by MH and RM in Julesburg, 25 September 2011 and 23 April 2012.

Maponye who ruled until 1928).[139] He settled on Keulen, a nearby company-owned farm which, according to Mathale, was 'just bush' in those days. Other tenants arrived around 1922 from the farm Munchen, which had been incorporated into Ofcolaco (a government settlement scheme for white officers returning from the First World War).[140] Years later they were joined by people from Mohlaba's location, who arrived with their own headman. The farm population was clearly independent from the baMaake chieftaincy, yet in 1937 David Maake, a representative for the ruling baMaake chieftainess, told the Native Affairs Commission that land 'down to the Letaba River', including Keulen, was part of their 'tribal territory'.[141]

Morris Mashele's parents were both descendants of the group that had moved to Letaba with Chief Mohlaba sometime in the 19th century. It seems that they broke away and settled in the foothills of the Drakensberg. According to Mashele his parents were mobile: 'they were just moving about, anywhere they wanted to settle, they settled'.[142] For some years they lived on the farm Inglesburg but when it was incorporated into Ofcolaco in 1919 the Masheles left to avoid labour tenancy. They moved to Burgersdorp, further north, and lived there for approximately fifteen years before leaving again to settle on the farm Julesburg. Sometime during the 1930s, Chief Mohlaba decided to buy Julesburg, which was near his location, and imposed a levy on the residents of the farm. The Mashele's best cattle were taken and the family was outraged. When Mohlaba acquired the farm they lost their independence as rent payers, and, as part of the 'tribe', were expected to pay hefty levies against their will.

The farm Tours provides another example. After a succession dispute in 1931 between William Moguboya and Charles Moguboya, both claimants to the chieftaincy, the unsuccessful candidate, Charles, left Moguboya's location with over 100 families. They applied to the NAD to live on Tours, which was already occupied by at least seven other households.[143] The new arrivals appropriated the ploughing lands of some of the older

[139] N.J Van Warmelo, 'The Bakoni ba Maake' *Ethnological Publications No.12* Pretoria: Government Publisher 1944, pp. 23-24.
[140] SANA, NTS 7083, 2/323, Sub Native Commissioner Haenertsburg to SNA, 1922 (exact date unclear).
[141] SANA, NTS 3727 1993/308, Investigations Native Affairs Commission, Letaba District, Tzaneen, 12 August 1937, Native Evidence p. 3.
[142] MH and RM interview with Morris Mashele, Julesburg, 23 April 2012.
[143] SANA NTS 7119 427/323 Assistant NC, Leydsdorp to NC, Tzaneen, 27 July 1935.

families.[144] After collecting a levy from his followers to buy Tours, Charles squandered the money.[145] In 1934, when the farm agent realised payment for the farm was not forthcoming, he demanded rent from Charles, on behalf of his followers. This was not forthcoming and the tenants were given their final notice.[146] Charles hired a lawyer to take up their case, who asked the NAD to find somewhere for Charles and his followers to live under some kind of secure tenure.[147] The Native Commissioner did not like Charles' character, and emphasised:

> There is no possibility of their being recognised as a separate tribe and the sooner they realise this, make up their minds to become loyal members of the tribe, to which they still belong, and accord the Chief thereof the respect to which he is entitled, the better it will be for themselves as well as for the tribe as a whole.[148]

The group was scattered. Some moved back to Moguboya's location, most moved to other locations or white farms, but about 13 families stayed at Tours.[149] At this point, the agent who administered the farm appointed one Saul Rammalo as headman. Rammalo was relatively wealthy and had experience of leadership in a mine compound.[150] He had also lent money to Charles Mogoboya to help buy the farm (which was never repaid). Ironically, Rammalo was recognised by the state as a headman of William Moguboya. Despite the hybrid forms of community that were taking shape on the farm, Tours was claimed by Maale, the baMaake chieftainess, as 'ancestral land' during the 1937 tour of the Native Affairs Commission, and was used to extend Maake's location in later decades.

[144] Ibid. Native Commissioner, Letaba to SNA, 12 October 1934.
[145] Lebowa Archive (Hereafter LA), Naphuno Magistrate Files (hereafter NMF), Box 32 6/3, Mack Rammalo to The Magistrate, Naphuno, 9 September 1971.
[146] Ibid.
[147] SANA NTS 7119 427/323 L. Caplan, attorney to SNA, 28 September 1934.
[148] Ibid. SNA to Caplan, 18 March 1936.
[149] Ibid. Assistant NC, Leydsdorp to NC, Tzaneen. 27 July 1935.
[150] LA, NMF, Box 32 6/3, Mack Rammalo to The Magistrate, Naphuno, 9 September 1971.

Conclusion

This chapter has challenged some of the assumptions prevalent in popular understandings of land dispossession: the central role of the 1913 Land Act, the role of chiefs as 'custodians of land' and the idea that African people lived in tribal communities and that this was how they experienced dispossession.

Land laws, including the squatters' laws, and the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, were not the direct cause of dispossession of African families in the region. As many have noted, Africans in general had been denied rights to land since long before the 1913 Land Act. The 1913 Land Act was provisional, and if anything, the 1936 Natives Trust and Land Act intended to reserve land for Africans to prevent further evictions and dispossession in heavily populated areas. The most direct cause of evictions was white farmers acting on economic motives as they put land under commercial use, wanted to extract rent from tenants, or use farms as private labour reserves. A more indirect cause was the difficulties the NAD experienced in buying the land that was set aside for Africans under the 1936 Natives Trust and Land Act.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, chiefs became less important as new forms of identity and sources of security, livelihood and land opened up. The extent to which chiefs controlled land even within locations was fairly minimal – most especially, once land was allocated to a family, it belonged to that family. There is also evidence that people could leave the domain of a chief after some disagreement simply by moving to a neighbouring farm. Here they could live independently, albeit as rent payers, in some cases labour tenants. Outside and even in some cases within locations, people could take up land at will. In the meantime, the population of the area was mobile, and farm populations were fluid, and made up of people with different origins. Thus, the idea that chiefs' were 'custodians' of large expanses of land, and that Africans were living in 'tribes' and accessed land through a chief, is problematic.

There were many reasons for mobility; evictions were only one. Africans had some agency in leaving farms, and some moves were for positive reasons rather than forced evictions. Nevertheless, from the 1920s in some places, especially in Pilgrims Rest district, and 1930s

in others, the ability of Africans to live on land independently as rent tenants was gradually constricted as more and more white farmers moved to the area and demanded labour from tenants. People could move to locations to escape these demands, but were then obliged to pay tribal levies and become subject to a chief. One needs to understand the loss of rights to land in this period as a constriction of the ways that people could access land independently, either as rent tenants or owners, and be mobile. It was in this sense that the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts had their most pernicious effects. The extension of locations to be administered by chiefs was one of the ways this independence was constricted. Putting so-called 'ancient tribal land' under the authority chiefs did not reflect the reality on the ground, and left little space for Africans to live on land independently as rent payers, or under their own chosen leaders.

Chapter Three:

African Agriculture from 1902 to the 1940s

In this chapter I look at agriculture practised by Africans in Letaba district from the turn of the century to the 1940s, before large scale evictions and over-crowding began to significantly affect the area. Official records such as the Annual Reports of the Department of Native Affairs, are fairly helpful in trying to reconstruct what agriculture was like in this period, and how it changed over time, but unfortunately these records are very thin after 1912. In 1930 the Director of Native Agriculture, for example, wrote regarding the Tzaneen/Groot Letaba district that 'any declared knowledge of the numbers of Natives and stock distributed throughout the area' was a 'farce'.[1] For this reason I have relied fairly heavily on the work of E. J and J.D Krige, and H.A. Junod. [2] The work of these anthropologists is also useful in order to get a sense of the variability of agriculture in the district. Also very helpful are records from Rheinallt –Jones, MP for Africans and head of the South African Institute of Race Relations, as well as his wife, who received letters from black farmers and conducted investigations in rural areas. However, these records are mostly from the 1940s. My understanding of local agriculture is also based on interviews with many individuals during my fieldwork and research for land claims.[3]

Practising Agriculture

In a place as environmentally diverse as the Letaba district, the first point to make about agriculture is that the kind of agriculture people practised, and its importance to their subsistence base and the local economy, varied. However, the idea that households would engage in particular activities, abide by particular taboos and rules, and hold particular sets of beliefs depending on their 'tribe' is of course very problematic. There was a lot of cultural mixing and practises and beliefs kept changing. The early twentieth century was a time of

[1] SANA NTS 10161 42/419, Report on the Agricultural, Pastoral, and Economic Conditions in the Transvaal Native Locations, 1930.
[2] E. J. Krige and J.D Krige, *The Realm of a Rain Queen,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943; Krige, E.J. 'Note on the Phalaborwa and their Morula Complex' *Bantu Affairs,* 1937; H. A. Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe, vol. 2,* New York: University Books, 1962.
[3] Full list in bibliography.

considerable change. However, the Kriges in particular are sensitive to some of these changes, and, as with Junod, it is helpful to read their work not as a blueprint of what homesteads looked like, but as a useful guide to the local homestead economy and some of the changes impacting on it, in vastly different areas. Before looking at differences though, it is worth making a point about similarities.

Regardless of area differences, cultivation and stock-keeping were important parts of the subsistence base of people living in this region. Agricultural products and livestock were also important in local trade. A 'typical' homestead, in both the well-watered hilly west and the drier lowveld below, looked fairly similar: a household cultivated a number of different plots or gardens, taking advantage of different soil types, cultivating, for example, near a river, immediately outside the homestead, and perhaps in another location. Different soils were good for different crops, and it was prudent to spread out one's fields and minimise the risk of losing one's entire crop to localised drought, flooding, hail, disease, pest infestation or, in the lowveld, elephants and other large wild animals. People also planted a wide variety of crops, for a varied diet and as security against drought. Mixed seeds were scattered in a field, there was no mono-cropping and little irrigation. In this period the amount of land cultivated was dependent mostly on how much labour power was available, rather than how much land there was – as I will discuss later on.

Maize was an important and extremely popular crop across the district. Maize has the strange distinction of being at once a high risk crop - because it needs a lot of rain at critical points of its growing cycle - and an emergency one. [4] It has a shorter growing period than indigenous cereals, cobs can be eaten while still green, it stores well, is easily transportable and can be eaten without processing.[5] Maize is also fairly bird-resistant, requiring less labour time to chase birds away, and less of the crop is lost. Most households would have grown a variety of other crops and vegetables too: sorghum, millet, pumpkins, a variety of beans, sugar cane and groundnuts were the most prevalent. Onions and tomatoes were sometimes grown; there were varieties from the east that were brought from Tsonga immigrants, and there were also new 'European' varieties which were starting to become

[4] A. Ekblom, L. Gillson, and M. Notelid, 'A Historical Ecology of the Limpopo and Kruger National Parks and Lower Limpopo Valley' *Journal of Archaeology and Ancient History,* No. 1, 2011, p.21.
[5] Ibid.

popular by the 1930s.[6] Spinach and cabbage were not widely grown as late as the 1930s, these plants 'came with white people.'[7] Tobacco was also a popular crop in the region, with 12,000 pounds being grown in the Haenertsburg district in 1905, vastly more than any other district in the Transvaal except Pietersburg, Wakkerstroom and Piet Retief.[8]

People began to use ploughs more often, but draught animals and ploughs were not always available. Donkeys were used as an alternative draught animal, and their numbers increased when cattle was low.[9] Not every household had a plough and draught animals, rather, households hired these services, and payment was in kind or in cash. Sometimes, people from Lovedu used the services of white farmers in ploughing fields, as their cattle and ploughs were not up to the task. When ploughs were introduced, according to Junod in 1914, 'men alone are allowed to drive them' because women could not be near oxen.[10] But by the 1930s and the 1940s ploughs were also driven by girls and young women – Jane Hlangwane, an interviewee, was responsible for herding cattle and attaching the plough to their backs.[11] Ploughs saved labour power and resulted in more abundant yields. But their use also led to erosion, particularly along the slopes of hills and valleys.[12]

The seasons of the year dictated people's activities and diet. There were different stages of the growing season, and all were labour intensive. Towards the end of August, late winter and before the rainy season began, people cleared fields. This involved the strenuous work of cutting down small trees and bushes with axes, using hoes to tear up grass and weeds on the surface of the soil, and burning the waste vegetation and tree trunks left in the fields. Fruit trees and large shade-providing trees were normally preserved. At least in some places, 'wherever the land is cultivated it takes the appearance of a huge orchard.'[13]

Clearing fields and preparing them for the rainy season continued for about three months. In the meantime, some people began to cultivate in moister areas. Amongst the Tsonga,

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[6] Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* p. 14.
[7] Ripfumelo Mushwana interview with Nkiyasi Mathebula, May 2012.
[8] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1905, p. 91.
[9] Ibid, p. 28.
[10] Junod, *Life, vol 2,* p. 48.
[11] RM interview with Jane Hlangwane, May 2012, also see WHP AD1438 Box 1, Native Economic Commission, Pietersburg, p. 271.
[12] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 41.
[13] Junod, *Life, vol. 2*, p. 16.

women began cultivating in their second fields in the marshes and near rivers.[14] Crops grown here matured earlier than those grown higher up, and helped to tide people over in what was the hungriest time of year. Generally however, sowing only began after the first rains fell, sometimes only after the chief had begun sowing. Sowing was time-consuming, hard work and often people arranged work parties to get it done more quickly and more pleasantly than would otherwise be the case.[15] This required reciprocation.

While the crops grew came the daily task of weeding. Later, once crops began to mature and grains formed, women and children went to the fields and spent their days chasing birds and other pests from the fields. During this period girls did not go to school.[16] Harvesting, threshing and getting food ready for storage took place from mid to late summer and beans were harvested as late as May.[17]

As noted in the previous chapter, because of the conditions of the soil and rainfall patterns in the lowveld, households had to move their fields fairly frequently, and this sometimes led them to migrate to other farms.

Many households kept a variety of livestock. Cattle were not very important amongst groups settled in the lowveld, because of the threat of trypanosomiasis carrying tsetse fly up to the end of the nineteenth century, other livestock diseases and threats such as predators. Junod does not even list 'cattle' or 'livestock' in his index. Hoes, not cattle, were typically used for bridewealth.[18] Cattle were important particularly amongst the Lovedu and Sotho groups, but quite rare in the first decade of the twentieth century. Cattle were used for bridewealth, their dung was used for smearing floors, when cattle died they were eaten, and in times of famine they were killed 'so that the meat can be exchanged for mealies.'[19] Milk from cows was sometimes drunk fresh, more often curdled.[20] But the numbers of cattle were very low. In 1905 there was 1 head of cattle between every three men in Haenertsburg district, compared to just under 2 head of cattle for every man in Pietersburg district – and this decreased for a few years due to disease, as the figures below show.

[14] Ibid, p. 22.
[15] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* pp. 31 – 32; Junod, *Life vol 2,* p. 23.
[16] Junod, *Life vol 2*, p. 25.
[17] Ibid.pp. 25 – 27.
[18] Junod, *Life vol 1.* p. 109.
[19] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 42.
[20] Junod, *Life, vol 2,* p. 49.

Fig. 2. Cattle in Haenertsburg District compared to Pietersburg District: 1905 to 1910[21]

	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
Haenertsburg	5,107	2,167	N/A	2,500	4,000	4,500
Pietersburg	30,000	15,000	N/A	12,000	8,000	18,000

The rinderpest epidemic – still recent history at the beginning of the century – had wiped out huge herds, but it also got rid of tsetse fly in the lowveld. And so for the first time people in the lowveld, such as the Phalaborwa, were able to keep cattle. This, and the end of serious raiding as occurred in the nineteenth century possibly produced a safer environment for cattle; the increasing shortage of land for grazing and the need to pay grazing fees no doubt curbed numbers in more populated areas, as did diseases. Thus, the Kriges noted about cattle amongst the Lovedu, 'in the old days they were worthy of the metal of adult men who went armed to herd the cattle and supervised the milking. But today children herd and there are practically no cows to be milked.'[22] But cattle numbers increased. As Beinart pointed out:

> it should not be assumed that numbers [of cattle] were higher in the distant past. Lungsickness, redwater, rinderpest and East Coast fever decimated the herds in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It is likely that the figures recorded in the 1930s were an all-time high because systematic dipping and disease control had increased survival rates.[23]

The search for better grazing land was one of the reasons for mobility in this period. Cattle became an important part of the local economy, as I show later.

Goats were more important by far for most households.[24] They were eaten (the meat was eaten by everyone, and children drank goat milk), used as goodwill gifts, and for forms of exchange and ritual sacrifice.[25] Sheep 'were of no importance whatsoever' according to the

[21] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Reports 1905, p. 92; 1906, p. 106; 1908, p. 67; 1909, p. 91; 1910, p. 107. There was a population difference between Pietersburg and Haenertsburg districts, but it was not big enough to explain the difference in stock numbers. In 1905 the population of Haenertsburg was 60250, and Pietersburg was 73,695. But there were more men in Haenertsburg district: 15893 to Pietersburg's 15387.
[22] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 42.
[23] W. Beinart and K. Brown, *African Local Knowledge and Livestock Health: Diseases and Treatments in South Africa,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013, p. 27.
[24] Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* p. 49.
[25] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 44 – 45.

Kriges in the 1930s, and Junod similarly says that sheep 'are scarce in our tribe', although sheep were sometimes used in rituals connected with chiefs.[26] There were only 8,968 sheep in the Haenertsburg district in 1905, compared to 60,000 in Pietersburg.[27] By 1910 there were only 6,500 sheep in Haenertsburg district compared to 38,000 in Pietersburg district.[28] However, while sheep may not have been important in terms of custom amongst the Lovedu, there were far more sheep than cattle in the district, and more sheep than pigs.

Fig. 3. Livestock in Haenertsburg District, 1905 - 1910[29]

	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
Cattle	5107	2167	N/A	2500	4000	4500
Sheep	8968	7474		1200	5000	6500
Goats	43334	36111		35000	50000	60000
Pigs	3190	2659		3000	4500	4500
Donkeys	57	40		75	210	250

Chickens were kept predominantly by Tsonga households but were also kept more widely.[30] People ate the meat rather than the eggs, as eating eggs was considered to be a waste.[31] Amongst the Tsonga chickens were also used in sacrificial rituals. Donkeys were introduced at the beginning of the century and were important for ploughing. Pigs were also recently introduced but were not generally eaten for food because of taste preferences, rather they 'figure largely in trading transactions'.[32] According to Josephine Shikwambana, who was born in the 1930s, pig fat was used to make soap and for cooking.[33] This may have been a more recent practice.

[26] Ibid; Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* p. 50.
[27] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1905, p. 92.
[28] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1910, p. 107.
[29] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Reports 1905, p. 92; 1906, p. 106; 1908, p. 67; 1909, p. 91; 1910, p. 107.
[30] Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* p. 51; Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 45.
[31] Junod, *Life vol.2,* p. 51.
[32] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 45. Junod, *Life vol. 2,* p. 51.
[33] MH and RM interview with Josephine Shikwambana, Dan Village, 25 August, 2011.

What were the differences in agriculture in different areas? The Lovedu[34], living in the fertile foothills of the Drakensberg, were 'great agriculturalists and poor pastoralists'.[35] Here, the major change in the first few decades of the twentieth century was that, over time, less land was available for the older shifting cultivation that was practiced in the past.[36] Towards the east, where Makushane's, Maseke's, Mashishimale's and Selwane's locations were situated, 'land is plentiful and can be taken up at will by anyone',[37] but there was very little water. This was particularly so in the years before serious investment was made in digging boreholes and building dams. As late as 1943 the area was still sparsely populated when the Director of Native Agriculture, Ramsay, reported on the area:

> These Northern Trust lands could hold an immense population were water available. 100 boreholes would not be too many for the area. Extremely large lands would have to be demarcated if the people went in for agriculture on account of the extremely low rainfall. This… is pastoral rather than agricultural land. The people eke out their income from the sale of cattle and by poaching. Most of their cereal food is purchased from shops, even in normal times.[38]

While wild plants of enormous variety were important for the Lovedu, hunting in that part of the district 'can be dismissed with a reference to the activities of herdboys.'[39] Towards the east, hunting was more important, as was gathering mopane worms, wild edible plants and fruits such as marula. In fact, Eileen Krige suggested, while morula was used as a food and drink all over the northern Transvaal, 'such is its importance in the economic life of the Phalaborwa that theirs may with justice be termed a morula culture.'[40]

Very few 'ordinary' households in this period had yet taken to growing 'European' vegetables: tomatoes, onions, cabbage, and carrots, which required irrigation and were grown in winter. [41] It seems it was more common in the west of the district to grow 'European' vegetables in market gardens, particularly in this early period. The area was more heavily populated, there was a larger local market, and it was near to Tzaneen,

[34] As emphasised in chapter 1, people living in BoLobedu were ethnically heterogenous, not only 'Sotho' people, but a mix.
[35] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 34.
[36] Ibid*,* p. 37.
[37] E. J. Krige, 'Notes on the Phalaborwa and their Morula Complex' *Bantu Studies,*1937, p. 362.
[38] SANA NTS 3728 1993/308, Ramsay to Additional Native Commissioner, Duivelskloof, 'Proposed Disestablishment of Six Locations and Settlement of the People elsewhere' 19 February 1943.
[39] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* pp. 34, 45.
[40] Krige, 'Note on the Phalaborwa', p. 360.
[41] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* pp. 37 – 38.

Pietersburg and other white villages and towns. The Kriges wrote for example that 'many people' among the Lovedu, 'more particularly Christian' cultivated these vegetables during the winter, to sell locally as relish to people tired of an otherwise monotonous diet at this time of year.[42]

Some crops were taboo in some cultures but not in others, for example the *nyume* or 'kafir pea' was grown by Tsonga households, but not by Pedi.[43] Chickens were a far more integral part of Tsonga households and diet than Sotho, and eggs were not universally popular.

The Agricultural Economy

In terms of integration into a money economy, the most important crops locally were maize, sorghum, and to a lesser extent, tobacco and vegetables. Maize was traded locally with itinerant traders, transport riders in the early years of the century, and later bartered at local trading stores. Maize was used by local producers for barter rather than sold for cash, and many traders had to accept maize rather than money for payment. In the late nineteenth century for example when Sarah Heckford first entered the Zoutpansberg to begin trading with Africans, she had to barter her goods for maize, as people reserved their cash for tax.[44] By the time she had traded all her wares she had so much maize she had to leave some of it (guarded carefully) behind while she took what she could carry on her heavily-laden wagon.[45] In 1909 Indian and European traders did well in the Haenertsburg and Pilgrims Rest districts respectively, as there had been a bumper harvest and trade was principally in mealies.[46] This was a broader regional pattern – in Louis Trichardt, Groot Spelonken and Pilgrims Rest districts trade was principally in grain, in Pilgrims Rest Africans traded grain 'almost exclusively for merchandise', not for cash.[47] By 1941 maize was still the main item traded in stores, 'for although stores prefer to take cash they are bound to take mealis [sic] as cash is scarse [sic] amongst most of the natives.'[48] Women bartered maize in local stores for tea, coffee, sugar, cloth and beads.

[42] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 33.
[43] Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* Neuchatel: Imprimerie Attinger Freres, 1913, pp. 12 – 13.
[44] V. Allen, (1979) *A Lady Trader,* p. 134.
[45] Ibid, p. 137.
[46] Transvaal Department of Native Affairs Annual Report, 1909, p. 41. 1909 – 1910, pp. 41 – 42.
[47] Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1910, pp. 126, 190.
[48] WHP AD 843/RJ Sb3.34, W. Krause, Medingen to Rheinallt-Jones, 14 May 1941.

Maize was such an important an item to trade with that it was bartered even when the harvest was not enough to meet a household's subsistence needs for a season. This became an established practise. In 1911 for example, Wheelwright, the Native Commissioner for the Northern Division, wrote:

> The usual improvidence of the Native has again been much in evidence in the disposal of such grain as was not required for immediate consumption, necessitating re-purchase at enhanced prices. From 4/- to 15/- per bag of 200 lbs. appears to be the amount received by Natives, the price on re-purchase being anything from 25 per cent. to 100 per cent. greater.[49]

Two and a half decades later, in 1936, the Chief Native Commissioner wrote that:

> The Native is notoriously lacking in foresight and will sell his mealies in a time of plenty for a few shillings without a thought that when a period of scarcity comes he will have to re-purchase his staple food supply from the trader at double or treble the price for which he sold it.[50]

The statements by the native commissioners come with the assumption that the value of maize was primarily as a subsistence crop, used for food. Thus maize only had real further value to a household as an item to exchange once a surplus had been achieved, otherwise selling it or using it to barter was irrational. But this assumes these were stereotypically peasant households, reliant on agriculture for subsistence and income, and that there was no other reliable source of income to buy food.

Maize may have had a different but equally important role in the local economy than providing extra income from a surplus. For example, in 1935 in the Duiwelskloof area, the Assistant Native Commissioner wrote that:

> When travelling through the district and taking note of the cultivated patches in proximity to the kraals one is forced to the conviction that the Native, generally speaking, does not plant sufficient for his requirements throughout the year, specially considering *that a fair proportion of the mealie crop is always bartered by the women and children to the local traders for sugar and other luxuries*.[51] [own emphasis]

An argument could be made that maize was being used like credit by women and children at home, perhaps in the absence of cash from migrant men, with the hopeful expectation that

[49] Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1911, p. 5.
[50] SANA, NTS 1915, 147/278, Untitled, undated report. p. 10.
[51] NTS 1915 147/278, Assistant Native Commissioner, Duivelskloof, Report on Native Affairs for the Year 1935, p. 5.

at a future point a husband/brother/uncle might return with cash – or even with maize purchased cheaply in Johannesburg. Bartering maize may have been the most convenient way to acquire items as they were needed, even though people knew they might have to buy it back at a higher price – with interest – later on if other sources of maize did not materialise.

This practice is also reminiscent of other strategies used by the poor to tide households over in times of need – for example taking items to a pawn shop to get money to buy food, and then buying back the items later on.[52] The critical part of the equation was income from other sources, such as migrant remittances. This suggests that maize was important to the local economy in less straightforward ways than is often assumed. Its economic value was not simply in terms of subsistence, or the sale of surplus. There was a more complicated, and gendered, use of the plant.

Another crop of great importance was sorghum, which was used in beer brewing. Aside from its food value and its importance in ritual and reciprocity, brewing beer was a source of extra income for women. Delius makes the point that in 1930s Sekhukuneland, 'the most important local source of revenue for women was the sale of beer.'[53]

> The brewing of beer has been helping our women to make money. In some cases you find that these women… brew it to make money, so as to give it to their husbands, to enable them to pay their dipping fees or their taxes, whenever necessary.[54]

Again, the value of sorghum was tied into a migrant economy, and the use of the plant as a source of income was gendered.

Tobacco was another source of income, but this crop was cultivated by men and not women. Junod notes that it had been cultivated for a long time, and that it was often used for barter.[55] Some people were also starting to grow European style vegetables in irrigated gardens, to be sold locally, as noted above. The North-eastern Transvaal, both the foothills of the escarpment and the lowveld, were suitable for winter cultivation of certain

[52] D. Vincent, *Poor Citizens: the state and the poor in twentieth century Britain,* London and New York: Longman, 1991, pp. 9 – 12.
[53] P. Delius *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* p. 35.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Junod, *Life, vol 2,* p. 14.

vegetables, given the relatively warm climate. This was one of the things that drew white commercial farmers here in the 1930s. In the next chapter I look at the development of irrigation farming in the district in the late 1930s and 1940s.

Livestock was also important for trading. Sheep and cattle were traded locally, but again their use in barter was important. For example, before Rhodesian tick bite fever hit in 1905, 'many bartered their cattle for donkeys to use for ploughing, whilst others sold for money to buy sheep and goats.'[56] Some people sold cow's milk and, according to Junod, were 'so eager to make money out of it that they often added water to it.'[57]

The importance of cattle in the local economy increased over time. However, cattle sales were generally disappointing. Giving evidence to the Native Economic Commission in 1930, both Menne, a local land agent and Janse van Rensburg, the Assistant Native Commissioner at Leydsdorp, noted that this was due to the poor quality of cattle.[58] Cows in particular were only sold amongst Africans and not to whites, because of their small size. In 1937 Gradwell wrote that 'not 5 per cent of the Native bred stock are sold at their full value – thousands of speculators have "grown fat" on the profits derived from buying cattle from Natives and rushing same to the Markets of the union.'[59] In 1939 a report on agriculture in the Northern Areas noted that 'cattle sales do not make progress in the Northern Areas, in spite of the fact that many districts are overstocked… Natives prefer to deal with speculators as they are suspicious of auction sales.'[60] I try to provide some reasons for this later in the section on constraints to agriculture. While cattle sales may have been disappointing, cattle did have another economic value during this time – their manure was frequently sold to white farmers, to the dismay of Agricultural Officers who were trying hard to encourage the use of manure in African agriculture.[61] The value of manure as something to be sold may explain the limited use of manure amongst black cultivators. Firstly, cattle owners may have preferred to receive cash for manure rather than use it on their fields. But more likely many households did not own cattle, and could not afford to pay for manure.

[56] Transvaal Department of Native Affairs Annual Report, 1905, p. 28.
[57] Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* p. 49.
[58] WHP, AD 1438 Native Economic Commission, Pietersburg, Menne, p. 286; Duiwelskloof, Janse Van Rensburg, p. 374.
[59] WHP AD 843/RJ/Sb3.116, Gradwell, Tzaneen, to Rheinallt-Jones, Memo on Native Owned Cattle, 11/08/1937.
[60] NTS 7514, 662/327, Notes for the Natives Representative Council, Northern Areas, 1939, p. 11.
[61] Ibid, Address to the Native Representative Council: 1940 Session Commencing 25th November 1940, p. 4.

Peasant Prosperity?

Although agriculture was obviously an important part of the local economy, there is no suggestion that there was a major boom in agriculture in the early twentieth century. At the beginning of the century, in 1903, the Native Commissioner for the Northern Division of the Transvaal wrote:

> The cultivation of their fields continues the same year after year. They take all that is to be got out of the land by surface scratching and do nothing to restore fertility of the soil by rotation of crops or manuring. They certainly have taken more to using ploughs, and in fact where they possess oxen one invariably finds the plough and wagon in use. Only small irrigation is done by natives.[62]

There were some improvements. By 1905 many people used 'improved methods of agriculture, in that many now use the plough almost entirely in place of the common Kaffir pick', there were more properly sunk wells and some irrigation 'where water exists in sufficient quantities for the purpose.'[63] In 1910 'drought, locust visitations, and cattle diseases have followed one another in quick succession, and the result is today that the natives have been impoverished in many parts of the country.' [64]

In 1935 the Native Commissioner wrote:

> In some parts of the district Natives have shown an increased desire to use up-to-date farming implements and have gone in for irrigation on a small scale, the results being satisfactory, so there is reason to hope that it will be more universally undertaken in future.

But further down in the same report, he commented that:

> The tendency in some localities appears to be to plant less each year and rely on the purchase of grain from neighbouring store-keepers or farmers for the maintenance of the kraal. When travelling through the district and taking note of the cultivated patches in proximity to the kraals one is forced to the conviction that the Native, generally speaking, does not plant sufficient for his requirements throughout the year.[65]

[62] Native Affairs Annual Report 1903, Native Commissioner's Annual Report, Northern Division, p. 19.
[63] Native Affairs Department Annual Report 1905, p. 26.
[64] Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1910, p. 5.
[65] NTS 1915 147/278, Assistant Native Commissioner, Duivelskloof, Report on Native Affairs for the Year 1935, p. 5.

Interviews with men and women who were children in the 1940s suggests that agriculture was not a route to prosperity for many families. Josephine Shikwambana and William Monyele both said that 'people were suffering' in the time when they relied predominantly on agriculture, because 'food was scarce'.[66] Yields were fairly low. In a good year, Jane Hlangwane said, if they were strong and worked hard they could get 50 bags of maize.[67] This is in stark contrast to the 1000 bags of sorghum, 570 bags of maize and 200 bags of sunflower seeds Kas Maine and family reaped as their own share in 1948.[68]

Charles Simkins shows that 'taking the reserves[69] as a whole, one finds that their inhabitants were far from able to provide for their subsistence requirements from agricultural production as early as 1918.'[70] In the northern Transvaal, in around 1927, households produced on average less than 50 per cent of their subsistence food requirements.[71]

Concern over the decline of African agriculture is a recurring theme in South African history, and has been blamed on the migrant labour system amongst other things. Also prevalent is the idea that rural households were once self-sufficient and farming was a secure way of life. The rural economy and causes of its decline has been fundamentally misunderstood by many involved in forming rural policy. For example, Tozi Gwanya, the Acting Chief Land Claims Commissioner in 2003, wrote:

> It is interesting to note that up until the 1960s, when able-bodied rural men had to go for employment in the mines and manufacturing industries in order to be able to pay compulsory taxes, the rural economy was self-sufficient. Rural communities used appropriate technologies and produced their own food, without any dependence on migrant remittances, social grants or groceries from the supermarkets… Systematic dispossession, reduced land holding, insecure

[66] MH and RM interview with Josephine Shikwambana, 25 September 2011;MH and RM interview with William Monyele, Nkowankowa, 24 September 2011.
[67] RM interview with Jane Hlangwane, May 2012.
[68] C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894 – 1985,* Cape Town: David Philip, 1996, p. 306.
[69] Simkins uses the term African Reserves to include Crown/State Reserves or locations, Mission Reserves or Stations, Tribally owned farms, African owned farms, Crown/State lands occupied by Africans, Trust Lands purchased after 1936.
[70] C. Simkins, 'Agricultural Production in the African Reserves of South Africa, 1918 – 1969' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 7 (2), 1981, p. 264.
[71] Ibid, p. 267.

> tenure, industrialisation and urbanisation have all contributed to the lack of interest in agricultural production in rural areas.[72]

On the other hand, looking at the performance of agriculture in the Bantustans during the 1980s and 1990s Stefan Schirmer makes the argument that:

> It is extremely difficult to revive an interest in farming amongst those who have to start from scratch because of the risks involved. Agriculture in South Africa is affected by periodic price fluctuations, by regular droughts and by many crop and stock diseases. All of these factors make it impossible to predict what return, if any, will be realised on any sum invested into the land.[73]

Below I look at some of the constraints to agriculture in the Letaba District, to provide a more nuanced understanding of the poor performance of agriculture. I then look at how people coped with these constraints.

Constraints to agriculture

At the end of his report in 1935 the Assistant Native Commissioner of Duivelskloof ascribed the 'tendency to plant less each year' to the growing congestion in locations.[74] The growing congestion of reserves was accompanied by increasing insecurity of tenure on private farms. In 1911, the Secretary for Native Affairs commented with regard to agriculture that:

> The general belief among the Natives that any improvements effected will surely lead the European to covet the land and result in their expulsion is no doubt accountable for much of the disinclination to alter existing methods, while the insecurity of tenure, combined with physical inertia and want of business aptitude, all tend to retard the growth of the Native as an agriculturalist.[75]

In 1914 Junod remarked: 'There is no doubt that, having been initiated into civilised methods of cultivation, South African Natives, who have such a strong natural taste for agriculture, will in future considerably develop the resources of the soil.' But two conditions were necessary. Firstly, they needed teachers. Secondly, they needed to be allowed to buy land:

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[72] Commission for Restitution of Land Rights Annual Report, 2002-2003, p. 6.
[73] S. Schirmer, 'Policy Visions and Historical Realities: Land Reform in the Context of Recent Agricultural Developments' *African Studies,* 59 (1), 2000, pp. 143 - 144.
[74] NTS 1915 147/278, Assistant Native Commissioner, Duivelskloof, Report on Native Affairs for the Year 1935, p. 5.
[75] Transvaal Department of Native Affairs Annual Report, 1911, p. 4.

> As long as they are only tenants of big Land Companies, or provisional occupants, squatters on Crown land, always threatened with the possibility of their gardens being turned into farms, and sold to White people without any compensation, how can they be expected to devote much time and interest to the betterment of the soil?[76]

What Junod was concerned about in 1914 became so much worse as the next decades progressed, even though more land was technically put aside for African settlement. A significant transformation took place in the 1930s as more white farmers put land under production, and evicted thousands of tenants. In 1932 an article in an African newspaper in the Spelonken described a situation felt across the northern and eastern Transvaal:

> We are gradually being dispossessed of the land which we and our ancestors, from time immemorial, occupied. Daily we see big parties emigrating from their old homes (because the farmer has bought the farms and requires them to work) to places they might live in security and with freedom. But alas! Such a place is nowhere! They may perhaps go to the locations but they will experience in the course of time that they are in no better positon as the locations are congested and barren of vegetation.[77]

While land was becoming scarce, the African population of South Africa was growing – almost doubling between 1904 and 1936. Population growth put additional pressure on scarce resources such as land.[78]

But these are reports of the Transvaal more generally, or of Sibasa district which had a run of particularly extreme forceful removals by the 1930s. In the Letaba district, until the mid-1930s, shortage of land was not a major constraint on agriculture for most households. Until the 1930s there was relatively little white commercial farming in the district, there were few white settlers, and there was a lot of land. During the investigation of the Native Economic Commission in 1934, Francis Menne, an agent for the Transvaal Landowner's Association, pointed out that tenants 'had no reason to support that they will be removed from that ground'. In twenty years Menne had evicted 'hardly any' tenants, and then only for not paying rent. 'The native knows that so long as he pays he is safe, and generally speaking he pays.' [79] He also found that many Africans left the locations to come to private white farms,

[76] Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* p. 32.
[77] Cited in P. Harries, 'Exclusion' p. 97.
[78] J. Illife, *The African Poor, A History,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 123.
[79] Wits Historical Papers, AD 1438 Native Economic Commissionion, Pietersburg, pp. 272, 277.

where they could plough as much land as they wanted.[80] Thus, Menne did not believe that the tenancy system prevented Africans from improving themselves.[81]

According to Josephine Shikwambana, who lived in a fairly heavily populated part of the district in the vicinity of Tzaneen and Mohlaba's location, land was freely available, 'each individual had many plots to farm. There was no counting how many plots one should have.' They also did not need permission from the chief to occupy plots, they could do so 'as long as there was rain.'[82] Evictions however did have an effect on agriculture. It was very common for people to be evicted with little notice, and without the ability to arrange transport to carry all their belongings to their new homes. Bags of grain often got left behind, and livestock lost.

Here I want to argue that while increasing shortage of land and insecure tenure were critical in making agriculture difficult for certain people (perhaps the most serious black commercial farmers) and in certain parts of the country, there were many other constraints to agriculture that made it a risky business for ordinary households.

Drought and water shortage

Rainfall in the region varies from a low of 200mm in the hot dry areas in the lowveld to 1,500mm in the high rainfall areas along the Drakensberg escarpment.[83] A hot dry climate, poor quality of soil, and lack of water in parts of the district were clearly constraints for many producers. In the drier parts of the lowveld people may have only been able to grow crops one year out of every four.[84] For these people, farming could only ever be a minor (though still important) part of their livelihood base. In these areas, livestock became increasingly important, and during periods of drought people 'were forced to sell their cattle for grain'.[85] Given the urgency of these sales due to the need for grain and the deteriorating condition of cattle, the prices were probably low.

[80] This is also supported by interviews with land claimants in the Sabi Sands area further south. Delius and Hay, 'Sabi Sands' p. 58.
[81] Wits Historical Papers, AD 1438 Native Economic Commissionion, Pietersburg, pp. 272, 277.
[82] MH and RM interview with Josephine Shikwambana 24 September, 2011.
[83] FAO *Drought Impact Mitigation and Prevention in the Limpopo River Basin, A Situational Analysis:* Harare, FAO Subregional Office for Southern And East Africa, 2004.
[84] SANA NTS 3728 1993/308 Memorandum, 'Native Locations in the Letaba District' p. 4.
[85] SANA NTS 1915, 147/278, Report on Native Affairs 1936, Leydsdorp.

But even people living in better watered areas were at risk of regular crop failure due to drought. The Mopani district is situated in the Limpopo River Basin, which has an unreliable climate for agriculture. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation there is a probable risk of crop failure in the Limpopo River Basin in 45 – 75 per cent of years largely due to unpredictable rainfall.[86] In 1903 crops in the Northern Division 'were below the lowest average yield, and in fact failed entirely in some parts of the District on account of the shortage of the rainfall.'[87] In 1910 late rains and early frost in some areas led to poor harvests.[88] In 1911 drought hit large parts of the Transvaal, and by 1912 was so severe there was almost complete crop failure in the North-eastern Transvaal.[89] Drought did not only affect food supply in terms of the failure of crops. The Native Commissioner for Duivelskloof wrote in 1936 that:

> As was the case last year I have again to record a disastrous drought extending over practically the whole of the Letaba district, during the latter half of the year nearly all the early crops perished and in some cases fields were replanted three or even four times before a stand was obtained; the grain rose to nearly treble the ordinary prices. The high prices obtaining were not due to any shortage of food supplies in the Northern-Transvaal but, especially in this area, to the cost of transport which was greatly increased owing to the scarcity and poor condition of draught animals, due to poverty caused by lack of food.[90]

In the Duiwelskloof area in this year, 6,000 head of cattle died, half of them from lack of water.[91]

According to research by Mathieu Rouault and Yves Richard, who looked at the spatial extension and intensity of drought in South Africa from 1921 to 2008, the worst droughts in the summer rainfall areas of South Africa occurred in 1926, 1933, 1945, 1949, 1952, 1970, 1983 and 1992.[92] Intense hydrological droughts occur when, after a period of dry seasons or years, the water table and soil moisture levels are low, thus affecting the availability of river water, borehole water, irrigation, and the ability of the soil to sustain life. Agricultural

[86] Ekblom, Gillson, and Notelid, 'A Historical Ecology', p.20.
[87] Transvaal Department of Native Affairs Annual Report, 1903, p. 20.
[88] Transvaal Department of Native Affairs Annual Report, 1909-1910, p. 30-32.
[89] Blue book on Native Affairs, 1912, p. 6.
[90] SANA NTS 1915, 147/278. Report on Native Affairs, 1936, Duivelskloof.
[91] Ibid.
[92] M. Rouault and Yves Richard, 'Intensity and spatial extension of drought in South Africa at different time scales' *Water SA,* 29 (4), 2003, p. 492.

drought occurs more regularly, when rainfall starts too late, stops too early, or is unreliable during the growing season. This affects dry land farmers – the majority of small scale farmers in the region – even when the water table is normal and rivers are flowing. Agricultural drought can occur even if, on average, there was the 'normal' amount of rainfall in a given year. This kind of drought is often localised. Agricultural droughts possibly occurred in the summers of 1923 (September to December), 1925-1926 (December and January), 1926-1927 (October to February), 1930 (October and November), 1935-1936 (October to January), 1937 (November after a very dry winter), 1944-1945 (December to February), 1945 (November and December), 1946 (August to December) and 1950 (October and November).[93]

Cattle Disease

In 1905 cattle in the district 'became almost decimated by Rhodesian Tick-fever'.[94] In 1908 Africans 'suffered severe losses of horned stock owing to the prevalence of redwater or East Coast fever.'[95] Stock was lost to culling as well as actual disease: the Diseases of Stock Ordinance, 1902, and the Cattle Diseases Ordinance of 1904, allowed for the culling of stock in order to prevent the spread of the disease.[96] Cattle numbers for the Northern Division of the Transvaal dropped from 81,321 in 1904 to 54,107 in 1905 and 35,087 the next year, before they started increasing again slowly, to 79,200 by 1910.[97] There is a gap in reporting in the 1920s and early 1930s, but in 1936 an outbreak of East Coast fever was reported, and the farms of Julesburg, Sedan, Bordeaux and Burgersdorp were put under quarantine.[98] A fence was built around these farms and the NAD planned on recovering the cost of the fence from the cattle owners affected. Morris Mashele, whose family lived on one of these farms, remembers that the government took away his family's cattle and in compensation, 'only gave us some very small amount that you could not even buy one cow with it. After

[93] Based on Standard Precipitation Index data for north eastern interior provided by M. Rouault. This is based on figures for the 3 month time scale SPI which 'can be used to monitor soil moisture conditions at the start of the growing season or precipitation during the different stages of plant development or reproduction.'[93]
[94] NAD blue books 1905, p. 28.
[95] NAD blue books 1908, p. 15.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1904: p. 74, 1905: p. 91, 1906: p. 106, 1908: p. 67, 1909: p. 91, 1910: p. 107.
[98] SANA NTS 1915, 147/278, Report on Native Affairs, 1936, Leydsdorp.

they took the cows away, we used donkeys for farming.'[99] Fanisa Nwabeza Malungane born possibly in the 1930s (she did not know the date) remembers her father's cattle dying from a disease called 'xizohana' meaning 'high blood'. Her father culled whatever cattle had not already died from the disease. At that time 'there was no butchery, even the shops were not there. People were suffering.'[100] In 1939 12,000 head of cattle were destroyed in Pilgrims Rest district to control an outbreak of foot and mouth disease.[101]

Cattle dipping became compulsory in Letaba and Pilgrims Rest districts.[102] While dipping may have led to improvements in cattle numbers, other preventative measures designed to control disease outbreaks had a negative effect on the marketing of cattle in the area. To prevent cattle diseases from spreading, parts of the lowveld were quarantined. A fenced 'red line' was created which cattle could not cross. Parts of the Letaba and Pilgrims Rest districts lay almost permanently inside the red line and so stock owners were forced to sell stock within a very limited market, which speculators took advantage of. This was very likely one of the factors that contributed to the poor prices many Africans got for their cattle. In conjunction with this, the nature of evictions in the area also contributed to the poor prices fetched for stock, particularly in later decades. Households were given very little notice to vacate farms, and could not always take their cattle with them, either because of a lack of grazing land in the place they were moving to, because of a lack of transport, or because they were on the wrong side of the red line and could not take their cattle over. Speculators took advantage of this.[103] Tape worm infestations, leading to measles in cattle and pigs, also led to 'considerable' loss of the value of cattle sold to butchers.[104]

Cattle disease was a problem for local agriculture not only because of the destruction caused to herds and the wealth they represented, but because it impacted on people's ability to plough. In some years ploughs were underutilised because of the shortage of

[99] MH and RM interview with Morris Mashele, 25 September 2011.
[100] RM interview with Fanisa Nwabeza Malungane, May 2012.
[101] SANA NTS 7514, 662/327, 'Notes for the Natives Representative Council, Northern Areas, 1939, p. 10.
[102] Ibid.
[103] P. Delius and M. Hay, 'Report on Claims Lodged by Various Communities in Sabi Sands', unpublished report for the Mpumalanga Land Claims Commission, p. 39.
[104] SANA NTS 7514, 662/327, 'Notes for the Natives Representative Council, Northern Areas, 1939.

stock. To cope with this, some people bartered cattle for donkeys which could also pull ploughs. [105]

Pests

Insects, parasites, monkeys, rats, mice and birds all did damage to standing crops. The need to control them added to the labour intensity of farming, but sometimes they could not be controlled at all. Birds could take a tenth of the cereals planted, more if the children and women guarding fields were not vigilant enough.[106] One of the ways people dealt with this was to only plant certain cereals if one's neighbours were also doing so because 'when there are many fields all – not merely one – will be at the mercy of predatory birds.'[107]

Of the insects that troubled farmers, locusts were by far the most destructive. In 1906, 'A very large swarm of locusts invaded the district about the month of May, and did considerable damage to standing crops.'[108] Mrs E. A Thompson, a white female farmer in the Woodbush mountains, described the havoc caused by locusts in 1923 or '24 and her neighbour's attempt to protect his crops by setting the grass around his wheat field alight:

> When we arrived at the top of the hill we saw the smoke and I noticed a piece of bracken catch light and settle on the Roodhuizen's thatched roof. Before we could get there to save their possessions the house was burned down. We went home quickly and beat this fire along our boundary until dark. In the meantime, the locusts had come and settled on our apple trees. The next day there was a misty rain and they could not fly away. They just sat there for two days and ate until the sun came out again. The apple trees were about eight years old, nearly full-bearing. They were completely ruined and I had to prune them very severely.[109]

Large wild animals too, were capable of destroying entire crops. For a long time, dogs and guns were important in protecting fields and households from dangerous or destructive wild animals. Men also used dogs and guns to actively hunt wild animals for meat and skins – with the added advantage of scaring animals from the immediate surrounds of the homestead. The prohibitions on hunting which were introduced in the nineteenth century, disarmament after the South African war, and the dog tax which was introduced in 1903

[105] Transvaal Department of Native Affairs Annual Reports, 1905, p. 28.
[106] Junod, *Life, vol. 2,* p. 25.
[107] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 39.
[108] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1906, p. 45
[109] B. Wongtschowski, *Between Woodbush and Wolkberg: Googoo Thompson's Story,* Pretoria, Sigma Press, 1990, p. 117.

upset this balance. In 1908, 1909 and 1910 the Native Commissioner's annual reports referred to complaints by Africans that wild animals were destroying their crops.[110] In 1906 a government official remarked that, 'the over protection of game in some parts [of the Transvaal] has resulted in the most disastrous consequences to the Natives who had in many cases lost their whole crops.[111] In areas close to the Kruger Park and private farms used for game hunting, predators occasionally killed livestock.

In 1908 the government began issuing licenses to some individuals 'for the sole purpose of destroying wild animals within the immediate vicinity of their homes'.[112] This was fairly unhelpful for the very poor who lived in isolated homesteads – if they could not afford the dog tax it is unlikely they could afford a firearm and a license. The number of firearm licenses issued in the Northern Division exceeded the number in any other part of the Transvaal by far. In 1906 there were 233 registered firearms in the Northern Division, compared to the next highest, 75 in the western division.[113] In 1909 there were 291 registered firearms in the Northern Division, 77 of which were held in Haenertsburg district.[114] Those living closer to other homesteads may have grouped together for the purpose of driving off wild animals, but the places where people were most likely to suffer from trouble with wild animals were the same areas where the population was most scattered – the eastern lowveld.

Marketing

Junod in 1913 and the Kriges in 1937 make the point that the reason people did not grow more than enough to fill their needs was because there was no local market in which to sell the surplus.[115] This was a predominantly rural district and so the ratio of producers to consumers was high. But there were a number of other problems related to marketing which meant that it was difficult to send produce to the major markets of Johannesburg and Pretoria.

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[110] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1908, p. 15,
[111] Cited in J. Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park*, p. 31.
[112] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1908, p. 15.
[113] Ibid, 1906, p. 105.
[114] Ibid, 1909, p. 90.
[115] Junod, *Life vol. 2*, p. 32. Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 35.

The state of storage technology was a constraint. Although people made fairly effective storage huts and baskets and later used hessian sacks 'the problems of storage against the ravages of termites and weevils have not been solved and, with the materials at the disposal of the Native, cannot be solved even by our experts'.[116] Whether people used a storage pit or the 'more modern basket or hut… damp and vermin more often than not destroy or damage a large portion of the grain.'[117]

Roads connecting the lowveld to the highveld were very poor, in fact, unnavigable during rainy periods (described in chapter 2). The Selati Railway which connected Komatipoort to Zoekmekaar in the Northern Transvaal, going via the lowveld and the town of Gravelotte (missing the small administrative town of Leydsdorp) was only completed in 1915. Even up to the 1930s, homesteads were still fairly scattered and roads were poor.

As late as 1940 Edith Rheinallt Jones offered a set of explanations for why people in the district were not marketing their produce more effectively:

> Much of this land otherwise capable of intensive cultivation and high production is not well opened up by roads and railways. This is partly an interaction of cause and effect for if there were intensive valuable production, transport facilities would be likely to be provided – Railways, whether by bus or train services, are quite willing to establish lines which pay well. Nevertheless it is very difficult for people who work small holdings and whose production is therefore individually small to arrange to market satisfactorily at a distance. Also Natives are ill-trained in planning marketing and would probably take long years of training before they could develop and use cooperative systems to any extent. Therefore, Natives depend on local markets which rarely give them satisfactory treatment. There is, therefore, little inducement to Natives to grow anything but the staple mealie meal crop however good the land. Most unfortunately little has been done to induce them to grow fruits and vegetables etc., for their own consumptions and so improve diet and health. All this, however, is not the fault of the land but of the training or rather lack of training.[118]

Along with lack of training which featured large in Edith Rheinallt-Jones' explanation, lack of business acumen was another reason frequently cited by officials for why African agriculture was limited. For example, the fact that maize was bartered even when there was not enough for a family's subsistence was given as evidence of 'the usual improvidence of the

[116] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 35.
[117] Blue Book for Native Affairs, 1911, p. 5.
[118] WHP SAIRR AD843/RJ/C2.1 Edith Rheinallt Jones to Mr Molteno, July 8th, 1940

Native'.[119] Similarly, 'The Native is notoriously lacking in foresight… he will sell his mealies in a time of plenty for a few shillings without a thought that when a period of scarcity comes he will have to re-purchase his staple food supply from the trader at double or treble the price for which he sold it.[120] The idea that Africans needed to be educated on how to farm properly and profitably was what lay behind the creation of the Department of Native Agriculture in 1929, which I look at in chapter 4.

Labour constraints

A common view is that migrancy had a negative impact on agriculture in rural areas because men's absence from home meant that there was a shortage of labour for cultivation. Labour constraints were certainly a problem, but the extent to which this was due to migrancy alone, should be questioned.

Men's main task in the agricultural year was to clear new land, women were generally responsible for the daily labour required for cultivation. The Kriges, although they felt that men's absence from Modjadji's location and surrounds added to women's overall burden of work, did not believe that it impacted on the amount of land put under cultivation. 'The introduction of the plough has liberated more energy than is absorbed by work among Europeans.' [121] They point more to 'the vagaries of the weather, the surplus in the granaries, the availability of implements and animals and other factors.'[122] Men were not required for the work of ploughing either – women and even girls handled the oxen and ploughs.[123] (An argument might be made that women did not have the same strength as men and could not plough as well – but to suggest that a young woman accustomed to hours of pounding maize, carrying water and wood for miles, hoeing and harvesting might not be able to build adequate strength for the task may be unfair to them).

Ultimately, the agricultural productivity of a household depended in large part on the labour power available.[124] One could only cultivate as many fields as the number of workers you

[119] Blue book for Native Affairs, 1911, p. 5.
[120] SANA, NTS 1915, 147/278, undated report on Agriculture. p. 10.
[121] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 42.
[122] Ibid.
[123] RM interview with Jane Hlangwane, May 2012.
[124] Beinart, p. 21; J. Lewis, 'The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry: A Critique and Reassessment' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 11 (1) 1984. pp. 15 – 16.

could muster allowed. But the workers of a household had many other tasks to do. Some children went to school. Of the agricultural activities, clearing fields, hoeing, sowing, weeding and scaring away birds and other animals were labour intensive. While the introduction of the plough made it easier to cultivate larger fields, labourers still needed to do the weeding, bird-chasing and harvesting, and so families were still constrained in how much land they could cultivate.

Women also had many other roles in an economy which was still largely subsistence based. Daily tasks like cutting firewood, fetching water and cooking meals were time consuming. To make enough maize meal to feed a household, for example, women needed to stamp dried mealie kernels for four and a half to six hours, two or three times a week.[125] With regard to ensuring a good food supply, it was not cultivation alone that took people's labour time, but the entire 'agricultural complex of activities'.[126] This included gathering wild fruits and, especially, wild spinaches, and collecting termites and grasshoppers. People kept a variety of livestock and needed also to render fat from animals. Then there were other chores – making pots and mats, mending, making lotions and home remedies. To save labour working on their own fields women and men called work parties, and for a morning a large group of people would get involved in working on someone's field. But this was reciprocal, and later on one would have to help someone else to do the same.

The length of time these activities took out of an ordinary day increased as time went on. There were fewer hands, as children started going to school. As the population grew and farms and locations became more congested, it was necessary to walk further for firewood. When the government imposed regulations on cutting wood – an essential resource used daily – people needed to spend more time and energy either by going through the correct process, which could involve 'walking twenty miles or more', or by evading the law.[127]

Health

Packard suggests that the prevalence of malaria in the lowveld may have in fact been good for African agriculture, as there were only a few white settlers and so land was freed up for

[125] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 25.
[126] Ibid*,* p. 35.
[127] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 51.

Africans.[128] While this is a compelling point, malaria did affect African households despite their relative immunity, and poor health would have affected household's ability to be productive farmers. Food shortage and consequent malnutrition also lowered people's resistance to disease, which Packard points out led to a number of malaria epidemics in the loweld, in 1923, 1926, 1928, 1936 and 1942.[129] Syphilis and tuberculosis, too, became more prevalent in the district over this period, possibly because of migrancy and breakdowns in family relationships, as well as malnutrition.[130]

An irony with regard to malaria is that the very years that were best for farming were the worst for health – more rain meant more mosquitoes. In 1909 for example, the 'abnormal' rains which fell in summer 'were followed up by a serious epidemic of malarial fever in nearly all the low-lying districts of the Colony' which 'claimed a large number of victims amongst the natives'.[131] In that year, the annual tax tour was beset by difficulties – the Sub-Native Commissioner, his staff, his police, and many tax payers were all affected by malaria, and many taxpayers could not go out to work because of illness.[132]

Coping with Constraints

Wild Foods and Resources

Wild foods were important at all times, not just in times of drought when crops failed. The Kriges' had a list of over 100 edible wild fruits and berries, and 45 greens and relishes in the fertile woodbush area.[133] Further east, morula fruit and their pips, and the *modudu* palm were very important in people's diets. In fact, people relied so much on nature in the drier areas that when there was a lot of food in the veld, Phalaborwa women for example would not cook for days, and children would simply subsist on what they found in the veld.[134] Locusts, although they did damage to standing crops, were highly valued. A source of

[128] Packard, 'Malaria', pp. 605 - 606.
[129] Ibid, p. 605.
[130] J.A Rees, 'Health Patterns in the Northern Transvaal 1900 – 1932' unpublished MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1992, pp. 74 – 87, 178.
[131] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1909, p. 11.
[132] Ibid, p. 45.
[133] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 46.
[134] Krige, 'Note on the Phalaborwa', p. 361.

protein, fat and important minerals, they were like 'the manna to the people'.[135] Hunting and fishing were very important. During the devastating drought of 1911 to 1912:

> Many of the Shangaans in outlying parts are said to be subsisting almost entirely upon fish, and although it is strictly contrary to the beliefs and customs of the Bavenda, to regard fish as a wholesome food, many of them, through the want of other supplies were obliged to abandon their superstition in this respect and … indulge in the consumption of fish and eels. It is natural that the shortage of the food supply has caused an extraordinary amount of poaching and destruction of game by Natives.[136]

Trade and mobility

One of the first comments made by C.A Wheelwright in 1903, under the heading 'food supply' was that 'the topographical nature of the country is such that one portion of the District will always have a fair supply of grain; thus in wet seasons the low veldt will grow ample mealies, whilst in the dry seasons the mountains have to supply the low veldt.'[137] In the eastern lowveld, where people could perhaps get a crop every four years, trade and mobility had been important in the nineteenth century and pre-colonial times, and continued to be critically important in the twentieth:

> Constant shortage of crops has combined with the unhealthiness of this fever-ridden area to keep the population sparse, for not only is there little incentive to strangers to trek into the country but numbers of the people move away after every drought to seek food in better-watered parts such as Modjadji's country. Some of these return when prospects improve, but many never come back. The great need for grain has led also to a good deal of trade with neighbouring tribes, most important among which are the Mapulana peoples… Today, Europeans also come into this area to exchange mealies for cattle at the rate usually of four to five bags per head.[138]

That said, cattle were frequently killed by drought, so it is likely that people did not build up huge herds but rather bartered cattle for necessities as their herd grew.

In 1903, a year of severe crop failure owing to years of drought, the Native Commissioner for the Northern Division wrote:

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[135] Cited in Illife, *African Poor,* p. 79.
[136] Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1912, p. 6.
[137] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1903, p. 20.
[138] Krige, 'Notes on the Phalaborwa', p. 359.

> As has occurred during the present year, the shortage of food was met very reasonably by local traders and transport riders, who carried grain to all parts of the District where it was wanted, and the keenness of competition had the effect of keeping the price within reasonable limits.[139]

Using more powerful imagery, Jane Hlangwane said, 'then god felt sorry for his people, he…made it that they must have shops. Then where there are shops the one whose husband is working… they will send the money. And in that time the majority of men were working.'[140] Sam Nkuna, born in 1920, linked this specifically with migrancy – those who were working in Johannesburg sent money to buy mealie meal in local shops.[141]

By the 1930s, with the improvement of transport infrastructure, the price of imported food was cheaper. Thus, although people still relied on agriculture for their own maintenance, this was 'not to the same extent as formerly, because prices never ruled so low. The price of transport nowadays is moderate as compared with what it used to be in the olden days.' [142]

Employment and Migrancy

Employment, whether locally or away, improved a family's living conditions.[143] In 1905, C.A Wheelwright wrote that:

> One of the most important features [of change] is the larger number of able-bodied natives proceeding to work than hitherto. This points to an expansion of requirements, for contact with Europeans teaches to the native wants of clothing and comforts which were unknown… imported cooking utensils, water vessels, and other such articles, in many parts of the country now almost entirely supersede the articles of native manufacture.[144]

Mdabazi Shingane, an elderly woman who was born at Morogolotsi near Tzaneen, explained the significance of having a husband who had a job: 'If your husband can buy you a T-shirt, you're the wife of a rich person. If he can send you R2, you are the wife of a chief.'[145] In 1934 Menne, an agent for the Transvaal Landowners Association, who had lived in the district for 40 years, said of those living in the 'Eastern Low Country':

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[139] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1903 p. 20
[140] RM interview with Jane Hlangwane, May 2012.
[141] RM interview with Sam Nkuna, May 2012.
[142] WHP, AD 1438 Native Economic Commission, Pietersburg, Menne, p. 275.
[143] See M. Hay, 'Surviving Drought: Migrancy and the Homestead Economy' in P. Delius, L. Phillips and F. Rankin-Smith, *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds 1800 – 2014.* Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2014.
[144] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1905, p. 26.
[145] RM interview with Mdabazi Shingange, May 2012.

> There has been a lot of improvement in the conditions of the natives there. That is not due so much to their own efforts in agricultural advance as it is due to the gradual opening up of the country and its means of communication and development. And to my mind their advancement has been more depending upon the result of their labour outside. Our natives do not go so much to the mines, but they come to town for employment, and they take domestic employment.[146]

Clearly, getting waged work can contribute to a higher income and better standard of living. But a common argument is that people may have achieved that through agriculture rather than dangerous hard labour for exploitative mining companies. A common assumption about labour migrancy is that people were forced into it as their access to land diminished and they thus lost their ability to pay taxes through selling surplus produce. But in the Letaba district the incidence of labour migrancy was linked more to the quality of land in the district, rather than quantity. In 1935 in the Leydsdorp native affairs area, where 23,000 people lived on 2,200 square miles of predominantly hot, dry lowveld, 3,960 passes were issued. That is, there was a population density of 10.45 people per square mile, land was still fairly easily available, and 1 out of 6 people were leaving the district to work.[147] In the Tzaneen native affairs area, where 74,000 people lived on 2,100 square miles of mostly well-watered fertile land, 3,750 passes were issued.[148] (4,550 the year before.) There, the population density was over three times higher: 35.23 people per square mile. But only one in 19 people were leaving the district for work. In the Duiwelskloof area, where 46,368 people lived on 2,357 square miles, 2,200 passes were issued.[149] Population density was 19.67 per square mile, and 1 in every 21 people left the district for work. The low number of passes issued in the Tzaneen and Duiwelskloof areas may be explained by the relative abundance of local jobs compared to what was available in the Leydsdorp area and out towards Phalaborwa (the town had not yet been developed). What is more important regarding the link between access to land and migrancy is that in the Leydsdorp area, where we know by this stage there was still abundant land, many people were labour migrants. The obvious explanation is that agriculture was very risky in this area.

[146] WHP, AD 1438 Native Economic Commission, Pietersburg, Menne, p. 269.
[147] SANA NTS 1915 147/278, Report on Native Affairs, 1935, Leydsdorp.
[148] Ibid, Tzaneen.
[149] Ibid, Duivelskloof.

In a context of a harsh environment and a risky agricultural economy, Patrick Harries viewed mobility as a resource, and labour migrancy was one element of that.[150] The importance of employment in preventing famine in times of drought (or food scarcity for other reasons) is widely recognized in the literature on drought in Africa and India.[151] Labour migrancy in particular is very often the main avenue to employment for people in rural areas, and possibly the most secure in times of drought. Megan Vaughan, looking at the famine in Malawi in 1949 showed how those employed through the colonial/migrant economy had more chance of survival than those employed in the informal local economy, one of the reasons was because the local economy was 'linked to agricultural production and was thus precarious in the event of a drought'.[152]

In the Haenertsburg/Letaba district wage employment was clearly an important strategy for coping with the risks of farming. In 1910 the Native Commissioner made the comment that while 'drought, locust visitations and cattle diseases' had impoverished people in many parts of the Transvaal, 'fortunately for them there is always a strong demand for labour at a good wage and at no great distance from their homes. There is no fear, therefore, of their coming to want.'[153] During the drought of 1933 to 1936, the Chief Native Commissioner of the Transvaal wrote that:

> It is fortunate that large numbers of Natives were absorbed by the mines and it is reported from several districts that large amounts have been remitted by Natives in such employment to their families in rural areas.[154]

But migrancy was not only important in terms of providing remittances to local people in the event of food scarcity, allowing them to purchase food in local stores. Maize became excessively expensive in local trading stores in periods of drought and food scarcity, and so

[150] Harries, 1994, chapter 1 and pp. 151-152.
[151] M. Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine: Gender and famine in twentieth century Malawi,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.107, P. Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, 1860 – 1910.* London: James Currey, 1994, chapter 1 and pp.151-152; See also Iliffe, J., *Famine in Zimbabwe,* Gwero: Mambo, 1990; Sen, A., 'Food, Economics and Entitlements', in Drèze & Sen (eds.) *The Political Economy of Hunger, Vol.1,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990; Glantz, M., 'Drought and economic development in sub-Saharan Africa', in Glantz, (ed.)*Drought and Hunger in Africa: denying famine a future,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
[152] Vaughan, *African Famine,* p. 107.
[153] Transvaal Native Affairs Department Annual Report, 1910, p. 5.
[154] SANA SAB NTS 1915 147/278, Report by the Chief Native Commissioner, Transvaal, for the year 1935.

money was not necessarily enough to prevent one from starving. Francis Menne recalled to the Native Economic Commission the famine of 1896:

> In 1896 there was a very serious shortage [of grain]; in that year we had rinderpest, locusts, and a partial drought. Crops were a complete failure. The whole of East Africa and the whole of Portuguese East Africa had famine conditions, and the same applies to the greater part of the low country here. The Government had to supply grain, Argetine grain, which was sent from Pretoria by mule waggon… Grain was distributed among those people, while other people again sold to the natives at I think 4/10d per bag, but I have it on good authority that in many areas the natives had to pay £10 per bag for grain, which meant 1/- per lb.
>
> How did they get the money for that?
>
> They either had to find it or starve... I can tell you gentlemen that in 1896 it was a common occurrence to find a dead native – a man who had starved along the road.[155]

However, famine such as this had not occurred since the South African war, said Menne, because 'we have the railways, and it was possible to rush up food.'[156] During the food scarcity crisis of the mid-1940s, during and immediately after the Second World War, local stores received their maize supply from the Maize Control Board, but in the mid to late 1940s, the Maize Board was constantly short of maize – at one stage there was only half a month's supply left, and generally there was a deficit of 10,000 bags of maize.[157] It is no surprise that the shortfall was felt by the inhabitants of the African reserve areas. At a 1946 conference, the Maize Control Board became an object of fury for officials from the Northern Transvaal Department of Native Affairs. Case after case was presented 'of people sitting on the doorstep waiting for supplies. They were close to death and starvation.'[158] One official recalled how he could sometimes 'find there are 300 waiting for mealie meal and there is not enough for them and they have to walk back 15 miles or so without food.'[159] What saved locals from famine was the arrival of bags of mealies from Johannesburg, sent by migrants. As one official remarked: 'You can buy mealies [maize] anywhere and put it on the train.'[160]

[155] WHP, AD 1438 Native Economic Commission, Pietersburg, Menne, p. 273.
[156] Ibid. p. 274.
[157] SANA HKN 1/1/3, 1/15/5 (1) Native Commissioner's Conference, 1946.
[158] Ibid, Mr Hartman, p. 29.
[159] Ibid, Mr Yeats, p. 28.
[160] Ibid, Mr Hartmann, 30.

'Wildlife economy'

As mentioned before, hunting and fishing were very important in sustaining people during drought. But there was also an important local 'wildlife economy'[161] in terms of an industry being built up by white business people and the state to take advantage of the wild resources of the region for tourism, hunting and conservation.

A significant amount of land in the area was either officially protected as a wildlife reserve, or used by wealthy white landowners as private hunting retreats.[162] While taking away the general rights of Africans to hunt on the land as they wished, the government and private white landowners at the same time provided opportunities for skilled African hunters and trackers to work for wages. A small hunting party, or group of people visiting a farm for the first time, could employ a large contingent of 'servants'. For example, during the Bateman family's trip to Letaba Ranch in 1939, they employed twelve local men, while they brought two others with them. They paid the locals 1/- a day plus 6/- 'bonsella', one of the policemen 10/- and two 'policeboys' 5/-.[163] On top of cash payment, the men received whatever meat could not be used by the hunting party.[164] The manager at Letaba ranch also employed two local men to build roads.[165] Further south in the Sabi Sands area, people were employed as hunters, trackers, cooks and servants and were also expected to build roads to serve visiting hunters.[166] It is not clear to what extent people were paid for this however, or whether it formed part of the labour required under the labour tenant system.

The Kruger National Park also offered opportunity for employment. After at first wanting to evict those living in the Kruger Park, from 1903 the authorities 'had …come to appreciate that Africans could be useful to the conservation effort by providing both labour and

[161] A new term used today to describe the growth of game farming and eco-tourism, but it clearly has been a part of the local economy for over a century.
[162] See for example WHP, A1505 Bateman; D. Bunn, 'Comparative Barbarism: Game Reserves, sugar plantations and the modernization of the South African landscape' in K. Darian-Smith, L. Gunner and S. Nuttall, *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia,* London: Routledge, 1996, p. 44; J. Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park: A social and political history,* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995, p. 92.
[163] It is not clear whether the 10/- and 5/- is per day or a total amount. WHP, 1505, Bateman, '1939 Shooting Party'.
[164] WHP, 1505, Bateman, 'Trip to Letaba Ranch, 1941'.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Interviews held with claimants for P. Delius and Michelle Hay, 'Report on Claims Lodged by Various Communities in the Sabi Sands Area' unpublished report, 2013. Names confidential.

funding'.[167] Africans were allowed to remain in the Park in exchange for cash rent payment or labour. Although many resisted the demand for labour, 'game reserve labour seems to have been less onerous than farm labour and the reserve was accused of providing a refuge for those avoiding it.'[168] There were other small opportunities to make some money hunting wildlife, for example the government offered a royalty of half-a-crown for a bush pig skin – bush pigs were regarded as vermin.[169]

Farm Labour

As more commercial farmers arrived in the area from the 1930s, more people took up wage labour on their farms. The distaste and resentment with which many labour tenants viewed farm work is well known. But during drought periods when rain-fed agriculture was challenging, or even in 'normal' times, many people volunteered to work on white farms. 'Many people' among the Lovedu for example 'willingly hire their services for a day to a farmer in return for a basket of tomatoes'.[170] This was important particularly for those who did not receive remittances from their husbands. Children were often taken out of school to provide labour on white farms. Edith Rheinallt Jones was told that 'the Native families concerned cannot exist without the proceeds of this seasonal labour.'[171]

When crops failed for Africans, they were more likely to seek work, even poorly paid farm work. A farmer remarked that, 'A bad year for the Natives is a good one for the farmers – even though they have to feed them a little more – because it sends more of them to look for work and for longer periods.'[172] That said, a bad year for commercial agriculture was terrible for the local population. First, seasonal work was not available, and if a drought became very bad, permanent workers would be laid off too. This would be more of a problem in later years, as by the 1930s commercial agriculture was still in the early stages of development in Letaba district.

[167] Carruthers, *Kruger,* p. 92.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1912, p. 6.
[170] Krige and Krige, *Rain Queen,* p. 33.
[171] AD 843/RJ/J 4.2 file 3. Native Farm Labour: Memo submitted by Mrs Rheinallt-Jones speaking from the point of view of the women of the farms, p. 2. (1938-1939).
[172] AD 843 B53.1. Notes on farm labour conditions Zoutpansberg, Mr Els, 31 May 1941.

Education

The numbers of children going to school were still limited in the first decades of the twentieth century, but education was becoming increasingly important. When Edith Rheinallt Jones investigated farm labour conditions 'from the point of view of the women on the farms' in around 1939, she was 'astonished at the practically unvariable demand for this [education] even from parents, themselves illiterate.'[173] Leon Shiwundlana explained why his parents and others no longer kept cattle from the 1950s:

> Because maybe sometimes we experienced drought and they died of drought, maybe because we have to sell them to those butcher people, bearing in mind that education was now permeating in our society. So that type of keeping cattle, our parents had to realise that time was wasted more in looking after the cattle rather than in education. So they came to understand that the best thing was to do away with cattle and concentrate on education.[174]

Leon Shiwundlana's father worked at St Martins school in Johannesburg, as an assistant. Josephine Shikwambana remarked, 'There were very few with education and many of them did not have education. Those with education were living a better life and those without education were… suffering.'[175]

Conclusion

In the period before the 1913 Land Act was implemented, and before the effects of white settlement and overcrowding became serious, agriculture in Letaba district was not prospering, although it was a critically important part of the local economy. The economic value of agricultural produce, including maize, was not dependent on a surplus being produced. Many women bartered agricultural produce for other items in trading stores. Agricultural production was very important to them, but was not enough to sustain a household. This implies that these households were integrated into a migrant economy or other waged employment.

[173] AD 843/RJ/J4.2 file 3, South African Institute of Race Relations, Memo: Native Farm Labour, by Edith Rheinallt Jones, p. 3.
[174] MH and RM interview with Leon Shiwundlana, Nkowankowa 24 September 2011.
[175] MH and RM interview with Josephine Shikwambana, 25 September 2011.

The type of smallscale, dry-land, rain-fed agriculture being practiced by rural people was very high risk given the many constraints. Shortage of land in the district was not yet a major constraint. Education, migrancy and other forms of work, may have been preferable to households than investing the little money they earned into agriculture.

In this period, one of the explanations that became very prevalent amongst government officials in particular was that a serious constraint to agriculture was backward farming practices and lack of business acumen. These beliefs, along with fears of environmental degradation (which I look at in the next chapter) formed the basis of the government's 'betterment' policies in the 1930s.

Chapter Four:

Government Policies to Improve African Agriculture, 1930s to 1960s

In much of the South African land reform literature the reserves and the policy of segregation are seen as the 'death knell' for the peasantry. The decline of African agriculture is sometimes portrayed as a result of government policies intended to destroy a class of peasant farmers. Similarly, in some of the key literature on rehabilitation, betterment and native administration in South Africa's reserves, scholars focus on the very negative aspects: the coercion, lack of local knowledge and use of inappropriate colonial science, the trauma caused by villagisation and resettlement schemes, the disastrous consequences of culling and anti-erosion works and the popular resistance and revolts this caused.[1] While some acknowledge that the Department of Native Affairs also had programmes to improve agriculture in the reserves, this engagement is often dismissed: despite the 'lofty ideals' of agricultural officers, the 'idea of creating a stable middle peasantry' was 'still-born'.[2]

Scholars have tended to focus on the rejection of the Tomlinson Commission by Verwoerd in the mid-1950s. Professor F. R. Tomlinson recommended enormous investment in the reserves and the creation of 'economic farming units' on which it would be possible for people to farm full-time. Hendricks makes the point that with the rejection of the Tomlinson Commission, 'ideas of creating a stable middle or accumulating peasantry were jettisoned in favour of the universalisation of sub-subsistence agriculture, denying Africans the wherewithal to undertake proper farming, imposing a pseudo-egalitarianism on the people

[1] Yawitch, *Betterment: The Myth of Homeland Agriculture,* Johannesburg: The South African Institute of Race Relations, 1981; C. de Wet, *Moving Together, Drifting Apart: Betterment planning and villagisation in a South African Homeland,* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995; P. Delius and S. Schirmer, 'Soil Conservation in a Racially Ordered Society: South Africa 1930 -1970' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 26 (4), 2000; F. Hendricks, 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resetlement: The Politics of Conservation and Control in Transkei, South Africa, 1950 – 1970' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 15 (2) 1989; C. de Wet, 'Betterment Planning in a Rural Village in Keiskammahoek, Ciskei' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 15 (2) 1989; P. McAllister, 'Resistance to 'betterment' in the Transkei: a case study from Willowvale district', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 15 (2) 1989; P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* Ravan Press: 1996, especially chapter 2, T. Nemutanzhela, *Ploughing Amongst the Stones: The Story of 'Betterment' in the Zoutpansberg, 1939 – 1944,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1999.

[2] Hendricks, 'Loose planning', p. 325.

in the reserves.'[3] An era of 'loose planning and rapid resettlement' began which disrupted rural communities and took away their agricultural base, including access to land and cattle. The decline of African agriculture is blamed on the inadequacy of betterment plans in the context of the state's other objectives. [4] These included territorial segregation, which also ultimately meant less land available for Africans, and the creation of Bantu Authorities which made it expedient to keep a tenure system of 'one man one lot' in order to maintain a resemblance with older accepted patterns of land tenure, and prevent extensive rebellion against the government.

Evans, who has written one of the major accounts of Native Administration in South Africa, argues that unlike in British colonies in Africa where peasant agriculture was encouraged, 'Native administration in South Africa participated in the concerted destruction of African subsistence production in favour of capital-intensive growth in the white agrarian sector'. Similarly, in the context of the 1913 Land Act and the reduction of land for Africans, 'the state was used to decimate the indigenous peasantry', and turn rural Africans into migrant labourers.[5] Evans does not look at the work of the Department of Native Agriculture, which is also not listed in the index of his book.

It is important to transcend this oversimplified approach, and to look at the roots of government programmes to promote progressive farming amongst Africans, and how these performed. Beinart and Anderson have shown how government intervention in African reserves was rooted in the very real ecological and agricultural crises of the early twentieth century, and the profound crises of 'depression, dust bowl, demography and drought' of the 1930s.[6] The social catastrophes and upheavals of the post war and depression years from 1918 through to the 1930s and beyond led governments around the world, including South Africa, to reconsider the role of the state in intervening in the lives of citizens and creating a better social order. There was widespread belief that:

[3] Ibid, p. 307.
[4] Ibid, pp. 306 - 326; C. de Wet, 'Betterment Planning', pp. 326 – 346.
[5] I. Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 173.
[6] W. Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 11 (1) 1984; D. Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought: The Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa during the 1930s', *African Affairs* 83 (332), 1984.

> No longer could economic relations be left to the supposed rationality of the market; nor could individuals and families be expected to fend alone for themselves in times of dire need. Economic and social life would be subject, therefore, to much more systematic and comprehensive state intervention, by a state suitably reformed to take on appropriately expanded powers and responsibilities.[7]

The 1930s and 1940s in South Africa were characterised by social welfarist thinking, and the idea of a 'new order' came from all sides of the political spectrum.[8] Dubow makes the point however that 'Paradoxically, social-welfarist ideas may well have been able to gain ground not so much because of active support from the state, but as a consequence of its lack of resolve…. Seen in this way such [social welfare] projects testify to the energy and social commitment of groups and individuals rather than to major shifts in official public policy.'[9] In this sense it is worth considering the individual efforts and projects that were introduced by the Department of Native Agriculture. As Dubow points out, and as this thesis demonstrates too, the Native Affairs Department (NAD) itself had considered itself for a long time to be a 'protector' of African interests in the face of white antagonism and greed.[10]

A less studied aspect of betterment is the specific efforts to improve African agriculture and create a class of peasant farmers.[11] From 1929 with the creation of the Department of Native Agriculture, a sub-department of the NAD, the government began to intervene more systematically in African agriculture and the management and conservation of natural resources in the rural reserve areas. The NAD, and later on the Department of Native Agriculture trained agricultural demonstrators to teach proper farming methods to African farmers and gardeners. From the late 1930s, in a context of drought and food crises,

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[7] D. Posel, 'The Case for a Welfare State: Poverty & the Politics of the Urban African Family in the 1930s and 1940s' in S. Dubow and A. Jeeves, *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities,* Cape Town: Double Story, 2005, p. 65.

[8] Dubow and Jeeves, *South Africa's 1940s,* p. 5 – 6.

[9] Ibid, p. 15.

[10] S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919 – 36.* London: Macmillan, 1989.

[11] Drummond and A. Manson, 'The Rise and Demise'; For an account of the failure of a settlement scheme to create white farmers in the Levubu area (just north of Letaba District), see Mulaudzi, M., ' "U Shuma Bulasi" Agrarian Transformation in the Zoutpansberg, District of South Africa up to 1946' PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2000, pp. 82 – 88; For literature from other African countries which provide a nuanced account of government attempts to create an African peasantry see M. Vaughan and H. Moore, *Cutting Down Trees: gender, nutrition and agricultural challenge in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890 – 1990,* Portsmouth N.H: Heinemann, 1994*;* D. Anderson, *Eroding the Commons: The politics of ecology in Baringo, Kenya, 1890s - 1963,*Oxford: James Currey, 2002.

irrigation schemes, collective farming schemes, and farmer's co-operatives were established to create a class of peasant farmers and improve agricultural production. Some of the schemes they introduced were still in existence and receiving government support by the end of apartheid, as I will show.

This chapter looks at some of these programmes, in particular the performance of the Letaba Bantu Farmer's Co-operative (LBFC). Starfield wrote about the LBFC and some of the problems it faced, particularly with regards to marketing, but she focused mostly on the irrigation scheme in Mamathola's location and put its decline in the context of removals and white agitation.[12] I will provide a more systematic account of its 'rise and fall' over roughly a twenty year period.

Food crises in South Africa

As was clear in the previous chapter, officials expressed considerable anxiety around the ability of African households to support themselves through farming. In many parts of the country, certainly in the Letaba district, Africans were not producing enough food to sustain a family through the year. While many of these families may have bartered some of their produce in the stores for goods, they were ultimately reliant on other forms of income, including wage work on white owned farms and game farms, domestic work, or migrants' remittances, to make ends meet.

While officials of the NAD were acutely aware that an underlying cause of poor production and environmental degeneration in reserves was shortages of land for Africans, all were in agreement that existing farming practices were not ideal. Officials also recognised that even with a huge increase in the amount of land reserved for Africans, increasing congestion in the reserves was a future reality for which they had to prepare. It was considered absolutely necessary to use what little land there was for Africans as efficiently as possible. Under the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, a fund was created for the South African Native Trust to facilitate this:

[12] J. Starfield, '"For Future Reference": the Mamathola Removal of 1958 and the Making of Apartheid', unpublished paper for African Studies Seminar Series, Johannesburg, 1990, pp. 15 – 24.

> To meet administrative costs, buy land and develop it, develop agricultural, pastoral and other industries, make advances to Native farmers for the better development of their land and generally to improve the material, moral and social well-being of Natives in Native Areas.[13]

For decades African farmers had been criticised by government officials for being conservative and slow to change, for lacking business acumen and foresight, and not readily responding to opportunities for increasing their income. For example, in 1911, the annual report of the Department of Native Affairs stated that:

> Notwithstanding the constant example of progressive European farmers, the system of sowing seed broadcast is adhered to, resulting in the overcrowding of plants and retarded development of the crop. So long as the Native continues to regard agriculture merely as a means of providing sufficient food for his immediate needs there is little prospect of any substantial improvement in his methods, and his greatest need would therefore appear to be to have the financial possibilities of agriculture explained to him.[14]

And this point was frequently reiterated, not only by government officials. Khan has shown the importance of progressive African voices in South Africa's conservation history. The South African African Native Congress for example spoke similarly of the importance of productive activity:

> Every civilisation in the world has been built up, bit by bit, by the need for food and the need for things. The path of progress does not lie in buying a white loaf of bread and eating it, but out of learning to grow the corn and grinding it; not in wearing clothes but in weaving them; not in living in a square house but in building it. Agriculture! Production! let these be your watchwords.[15]

The African Farmers' Association, founded in 1911 and based in the eastern Transvaal, and the Native Farmers' Association (NFA), founded in 1918 in the Eastern Cape, played an important role in emphasising the importance of creating a black peasantry, teaching progressive farming methods and conserving soil.[16] One of the NFA's most concrete contributions was its role in pushing for the establishment of another training college for

[13] H. Rogers, *Native Administration in the Union*, Pretoria: Government Printer, 1933, p.150.
[14] Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1911, p. 4.
[15] F. Khan, 'Rewriting South Africa's Conservation History – The Role of the Native Farmers Association' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 20 (4), 1994, p. 504.
[16] Ibid, pp. 503 – 504.

African farmers.[17] There were only two agricultural colleges at the time for Africans, Tsolo and Teko in the Transkei, and the NFA lobbied for a training college in the Ciskei area. Fort Cox, also in the Eastern Cape, became one of the most important agricultural training colleges in South Africa, and a number of agricultural demonstrators in the Northern Transvaal were trained there. There were many other black farmers' associations around South Africa, and their history and impact still needs to be explored.

In 1932 the Native Economic Commission (NEC) explored the possible reasons for the slow pace of economic development in reserve areas. The Commission reported on many problems with African farming methods, repeating much of what had been said in the past by local Native Commissioners.[18]

According to officials African agriculture in the region was characterised as being bound by 'tradition', and these traditional methods were considered 'wasteful' and inefficient. 'Traditional' agriculture involved shallow surface farming, taking nutrients out of the soil and not putting them back through use of manure, a practice which resulted in depletion of the soil, and which required constantly shifting cultivation. Tree stumps were not removed and soil was not turned adequately. Traditional farming also involved using one's own seeds year after year, seeds considered to be degenerate, with a host of taboos and 'superstition' governing their use. Even when the plough was introduced, it led only to a short-lived windfall, because, it was said, old methods prevailed. There was still limited use of manure, ploughs were not driven deeply into the soil, only scraping the surface.[19] The use of ploughs without other modern farming methods led to increased, even new, problems of erosion, particularly in the hills and valleys. Amongst the Lovedu, people had cultivated along contours in the past, but the use of ploughs required the removal of stumps and stones, which destroyed these contours.[20] The accumulation of cattle regardless of the carrying capacity of the land was also imagined to be a problem of 'tradition' - the 'cattle complex' whereby cattle were used irrationally as a form of wealth, linked to ritual, superstition, and most especially the uncivilised practice of lobola (bridewealth).

[17] Ibid.
[18] Wits Historical Papers (WHP), AD 1438 Native Economic Commission, Duivelskloof, 363 – 377.
[19] AD 1438 Native Economic Commission, evidence, Duiwelskloof, Janse van Rensburg, 363-364.
[20] E.J Krige and J.D Krige, *The Realm of a Rain Queen,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943, p. 41.

In 1929 the Department of Native Agriculture was established, and Thornton, the Director for Native Agriculture, expressed a sense of urgency about the situation in the reserves

> He warned that there was little time left in which to develop the reserves so as to prevent "not another sudden labour crisis in the future but the arrival of a slower and more deadly 'poor black' problem".[21]

Thus, 'by the early 1930s the impending collapse of the reserves was viewed primarily as a social and political threat'.[22]

In the 1940s alarm about food security was made worse by the increased influx of Africans to the cities, the growth of urban slums, worsening conditions in rural areas, drought, and increased demand for food during war time. A number of commissions were established to find out what was happening with regard to the poor, and make recommendations for how to address these problems. In 1940 the Van Eck Industrial and Agricultural Requirements Commission (IARC), in 1942 the Smit Commission into the social conditions of urban Africans, Gluckman's 1944 commission and the Social Security Committee (1944). The IARC argued for 'improvement in the social security position of the poor' through, amongst other things, subsidisation of food.[23] In 1942 the Social and Economic Planning Council (SEPC) was founded. In the SEPC's 1948 report *The Economic and Social Conditions of the Racial Groups in South Africa,* they made recommendations for 'the enlargement and development of the reserves'; the 'proper settlement in planned townships of those native families who form a permanent part of the urban population'' and 'improvements to agriculture'.[24]

In the same period, increased food production was critical for the war effort. 'The flag is on the plough', wrote Lodermilk of the United States Soil Conservation Service, quoted by Reinecke, the Director of Native Agriculture:

[21] Dubow, *Racial Segregation,* p. 69.
[22] Ibid.
[23] N. Nattrass, 'Economic Growth and Transformation in the 1940s', in Dubow and Jeeves, *1940s*, p. 23.
[24] Ibid, p. 39.

> Brave soldiers do not fight our battles of freedom unless food is grown in abundance for their daily needs by our tillers of the soil. Food, abundant and adequate, is necessary to victory. The flag is on the plough as well as on the battleship and the tank.[25]

Not only was there a concern about growing enough for the war effort: war-time measures were introduced to control the distribution of food, and this resulted in a grain shortage in rural areas. [26]

Drought in the mid-1930s had caused considerable alarm, and the drought in 1941-42 was so severe that Reinecke called the conditions in some districts 'as adverse as they have ever been in living memory'.[27] Agricultural production in the Northern Transvaal took a dive – it was estimated that it was only 25 per cent of 'normal' yields. In some places people were exposed to 'famine conditions' due not only to a lack of food, but to problems with distribution caused by war time controls over food distribution.[28] The impact of drought strengthened officials' beliefs in the importance of irrigation, who recognised that 'owing to the vicissitudes of the seasons, dryland farming is a precarious occupation especially where such primitive methods are practised.'[29] Irrigation schemes 'afford the only assurance that there is for the Native people to get a crop regularly' the Director of Native Agriculture wrote in 1941.[30] It was in the early 1940s that irrigation schemes became very popular in rural areas.

At the same time, rural agriculturalists were also expected to supply the growing, impoverished and malnourished black population of the cities and rural areas. The need to improve farming and grow vegetables in the rural areas was deemed crucial to improve public health. The Director of Native Agriculture wrote that,

> Although the matter of health is not generally stressed the agricultural activities of the Department of Native Affairs are directed towards the goal of improved living conditions, indeed to the health of the people. Two examples of this activity are:

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[25] SANA NTS 7514 662/327, 1941/42 Report by T.G.W Reinecke, Director of Native Agriculture, 16 November 1942.
[26] SANA TAB HKN 1/1/3, 1/15/5 (1) Native Commissioner's Conference, 1946.
[27] SANA NTS 7514 662/327, 1941/42 Report by T.G.W Reinecke, Director of Native Agriculture, 16 November 1942.
[28] SANA TAB HKN 1/1/3, 1/15/5 (1) Native Commissioner's Conference, 1946.
[29] SAB NTS 7514 662/327 Address: Native Representative Council: 1940 Session Commencing 25th November 1940, p.9.
[30] Ibid, 1941/42 Report by T.G.W Reinecke, Director of Native Agriculture, 16 November 1942.

> 1) The present campaign for increased crop production stimulated by the outbreak of war. The motive for this is to render it improbable for a food shortage to occur. Indeed it is hoped that there will be a surplus so that the native may purchase commodities associated with better living conditions; and
>
> 2) The efforts to combat overstocking are destined to improve the quality of cattle (especially regarding milk production) kept on the location commonages. Milk as everyone knows is an ideal food.[31]

Irrigation schemes were introduced partly to 'supplement the food supply of the people'.[32] Demonstrators who worked on school garden schemes and taught people to grow vegetables were told:

> Make it plain to those you have to teach how important it is for the family to have fresh vegetables at least once daily in their diet… Declare war on the aggressors "Malnutrition and disease"; they are silent enemies lurking both within and without your homes; they are destroyers of defenceless children. No-one can afford to remain neutral; but you can keep your nation healthy, strong and safe by making your vegetable garden the first line of defence against the common enemy.[33]

The NAD introduced schemes for the improvement of cattle, including culling cattle, in part to respond to the problem of malnutrition in reserve areas:

> In the rural areas although most of the Natives possess cattle and/or goats very little milk is available for human consumption as generally the locations are so overstocked and denuded that the animals can barely exist and consequently have no surplus milk after feeding their progeny… It is submitted that, *The child must be given the means requisite for its normal development both materially and spiritually* [their emphasis].[34]

Aside from improving health, the NAD also wanted to increase the incomes of people living in rural areas. Not only were they not producing enough, black cultivators and livestock farmers were not making enough income from their endeavours. A 1939 report on agricultural development in a number of districts in the Northern Transvaal, elaborated on the need to encourage people to diversify crops, particularly because it was becoming

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[31] SANA NTS 7514, 662/327. Notes for the Native Representative Council. Northern Areas, p. 1.
[32] Ibid, Agricultural Development in the Districts of Pietersburg, Potgietersrust, Letaba, Louis Trichardt and Sibasa. Undated probably 1939.
[33] Ibid, Instruction to Teachers and Demonstrators: The Layout and Management of School and Home Gardens. Part 1, by AUB. L. Vanderplank.
[34] Ibid, Annual Report: agricultural Section for Period 1st October 1942 – 30th September 1943. p. 11.

increasingly difficult to get a good price for maize with new regulations. Soya beans and cow peas were recommended, both of which could be sold 'at your nearest railway station'. [35] 'Bear in mind that a successful crop farmer is one who gets the highest monetary return' chiefs were told. Likewise, 'the object of livestock improvement is to increase the cash income which the natives receive from their livestock'.[36]

Government intervention in Agriculture in Letaba District

In 1929 R.W Thornton was appointed Director of Native Agriculture, the first step to creating a separate Agricultural Branch within the NAD.[37] The aim of this branch was to 'promote agricultural development and education in the various Native areas throughout the Union.'[38] Government intervention in African agriculture in Letaba district began formally in 1935 when Rienecke, the Director of Native Agriculture, visited Mohlaba's and Modjadji's locations to meet with the Chiefs and their councillors and discuss where anti-erosion works could begin.[39] By 1939 there were three agricultural officials, one native field assistant, four agricultural demonstrators and ten rangers in the Letaba district. The demonstrators were based at Mohlaba's, Mamitwa's and Modjadji's locations and the farm Zoetfontein.[40] By 1940 although every location had a reclamation scheme (for addressing erosion) in place, none of them were operational, partly because land purchase for the Trust was not yet completed.[41] In the meantime, Trust land was used for 'temporary settlement' and leased for grazing. By 1939 the NAD authorised and provided aid for three vegetable gardens for adults and six school vegetable gardens in the Tzaneen area.[42]

An important point to make about government intervention in agriculture in the Letaba district was that officials from the NAD were rooted in local realities and responded to local needs. Their actions were not simply guided by broader policies. For example the decision to

[35] Ibid,. Agricultural Development in the Districts of Pietersburg, Potgietersrust, Letaba, Louis Trichardt and Sibasa. Undated probably 1939.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Rogers, *Native Administration*, p. 162.
[38] Ibid.
[39] SANA NTS 10161 42/419. Report of Inspection Tour – Tzaneen and Louis Trichardt: 20th – 22nd May 1935
[40] SANA NTS 7514, 662/327, Staff Northern Areas at 31/10/39.
[41] Ibid, Director of Native Agriculture to The Controller of Native Settlements, Re Land Purchased and Settlement in Northern Areas.
[42] Ibid, Notes for the Native Representative Council. Northern Areas, p. 4.

start reclamation works at Mohlaba's location rather than Modjadji's came from recognition that people at Modjadji's location were very resistant to government intervention. [43] On the other hand, Mohlaba was enthusiastic about starting the reclamation programme at his location. [44] Another example is that the first attempt at zoning in Letaba district took place spontaneously: a local experiment to deal with a local problem of cattle and other livestock destroying people's crops. The Assistant Native Commissioner at Leydsdorp, Janse van Rensburg, explained to the NEC in 1932 how he began an informal process of zoning:

> What really prompted that was that continually every day we were faced with complaints that the herds were allowing cattle to get into the lands, and one thing and another. I went there, inspected it thoroughly, and found that these lands were dotted all over and that cattle were allowed to graze, and I suggested that all their lands should be on the one side and that that portion should be left for grazing.[45]

The complaints diminished and Van Rensburg considered the experiment a success.

When South Africa entered the Second World War in 1939 a number of officials from the Department of Native Agriculture entered military service, leaving the department understaffed. Those that remained focused on the one main priority of the department during the war years: increased food supply. For the time being, other services were 'being left in abeyance.'[46] To achieve increased food supply, the department focused on running irrigation farming schemes.

A culture of paternalism in the NAD, as well as a general lack of faith in Africans' entrepreneurial ability, contributed to the particular form that farming projects would take. With regard to irrigation schemes, the Director of Native Agriculture, Reinecke wrote, 'To obtain the best results from an irrigation scheme it requires skill, knowledge, and capital by the worker and unfortunately by far the greater majority of the Native people do not possess these factors.'[47] Thus, the Trust should take control of the schemes, and run them on a share farming basis.

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[43] SANA NTS 10161 42/419. Report of Inspection Tour – Tzaneen and Louis Trichardt: 20th – 22nd May 1935, p. 5.
[44] Ibid, p. 2.
[45] Native Economic Commission, Duivelskloof, Janse Van Rensburg, p. 378.
[46] SANA NTS 7514, 662/327, Native Representative Council, 1940 session, commencing 25 November 1940.
[47]

By 1941 the government had purchased the farms Tours and York, which already contained orchards and land under irrigation. Mr Trollip, agricultural foreman, took over supervision of these farms and created collective vegetable farming projects. On both these farms people were hired as labourers and paid per day, rather than joining as independent farmers working for their own profits. The vegetable farming project on York was run partly as a share-holder scheme, with 20 people working for 1 shilling a day, plus profits. On Tours, labourers worked for 1 shilling 4 pence a day. [48] This scheme was considered very successful – 'phenomenal' compared to similar schemes. Reinecke, the Director of Native Agriculture, felt that this was due to the involvement of the Trust: ' The success of the Irrigation Schemes in Native areas' he wrote, 'is practically in direct proportion to the amount of control exercised by the Trust'.[49]

By 1947 there were a number of irrigation schemes and local black farmers' associations.[50] Mr Mogg, from the Chief Native Commisioner's office, and Mr Pienaar, a Native Affairs Agricultural officer, put into motion the establishment of a co-operative for local black farmers working on the various irrigation and other schemes in the area. The main reason for forming the Letaba Bantu Farmer's Co-operative (LBFC) was because Pienaar especially realised that although farmers were producing a surplus, they were receiving very little return from it. Farmers consigned their produce individually and were thus 'not given fair treatment by the market agents in relation to the European producers'.[51] It was believed at the time that farmer's co-operatives would address the challenges of small scale farming, particularly with regard to transport, market access, and purchase of inputs. There was also the advantage of co-ordinating the supply of farming inputs, in particular buying packing material, seed and manure, in bulk at a lower price.[52]

To become a member, farmers had to pay £1 for a share. When it first began, 203 farmers applied to join the Co-op, lower than the 400 expected, and the balance of the £1000 capital

[48] SANA KTZ 2/1/7 N2/10/3 Monthly Report, August 1941.
[49] SANA NTS 7514 662/327, 1941/42 Report by T.G.W Reinecke, Director of Native Agriculture, 16 November 1942, p. 9.
[50] It is difficult to find information on all of these irrigation schemes and associations, as only the Tours and Lorraine schemes are mentioned in the annual report in this period. Evidence on the formation of the Letaba Bantu Farmers Co-operative suggests that there were at least 6 farmers associations. And by 1952 there were at least 8 irrigation schemes in the Letaba district.
[51] SANA RKV 2/649, Application for Registration, Letaba Bantu Farmers Co-operative, 7 June 1947.
[52] Ibid.

required (that was not provided by the share capital) was provided by the South African Native Trust. The South African Native Trust (SANT) became a member of the company, with a representative of the Trust acting as Chairman. The Agricultural Officer would act as Secretary 'such duties being considered as part of his duties as a civil servant', that is, the 'promotion of Agricultural interests of natives.'[53]Members of the co-op paid rent to the Trust. In 1951 the costs members faced were 2/6 for every 1/16 morgen of land under irrigation. Above that was hire of ploughs, which was on average 17/6 per morgen. Manure was sold at half price and there were other costs such as packing boxes and transport, which were sold at cost. Farmers dropped their produce off at the Co-op's packing sheds and received 2d per pound for most of their produce. In the beginning, the Co-op received a 5 per cent commission from the overall income for expenses such as packing materials, and 5 per cent commission exclusively for transport.[54] The additional income, if there was any, was put in a 'price stabilisation fund' which would be drawn upon in the event that prices received on the market per pound of produce was less than 2d. This decision was made because, it was argued, '[f]or the native producer and shareholder, an average price throughout the season is more encouraging than high prices the one month and low prices the next.'[55]

The LBFC was a largely top-down, paternalistic, organisation. It was run by officials from the NAD who did not receive payment from the co-op for their services, which were in addition to their other duties. The intensive involvement stemmed in part from the fact that they felt they were working with people who were unfamiliar with 'civilised' methods of agriculture and sophisticated marketing. As Mogg wrote in his letter to Wehmeyer, of the Co-operative division of the Department of Agriculture, 'We are dealing with the raw Native and it may be necessary to amend the rules and regulations that have been drawn up.'[56] A special book-keeping system, modified for the Co-op was drawn up. The way that farmers were to be notified was reminiscent of 'indirect' methods of administration. Rather than notices being

[53] Ibid.
[54] SANA RKV/2/649, Registrar of Co-operative Societies to The Secretary Letaba Bantu Farmers Co-operative, Financial Statements 1950 and 1951, 5 October, 1951; Minutes of Annual General Meeting (AGM), 30th May 1951.
[55] Ibid, Pienaar, Secretary Letaba Bantu Farmers Co-op to The Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Re Financial Statements 1950/51, 23 December 1951.
[56] Ibid, Mogg, Chief Native Commissioner to Wehmeyer, Co-operative division, Department of Agriculture, 14 April 1947.

sent out to each member of the co-op individually, as was the usual method of running a co-op, the regulations were changed so that notices were sent to directors, who would each be responsible for informing members in their area.[57] The directors included two chiefs. However, this method of contacting people may also have been due to the practical difficulty of ensuring that upwards of 400 members (eventually over 1000) received notices in areas with undeveloped postal and street systems.

The co-op was intended to stimulate production and bring in an income for farmers, but it was also tied into a local welfare programme. Some of the produce grown by farmers was sent to the open market, and there was a contract to send produce to mining compounds, but much of it was purchased by government for a school feeding scheme.[58] There was support for 'native supplying native', intended to bring benefits to both producers, in that they had a ready market, and consumers who otherwise were not supplied by European farmers whose vegetables cost too much for the poor.[59]

The scheme was subsidised. Apart from the fact that the chairman, secretary and some directors of the co-op were not paid for their work and took an income elsewhere, the co-op did not mark up the farming inputs it bought in bulk and sold to producers, but sold them at cost. In 1950-51 when the issue of mark-up was raised by the Registrar of Co-operatives, Pienaar explained that, '[t]he cost of boxwood, bags, pockets etc is so expensive that an increase in the price thereof to show a profit will make this type of farming impossible for them.'[60]Transport costs were, at least for some periods and depending on demand, subsided by the Trust which supplied two of its lorries purchased for the Trust farms Tours and York (Thabina) in 1941.

Overall the NAD was in fact not particularly supportive of the co-op, reflecting the contradictions between different aspects of government policy, and the importance of individual action. One of the challenges Pienaar faced was resistance from the NAD and the Registrar. Regarding the sale of African-grown produce in urban locations, he complained

[57] Ibid, Formation Meeting: Letaba Bantu Farmers Co-operative.
[58] Ibid.
[59] SANA NTS 7514, 662/327, 1941/42 Report by T.G.W Reinecke, Director of Native Agriculture, 16 November 1942.

[60] SANA RKV 2/649 Pienaar, Secretary Letaba Bantu Farmers Co-op to The Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Re Financial Statements 1950/51, 23/12/51

that '[i]t was suggested that the Department should undertake the sales to natives in the urban locations, but until now the Department has shown little sympathy towards this scheme.' In 1948, after being pressured by the Registrar of Co-operative Societies regarding an unsatisfactory year-end financial statement, Pienaar, evidently bristling, wrote:

> I wish to draw your attention to the fact that I am a Civil Servant doing my district work and also all the work as regards organising etc. etc., for the Co-op. I feel that an injustice is done to this small, well meant Co-op, by running it according to, and through the usual Civil Service lines with unnecessary 'redtape'.
>
> You might recollect our conversation when I interviewed you in Pretoria the beginning of this month, when I told you about our difficulties and the lack of whole-hearted assistance of my department.[61]

In 1949 a 'difference of opinion' arose when Pienaar and the directors of the co-op, including the local native commissioner, argued that the co-op 'would be competent to lease land from the South African Native Trust and to work and use implements on such land for the production of crops, and to dispose of such produce for the benefit of its members'.[62] The NAD on the other hand (and the Registrar of Co-operative societies, when brought in to make a decision) felt that 'productive' activities were 'outside the scope' of the co-op, and it should 'confine itself to the disposal of crops produced by its members individually.'[63] Essentially, this was to prevent the farm from becoming a more 'socialist' venture, whereby all members get an equal share of the income from the produce farmed as a collective. This was in the light of 'unfortunate experiences' and because such co-operatives were heavily taxed.[64] In 1951, when an admiring newspaper article spilt the beans on the fact that the directors of the co-op were running a special milk scheme, using its own dairy cows, to provide members of the co-op with milk at a reduced cost, the Registrar pointed out that this was 'irregular' and had to be stopped.[65]

[61] SANA RKV 2/649 Pienaar, Secretary, Letaba Bantu Farmers Co-op to The Registrar of Co-operative societies, Re Financial Statement and Annual Return, 22 July 1948.
[62] Ibid, Native Commissioner, Duivelskloof, to The Registrar, Co-operative Societies, 8 November, 1949.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid, Registrar of Co-operative Societies to The Native Commissioner, Duivelskloof, 17 Nov. 1949.
[65] Ibid, Registrar of Co-operative Societies to The Secretary, Letaba Bantu Farmers' Co-operative, 12 April 1951.

Performance of the Bantu Farmer's Co-operative

The co-op did remarkably well for the first seven years of its existence. It grew from 203 members when it first began, to 400 members a year later, and 740 members by 1951, when an article was written in the Farmers Weekly praising its performance.[66] On 7th December 1949 *The Star* newspaper ran the headline 'Native Co-operative Draws Dividends From Land No Longer Dying'.

> Six years ago the people on the recently acquired Native Trust farms Craighead, Tours and Lorraine, in the Letaba district, were starving. Natives on the neighbouring reserves were not much better off, and most of the men were away at work in the big towns. This year these same people have received up to £80 per pay out on the fruit and vegetables they have grown on land that was in process of complete ruination, and their cash incomes must be anything up to £200 a year, perhaps more.[67]

Almost a year and a half later the Farmers Weekly published an article entitled 'Fruit and Vegetable Co-operatives remarkable success: How Native Farmers in the Northern Transvaal Market their Crops'. The article speaks about the lack of success that 'European' farmers in the area had had in the past 20 years (since they began trying), in developing a good marketing scheme for fruits and vegetables. Due to lack of co-operation, white farmers were 'producing at an uneconomic figure, and the consumer paying exorbitant prices.'[68] It continued:

> A visit today to the headquarters of the Letaba Bantu Farmers Co-operative Society at Thabina should convince even the most doubting of the European farmers of the inestimable value of wholehearted co-operation. This enterprising and extremely progressive body was formed on March 18, 1947. In less than four years the results are, to say the least of it, astounding…There are 1000 members each holding shares of £1…The average earnings of each plot-holder amount to £60 a year, some make a good deal more. One Native actually showed a profit of £65 7s 1d in one month.[69]

[66] The article put the number of members at 1000, but the Secretary's address at the co-operatives AGM put the number at 740.
[67] SANA RKV 2/649, The Star, 7 December1949
[68] Ibid, Farmers Weekly, March 14, 1951
[69] Ibid.

At the annual meeting of the co-op, the new Additional Native Commissioner for Leydsdorp, Mr Van Rensburg, congratulated the members of the co-op and compared it to other schemes around the country:

> In various parts of the UNION we have tried irrigation schemes. We have seen some where the Trust has to plough the land for them, provide the water and do everything for them and they just sit back. They have no interest. Don't know what to produce. The only plot producing was the demonstrators [sic]. The Department became very tired of this thing and have said that the people are lazy and don't want to work. Then I came to Tzaneen. Mr. Pienaar has taken me around the lands and I have learned that all people are not lazy. There are people who can and will work… I see you people sitting here not hungry and thin.[70]

By 1952 there were eight irrigation schemes in the Tzaneen area. These were situated on seven farms and four locations, with two schemes being situated across a Trust farm and a location, or at least serving both a location and Trust farm. The size of plots varied from 1/8th morgen to one morgen. Across all the schemes there were 72 1/8th morgen plots, 141 quarter morgen plots, 353 half morgen plots and 252 one morgen plots. Each farm performed differently, and, given the variety in plot sizes, there was significant variation in average income.

From the tables below one can see that the income per morgen on each farm varied, from £25 per morgen on Julesburg to £86 pounds per morgen on Thabina. There may have been around 173 people earning between £5 and £10; 208 earning from £11 to £20; 188 earning between £21 and £25; 105 earning on average £36, 45 earning £43 and 55 earning £86.

[70] Ibid, Minutes of AGM, 30th of May 1951.

Fig. 4. Income from Irrigation Schemes in Letaba District[71]

Name	Size in morgen	1951/2 income	Number of plotholders	Average income per morgen	Average income per plotholder
Tours and Sedan (SANT)	122	£4889.0.11	233	£40	£21.18.11
Thabina (SANT)	77	£6649.5.7	100	£86	£66.9.8
Sekororo location	65	£2787.0.2	128	£43	£21.15.5
Lorraine (SANT)	50	£1805.10.9	76	£36	£23.15.1
Mamathola Location	30	£1360.13.11	16	£45	£22.10.10
Julesburg tribal farm	48	£1187.12.9	48	£25	£24.14.11
Mohlaba Location	75	£2694.6.10	78	£36	£34.10.7
Maake and Rita Location	35	£1250.9.3	37	£36	£34.15.11

[71] SANA NTS 3729 1993/308, Verslag van ondersoek ingestel na vraagstukke en klagtes geopper deur die blanke bevolking veral die boeregemeenskap van Letaba Distrik, 2 December 1952, p. 10.

Fig. 5. Income on irrigation schemes per plot size[72]

Farm	Size of plot	No. of plot holders	Income (based on income per morgen as calculated in table above)
Tours/Sedan	1 morgen	53	£40
	½	94	£20
	¼	72	£10
	1/8	32	£5
Thabina	1	55	£86
	½	45	£43
Sekororo	½	130	£21.5
Lorraine	1	5	£36
	½	54	£18
	¼	29	£9
Mamathola location/Craighead	½	10	£22.5
	¼	40	£11
	1/8	40	£5.5
Julesburg tribal farm	1	48	£25
Mohlaba location	1	75	£36
Maake/Rita location	1	25	£36
	½	20	£13

While the higher earners on the scheme certainly earned amounts comparable to work in other industries, for the majority of farmers on the scheme the income was low. According to the Tomlinson Commission, being a farm labourer was more productive than being an 'agricultural entrepreneur', 'the average total income of a Bantu farm labourer (resident on European owned land) for the year 1949 – 50 was estimated at about £83'[73](This presumably included remuneration in kind). In mining the average wage was £47.90 per annum, or £90 per annum with remuneration in kind added. In secondary industry the average wage was £110 per annum.[74] In domestic service, where many men and women in Letaba district were employed, the average annual income was roughly £96 in 1952.[75]

[72] Own calculations based on above data.
[73] Summary of the Report of the Commission for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa (Tomlinson) U.G. 61/1955, p. 35.
[74] Ibid, p. 36.
[75] Ibid, p. 38.

But despite the apparent success of the co-operative in its early years, ultimately, it failed. Twenty years after it began, the co-operative was liquidated after long years of disappointment. The Registrar of Co-operative Societies wrote,

> *'n Skrywe is van die Bantoesakekomissaris van Tzaneen ontvang waarin hy meld dat deur die aanhoudende droogte van die afgelope jare bogenoemde koöperasie feitlik geen inkomste het nie, dat daar is nie meer implemente is nie en dat die besprooingskema met staatsimplemente bewerk word. Verder meld die Bantoesakekommisaris dat hy weier om as voorsitter op te tree en bevel hy aan dat die koöperasie ontbind word.*[76]
>
> (A letter was received from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner of Tzaneen in which he reports that because of the persistent drought of recent years the above mentioned co-operative has had virtually no income, there are no more implements, and the irrigation scheme is being cultivated using state implements. The Bantu Affairs Commissioner further reports that he refuses to act as chairman and recommends that the co-operative should be dissolved.)

Decline and Fall of the Bantu Farmer's Co-operative

Why did the co-op decline? One possibility is that, as above, the average income for most people working on the scheme, even on the 1 morgen plots, was low in comparison to wage work elsewhere. But plot-holders were not expected to work on the scheme full-time. Officials expected men with plots on irrigation schemes to earn extra income elsewhere while his family worked on the scheme.[77] I will look at the significance of this later.

An official report puts the beginning of the decline at 1952.[78] This was a bad year for a number of reasons. Tomatoes had become a favourite crop of the Co-op's members, but in 1953 the tomato market was glutted, which led to a very disappointing income.[79] At the same time, cost of transport had increased, more so because the Co-op had to pay off a

[76] SANA RKV 2/649, Registrateur van Koöperatiewe verenigings to Die Sekretaris, Bantoe-Administrasie en Ontwikkeling, 20/2/67.
[77] For example at Gompies, SANA, NTS 7514, 662/327, 'Location Reclamation, Northern Areas', p. 2.
[78] Ibid, Ad Hoc Komitee: Letaba Bantoe Koöperasie, undated but probably 1963.
[79] SANA RKV 2/649, Minutes of the AGM, 20th October 1954.

debt owed to the Trust for using vehicles from the Tours/Thabina scheme. Thus, the Co-op suffered losses in both the 1952/53, and 1953/54 financial years.[80]

In 1954 there was a change of leadership as the Co-op became self-sufficient. Pienaar had long stopped working as the secretary, this role had been taken on by Mr Schultz, the new Agricultural Officer. At the end of 1953 Schultz began training a new secretary and treasurer, Mr P.S Mareme, who took over this role officially in 1954.[81] In the past, agricultural field staff and assistants under the supervision of the Agricultural Foreman, Mr A Heyer, had undertaken tasks such as accounting for materials, packing and dispatching produce. All of these staff, who had previously received no remuneration from the Co-op but had been paid salaries as civil servants, ended their direct involvement with the Co-op. Their role from thenceforward would be as advisors.[82]

Members of the Co-op now had to do the bookkeeping themselves, although the Additional Native Commissioner would still check the books every month. Services that had previously been provided by civil servants for free were now taken over by members, who would be remunerated. The new board instituted some changes from the beginning. To try to get back on track they reduced transport costs by buying a truck for the co-op; transport costs had to this point been a drain on finances. The truck was paid for from the 'stabilisation fund' that the board of directors felt was no longer necessary, and which was also apparently disliked.[83] One of the problems with the price stabilisation fund was that it was impossible to determine which members had contributed most to it (by producing crops of higher value than others over a period of many years), and it was felt that it was not fair to pay members out equally from this fund because some would benefit undeservedly, while others would not benefit from their greater contribution to the fund. Using the fund to pay for trucks was deemed best, to reduce in the long term one of their largest expenses.

Instead of helping the situation, the trucks proved to be, as predicted by the Chairman, B.F Lizamore in 1958 'the vein which is going to let the Co-op bleed to death.'[84] The trucks

[80] SANA RKV 2/649, Weitz, additional Native Commissioner, Tzaneen, to The Native Commissioner, Duivelskloof, 15 November, 1954.
[81] SANA RKV 2/649, Minutes of AGM, 20 October 1954.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid, Minutes of AGM, 27 May 1958.

required constant maintenance, petrol, and the services of drivers. This would mean high costs in an ordinary situation, but it became clear to the board that the maintenance required on the vehicles was 'abnormally high', year after year. In 1958, the Chairman noted that this was due to the fact that the vehicles were mishandled, something that was obvious from the manner they were broken.[85] In 1962, when the Bantu Affairs Commissioner of Tzaneen explained to the Registrar of Co-operative companies that the Co-op had ceased functioning in August 1961, he wrote '[t]o my mind the main reason for the Co-op's difficulties were that they were burdened with excessive overhead expenses and a lorry which was not operated economically.'[86]

What further hastened the decline of the Co-op was the downward turn of production. Every year, less produce was being grown and sold, despite the membership numbers increasing. This meant that the 10 per cent commission that was meant to cover farm inputs as well as transport, was simply not enough to cover costs. The decline in production was dramatic.

One of the possibilities for raising enough money to cover costs of transport was to increase the commission on produce. But this was deemed entirely undesirable because income from the farms was so low that farmers would not be able to handle the increased commission. To give a sense of how dire the situation was, if in 1958 the commission was raised in order to cover the loss incurred by the co-op, the commission would have had to be 23 per cent.[87]

[85] Ibid, Minutes of AGM, 27th May 1958
[86] Ibid, S.J van Rensburg, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Tzaneen to The Registrar of Co-operative Companies, 15/12/1962
[87] Ibid, Report to the Members, Letaba Bantu Farmesr Co-opeartive limited. 6 May 1958.

Fig. 6. Change in membership and value of produce, Letaba Bantu Farmers' Co-operative 1949 - 1960[88]

Year	Membership	Value of agriculture
1949 – 50		R16,606
1950 – 51	714	R32,552
1951 – 52	879	R39,252
1952 – 53	1,006	R45,918
1953 – 54	1,105	R32,800
1954 – 55	1,129	R26,044
1955 – 56	1,192	R25,714
1956 – 57	1,233	R26,814
1957 – 58	1,239	R16,902
1958 – 59	1,243	R16,842
1959 – 60	1,252	R12,730
1960 – 61	1,252	12,277

In 1960 the Agricultural Officer addressed members, saying that

> The cause of low production may be attributed to shortage of water, but, members too are to be blamed for not producing as they should. If every member could produce as he should, at Thabina only, produce to the value of 15,000 pounds can be produced per year, and the whole Co-op can easily produce 50,000 pounds worth of produce.[89]

Instead, in that year, the Co-op had a turnover of £6000, down from the previous years' £8000. In 1962, a year after the Co-op had 'ceased functioning' a special report was written to explain the causes of failure. One of the factors causing low turnover for the Co-op was that '[a]side from the fact that not all members of the co-op were active, some groups would sell their best grades of produce on their own, and the co-operative would sell their worse grades.'[90]

[88] RKV 2/649 Ad Hoc Komitee: Letaba Bantoe Kooperasie, undated but probably 1963.
[89] Ibid, Minutes of AGM, 25 May 1960.
[90] Ibid, Ad Hoc Komitee: Letaba Bantoe Kooperasie, undated but probably 1963.

Why did the farmers not produce 'as he should', and why did so many people sell directly to market agents rather than through the co-op? One possible reason given in the special report was that 'members complained that waiting two to three months for payment by the co-op was too long, while market agents would pay producers directly and immediately.' [91] But another of the issues the report raised, but did not explore, looks towards the broader context that constrained the functioning of the scheme. While the principle of 'native supplying native' was partly about selling vegetables at a price that poor consumers could afford, another reason was to ensure that there was less competition with white farmers. At the York and Tours irrigation scheme in the 1940s, (precursor to the LBFC), vegetables had been sent to schools and charitable institutions, as well as Township ('Native') markets. This meant a much lower price for produce. Regarding the potato crop in 1944:

> The price that these potatoes would have fetched would have been at least 6/- per bag higher on the European Market than the Native Market. However, the price is very satisfactory and much too high for the Native Population to pay. It is only the richer Native that can afford to buy potatoes at this price.[92]

Sweet potatoes sold on the European market fetched £1 per bag, but the same quality of sweet potato on the 'Native' market sold for 8/5 per bag.[93]

In 1949, nearing the peak of the Co-operative's success, a newspaper article reported, '[i]t was inevitable that sooner or later European farmers in the area would object to the competition of Natives on the open market.'[94] By 1951, it was reported that:

> One third of the production of fruit and vegetables goes to Native markets on the Reef and Pietersburg and Native School Feeding Schemes in the Northern Transvaal. The balance goes to European markets in open competition.[95]

White farmers were not happy about this competition.[96] One of the reasons the co-operative had purchased its own transport was because of agitation by white farmers that

[91] Ibid.
[92] SANA KTZ 2/1/7 N2/10/3, Monthly Report, Farms: York and Tours, Letaba District, August, September, October, 1944.
[93] Ibid, October, November, December and January 1944.
[94] SANA RKV 2/649, 'Native Co-operative Draws Dividends from Land No Longer Dying' *The Star*, p. 7 December 1949.
[95] Ibid, 'Fruit and Vegetable Co-operative's Remarkable Success' *The Farmer's Weekly,* March 14, 1951.

the co-operative was being subsidised by the Trust.[97] There was also tension with white farmers regarding irrigation water (the Co-op's members were at the top of the slope – they received water before the white farmers did).[98] White farmers were unhappy about the co-op's sale of tomatoes, because this was in direct competition with them.[99] In 1952 three of the farmers' associations in the Letaba district wrote a memorandum on the marketing of vegetables by 'natives'. In strong language they stated:

> *In die eerste plek voel ons dat die naturelle boerdery in die Trustgebied op werklik niks minder as n grootskaalse boerdery deur die Staat self neerkom nie en dat ons kleinboere geen hoop het om teen so n sterk mag staande te bly nie. Indien die onderneming nog daarop gemik was om produkte waarin daar n tekort is en wat op noemenswaardige skaal deur naturelle verbruik kon word aan te vul, dan sou daar nog geen rede tot klagte gewees het nie, maar in die teendeel word gevind dat die hele konsentrasie op slegs tamaties toegespits is. Dit is ons ondervinding dat as gevolg van die mark en die verbruiker se tafel maak, die naturel nog nie n noemenswaardige verbruiker van tamaties genome kan word nie, omdat hy dit eenvoudig nog nie kon bekostig het nie. Produksie in Trustgebied moet ten doel he om produkte goedkoper aan die naturel te lewer.*[100]
>
> In the first place we feel that the native agriculture in the Trust areas is really nothing less than large scale agriculture by the State… and that we small farmers have no hope of standing up against such a powerful force. If the enterprise was still focussed on growing produce which was in short supply and which is consumed on a significant scale by natives, then there would be no cause for complaint, but to the contrary, the whole concentration has been on tomatoes. Natives are not significant consumers of tomatoes because they are too expensive. Production in the Trust area must have the objective of delivering cheaper produce to the native.

Putting a limit on the amount of tomatoes that could be grown may have further affected the morale of producers. For a time, tomatoes were one of the most profitable crops. Although the crash in tomato prices was inevitable as too many people produced too many tomatoes for market, the response of the Native Commissioners and Secretary of the Co-op to this perhaps raised questions about the extent of the discrimination against black producers. It made sense to diversify crops and ensure a glut did not occur again. It also

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[96] Starfield, 'For Future Reference' p. 15.
[97] SANA RKV 2/649, Ad Hoc Komitee: Letaba Bantoe Koöperasie, undated but probably 1963.
[98] Ibid, Minutes of AGM, 30th June 1952; SANA NTS 3729 1993/308, Verslag van ondersoek ingestel na vraagstukke en klagtes geopper deur die blanke bevolking veral die boeregemeenskap van Letaba Distrik, 2 December 1952.
[99] SANA NTS 3729 1993/308, 'Verslag van ondersoek'.
[100] Ibid, p. 12.

made sense to diversify crops in order to protect the quality of the soil. And marketing was unpredictable – some years produce did not fetch as high a price as was expected, and difficulties with transport meant that some produce was spoilt before it could be sold.[101] However, in the context of white agitation and the resultant changes in approach, the explanations given by the directors of the Co-op, particularly the white agricultural officers, may have been only partly believed.

Delius and Schirmer make this point with regard to Africans' responses to soil conservation measures. Selope Thema, a councillor on the South African Native Affairs Representative Council, said,

> If you tell a man that he has a lot of cattle and that the cattle is finishing off the grass he really does not understand it. He knows that his father and his grandfather lived there; he knows that they had plenty of cattle and that the grass still grew when he was a boy and he cannot understand why his own cattle should suddenly finish the grass. Then again, he lives next door to a [white] farmer who has plenty of cattle on his farm, and he wonders how it is that his cattle can finish the grass whereas the cattle of the farmer do not finish the grass.[102]

In this sense, the political context of the 1950s which led to the rejection of proposals by the Tomlinson Commission could be seen as an important factor in the decline of the irrigation scheme. Tomlinson and other apartheid 'visionaries' imagined that black people could develop economically, but for this to happen, whites would have to make sacrifices. Verwoerd and other 'pragmatists' would not accept this. Some had an alternative vision of 'baaskap' whereby blacks should continue to support the white economy, but on the lowest rungs – a 'horizontal' barrier between the races versus a 'vertical' division.[103] There were clear signs that the National Party (NP) electorate did not want to make sacrifices. Lazar provides the example of 'a group of farmers in the Northern Transvaal' who complained in 1957, 'that they were being deprived of labour by a Department of Native Affairs homeland irrigation scheme which served to subsidise 'idle' Africans'.[104] The victory of the local white farmers' associations with regard to putting pressure on the Trust to stop subsidising

[101] See for example, RKV 2/649, Minutes of AGM, 13 May 1957.
[102] Delius and Schirmer, 'Soil Conservation', p. 726.
[103] J. Lazar, 'Verwoerd versus the 'Visionaries': The South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (Sabra) and Apartheid, 1948 – 1961' in P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds.) *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935 – 1962*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press/Ravan Press, 1993, pp.365, 383 – 386.
[104] Ibid, p. 377.

transport for the Co-op, and to prevent African farmers from competing in 'European' markets can be seen in this context.

Another cause of decreasing production may have been how the workers of the scheme were treated. The reason that the Co-op, and irrigation schemes more generally, was deemed a workable scheme was that according to the regulations, the wive/s and children of a plot-holder could work the scheme if he was away. It was generally assumed that men migrated to work, and holders of plots in irrigation schemes were no exception. Investigators estimated that between a quarter and a half of plotholders migrated to work and left the plot in the hands of their wives, because the plot failed to bring in enough income.[105] Even when men did stay on the plots, their wives and children were encouraged to provide labour. Pienaar entreated in 1951, '[Y]ou can't work without the support of the whole family. Keep the wife and children interested by giving them a few shillings after each pay.'[106] However, although women did much of the labour, they could not own plots themselves, but could only access one through their husbands. In 1960 when the drop in production was discussed at the AGM, and generally blamed on members' failure to understand the value of a co-op, M Shilubana suggested another reason for the drop, which he put down to Trust regulations:

> Which stipulates that after the husband has died, the widow loses the rights to have a land under irrigation. As a result of that, many people are reluctant to come forward to get lands, and those who have lands already, are discouraged when they think of that, and, therefore, do not work their lands satisfactorily.[107]

One sees here how tension over disliked Trust regulations influenced people's, perhaps especially women's attitudes towards these farming schemes. Beinart has commented for example that 'the mere threat' of culling, perhaps the most unpopular of all the Betterment programmes of the Trust, 'persuaded many South African reserve dwellers to resist the whole range of agriculture policies.'[108]

There was tension between paternalistic officials of the NAD and members of the co-op. It can be read in the minutes of meetings of the Co-op:

[105] SANA RKV 2/649 Ad Hoc Komitee: Letaba Bantoe Kooperasie, undated but probably 1963.
[106] Ibid, Minutes of AGM, 30th May, 1951.
[107] Ibid, Minutes of AGM, 25th May, 1960.
[108] Beinart, 'Soil erosion' p. 73.

> To you members I have only this to say. Give us your co-operation and obey the instructions given to you. Ask for help at any time or place and the staff will be only too pleased to give it. If in any difficulty come to the Office and they will explain things. Do not talk nonsense behind our backs. What we are doing and telling you to do we have already tested out. You will say as you have already said, 'Why do you want to make money, take such an interest and drive us on to work? Why don't you leave us so that we can rest.' We are not interested in the money but in the conservation of the ground and the water.[109] [quotation marks added for clarity]

Members were not able to make their own choices about what to cultivate.

> If you plant rubbish [perhaps dagga] and tobacco and waste water we will take your land away. You must grow food so as you can eat and also sell your food… We are trying our best to help you as well as possible but we also need your help. If we are strict sometimes you must excuse us as we are only looking to your good.[110]

But it is important not to reduce the failure of the scheme to the political climate. Children and women may have had other reasons for not working on the scheme. Schooling, although not yet at its peak, was becoming increasingly important in the 1950s. Cattle were also important in the local economy and many children, including girls, looked after cattle in the afternoons.[111] For example Johannes Magoro as a boy could only work on his family's fields on weekends, because he went to school during the week and after school tended to cattle.[112] When William Monyele decided to stop farming and focus on his business in the late 1950s, he could not rely on his children to look after cattle and farm, because his wife 'knew that if they spent more time looking after cattle they would not know how to write, to speak and cannot have education.'[113] Thus, he ended up losing his cattle. Women had many other tasks to attend. Strained relations between women and their husbands may also have contributed to women's reluctance to work hard on these schemes. Husbands did not always share their income with their wives, and some men had more than one wife to support. How was this income divided up? There may have been more profitable and secure ways for women to make some money besides working on plots that belonged to their husbands or other male relatives, to whom the profits would flow. Permanent or seasonal work on white farms provided one opportunity for making money and acquiring fruit and

[109] SANA RKV 2/649, Minutes of the Annual General Meeting Held at Thabina on the 30th of May 1951.
[110] Ibid, Minutes of Annual General Meeting Held at Thabina on the 30th June 1952.
[111] Based on interviews conducted by RM during May 2012.
[112] MH and RM interview with Johannes Magoro, Mogoboya's Location, 26 September 2011.
[113] MH and RM interview with William Monyele, 24 September 2011.

vegetables. For example when Josephine Shikwambana's husband failed to send her money she started to work at a nearby white farm and was paid every month.[114] She then went to work in Johannesburg for a few years. Shikwambana had access to her own dry-land field, and when it rained she had a good harvest, but it was only worth farming when it rained.

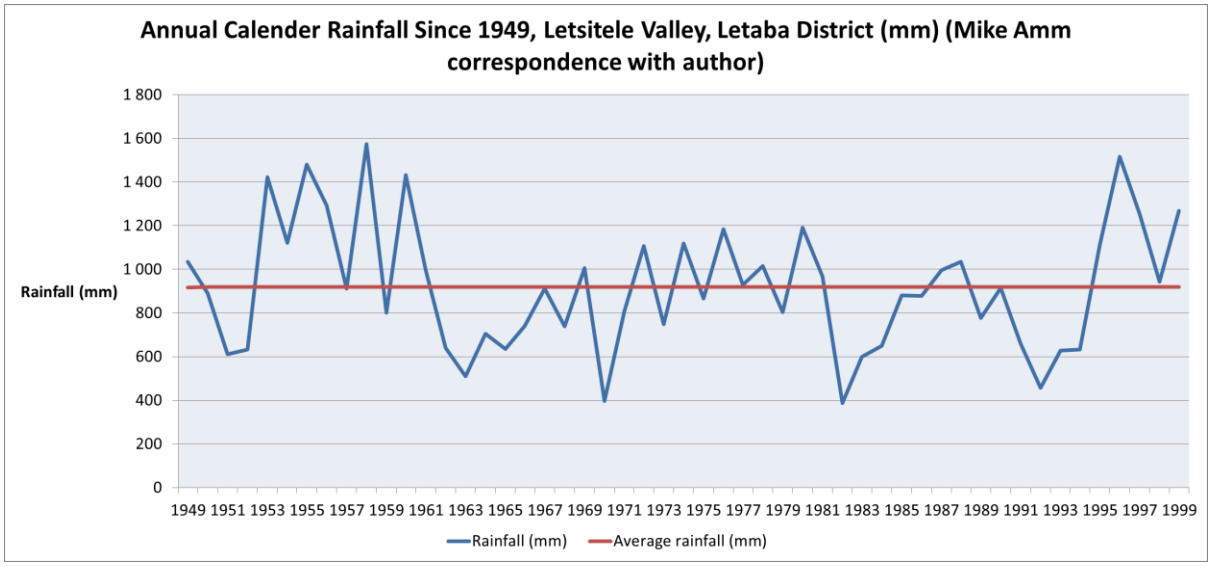
'Natural causes' were also to blame for low production in some years. For example in 1958, when turnover dropped by £5,000 (from £13,000 to £8,000) low production was due to three things: members of most irrigation schemes were not producing, diseases and frost damaged crops, and low prices were obtained at open markets. The last two were called 'natural causes' to be born with patience.[115] In the detailed monthly reports of the Agricultural Officer at the Tours and York scheme from the early 1940s the impact of disease, pests, weather events, transport and marketing problems are clearly apparent and caused occasional losses and regular disappointments.[116] For example eel worm affected the 1941/42 potato crop, which was also planted in the wrong season, so 50 bags of seed potatoes costing 28/- a bag to grow yielded only 50 bags in all which fetched 7/- a bag on the 'native market', resulting in a huge loss. Potatoes reached up to 25/- per bag on the 'European market', so there still would have been a loss if they had access to this market.[117] Some crop experiments went wrong – onions were unsuccessful because the lowveld was too warm, and, the Agricultural Officer wrote, 'I suspect that the wrong seed was sent and not the variety that I distinctly asked for'.[118] Crabs made holes in the irrigation canals and stock drank the water and caused damage.[119] Monkeys and baboons destroyed the 1943 banana crop.[120] Other weather events such as frost and rainfall at the wrong point in the growing season also took their toll.

While the above-mentioned events caused damage to specific crops, drought caused widespread destruction. Rainfall in Letsitele Valley and surrounds – which was near to some of the irrigation schemes involved in the LBFC – was extremely variable from year to year as the graph below illustrates. Rainfall was generally above average between 1952 and 1961,

[114] RM interview with Josephine Shikwambana, May 2012.
[115] SANA RKV 2/649, Minutes of AGM of the LBFC, 27 May 1958.
[116] SANA KTZ 2/1/7, N2/10/3 Monthly Reports – selection.
[117] Ibid, Monthly Report York and Tours, December, January, February 1941/42; Annual Report, York and Tours, 1941-42.
[118] Ibid, Monthly Report, York and Tours, July 1943.
[119] Ibid, October 1941.
[120] Ibid, March 1943.

but there were many years of below average rainfall, leading to drought from 1950 – 1952, 1959, and 1962 to 1969.

Fig. 7. Annual Calender Rainfall 1949 - 1999, Letsitele Valley, Letaba District



In 1951, a newspaper reported on the region:

> Except for odd patches here and there and on the slopes of the Zoutpansberg the country has been converted into a desolate thornbush desert. Rivers are sand tracks, fountains and boreholes are drying up, mealie plants are ashen white and even the leaves of the trees crackle into pieces as you touch them… The underground water level has fallen many feet. Most of the towns are worried about their water supply and more and more restrictions are being enforced every day… Rain if it comes now will save an aggregate of only 15 per cent of crops at best, but all hope is almost over.[121]

In this context irrigation water would have been rationed, if there was any at all. In 1962 the Secretary resigned 'in order to seek employment elsewhere' because the Co-op could 'no longer afford the luxury of a paid Secretary and Lorry Driver in view of the very severe droughts that have been experienced in the last few years.'[122] In 1967 after two years of

[121] SANA NTS 7898 138/336, 'Heavy Cattle Losses in Some N. Transvaal Areas' undated newspaper clipping, 1951.
[122] SANA RKV 2/649, Bantu Affairs Commissioner Tzaneen to The Registrar of Co-operative Companies, 15 December 1962.

drought and no income for the Co-op, the Bantu Affairs Commissioner of Tzaneen stepped down as chairman and recommended the Co-operative be disbanded.[123] Drought was not the only weather event causing destruction. At Thabina in 1954 'the tomato crop completely failed… through frost.'[124]

In 1969 the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Tzaneen, searched for all the remaining members of the Co-op and of those he found, 99 per cent agreed to liquidation. The secretary of the Co-op was found to have used some of the organisation's money for his own use, and was jailed for four months.[125]

Demonstration and general improvements in agriculture

The co-operative did not fare well. But it does appear that in general, there were important changes in agriculture from the 1930s. While some people may have become landless, and while agriculture may have declined in importance in the livelihoods of the majority of rural people, it is clear that there was an emerging class of black farmers who adopted progressive farming methods and supplied urban markets, as I will show.

As late as 1932, before agricultural demonstrators had been sent to the Letaba District, J.F. Janse van Rensberg, the Assistant Native Commissioner at Leydsdorp, noted that he knew of only one African who used manure, the reason being 'probably he has been living somewhere he saw what improvements he can make and what crops he can get.'[126] This farmer was getting good returns. After 1935, when demonstrators were sent to the Letaba district, the Assistant Native Commissioner of Duiwelskloof wrote that:

> In some parts of the district Natives have shown an increased desire to use up-to-date farming implements and have gone in for irrigation on a small scale, the results being satisfactory, so that there is reason to hope that it will be more universally undertaken in the future.[127]

In Modjadji's location, where a demonstrator was stationed, 'the Natives have been induced to adopt a more progressive policy and more scientific methods of cultivation… a number of

[123] Ibid, Registrar to the Secretary Bantoe-Administrasie en Ontwikkeling, 20 February 1967.
[124] Ibid, Minutes of AGM, 20 October 1954.
[125] Ibid, Bantoesakekommisaris to Registrar, 3 July 1969.
[126] AD 1438 Native Economic Commission, evidence, Duiwelskloof, 8 August 1930, Mr Johannes Frederick Janse van Rensburg, Assistant Native Commissioner at Leydsdorp, p. 367.
[127] NTS 1915, 147/278, Report on Native Affairs for the year 1935, Assistant Native Commissioner, Duiwelskloof

the Natives are doing fairly well out of market gardening.'[128] In the Leydsdorp area in 1936, people under Mohlaba and Sekororo were said to have a desire for education, improved methods of soil cultivation and stock breeding.[129]

Ten years later, in 1946 J.J de Kock, the Assistant Native Commissioner at Leydsdorp reported that:

> Last season's crops were exceptionally good and there is no food shortage and money is plentiful. Stock is in a very good condition. On the Trust farms Tours and Lorraine most of the natives are making use of the Department's enlightenment on agricultural matters and have to a great extent benefited thereby. They are gradually realising the value of fertilisation and they are then also using their kraal manure for their own lands instead of selling it to the European farmers. A number of natives on the Lorraine Trust farm are producing more vegetables than they require for own consumption and they are forwarding vegetables for sale to the native markets in Johannesburg.[130]

Agricultural demonstrators seemed to have a positive impact on farming practices in the Letaba District. But government programmes can certainly not be seen as the only impetus to 'development' in this area. In the 1940s during and after the war years the NAD was understaffed and the engineering section in particular – responsible for building dams and digging boreholes – was in a mess.[131] There were too few engineers, some of those who got jobs were unqualified, and there were significant problems with transport in rural areas with poor roads and no signposting. The efforts of the NAD coincided with other important transformations in the area – the improvement of transport infrastructure and increasing levels of education. The 'opening up' of the area through improved transport links may have encouraged local black farmers to produce for markets further afield. It also encouraged progressive white farmers to move to the area. The increase in commercial farming, and perhaps also the building of dams and boreholes by landowners on private farms, may have further stimulated some enterprising black farmers.

Many ordinary people were farming differently from the 1930s, and some people began farming very seriously. In 1939 'dozens of vegetable gardens have been established [in the

[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid, Assistant Native Commissioner, Leydsdorp, Report on Native Affairs, 1935.
[130] SANA HKN 1/1/132, Annual Report 1945/46 Leydsdorp area of Letaba District, p. 4.
[131] SANA HKN 1/1/3, 1/15/5 (1) Native Commissioners Conference 1946, pp. 10 – 12.

whole Northern Transvaal] without Departmental aid indicating that the people are slowly awakening to the need for vegetables'.[132] In 1940 it was reported that thanks to the example of 'Fort Cox' vegetable gardens in schools, many women had by themselves established their own home gardens at their kraals.[133]

There were a few noteworthy examples of farmers doing very well. Saul Rammalo was one such farmer. He was 'Modder East compound Induna for many years' before he was approached by Charles Solomon Mogoboya, an unsuccessful candidate for the Mogoboya chieftaincy, for a loan of around £80 to purchase the farm Tours. [134] (The purchase never happened as Mogoboya spent the money 'on his own affairs'). [135] Rammalo moved to Tours in around 1931. He later became a headman there. Over time he cultivated fairly large plots of land, and by 1965 he and his son Mack had 668 mango trees, banana and avocado trees.[136] In Mamathola's location there were by 1957 twenty eight people (out of 431 households) in who had over 1,000 fruit trees, 139 people who had between 100 and 1,000 fruit trees, and eight people with four morgen or more of land under irrigation.[137] Christopher Makwela was one notable farmer, who had 11,613 fruit trees, 13 units of livestock and 6 ½ morgen of irrigated land.[138]

Betterment and rehabilitation in some ways might have assisted these farmers. As noted above, Janse van Rensburg had implemented his own version of zoning in Sekororo's location as early as 1930 to deal with cattle destroying people's crops. This challenge of farming on communal lands was more widespread and frustrated progressive African farmers. A.M.D Molele of Balloon Tribal farm, Trichardtsdal had a garden in which he planted an acre of tomatoes and paw paws, and grew bananas, producing 100 bundles in 1946. But his neighbours allowed their cattle and goats to sleep in Molele's garden and destroy his crops. He spoke to his neighbours but 'when I talked to them, they laugh at me',

[132] SANA NTS 7514, 662/327. Notes for the Native Representative Council. Northern Areas, p. 5.
[133] Ibid, Report on Northern Areas 1940, p. 4.
[134] Lebowa Archive (LA), Naphuno Magistrate files, Box 32 6/3, Mack Rammalo to The Magistrate, Naphuno, 9/9/1971.
[135] Ibid.
[136] LA, Naphuno Magistrate file, Box 29, N2/7/3 (7) S.D Morris, Solicitor, to Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Tzaneen, 4 June 1965.
[137] NTS 10233, 24/423 (13)A, Waardering van Bome, Hutte ens. By Die Verskuiwing van Mamathola Lokasie. 14 January 1957.
[138] Ibid.

he asked Chieftainess Mantjana to speak to them, but this did not bother them.[139] He wrote to the Director of the South African Institute of Race Relations to ask for help, but the response was that he should approach the Native Commissioner of his area. Fencing and zoning – two aspects of betterment – may have assisted Molele.

But other aspects of betterment undermined these farmers. For example, when Saul Rammalo wrote to complain about Trust regulations on Tours and the tribal levy he was expected to pay to Maake (a chief he did not recognise) he was informed:

> you are under a misapprehension in regard to your rights on the Trust farm Tours, When you first went there, and when lands were issued, the farm had not yet been planned, and through some oversight on the part of the field staff, you were allowed to cultivate more land than you should have been allowed.
>
> In addition to this, you failed for many years to pay Trust rentals, and, according to my files, you adopted hostile attitudes towards the rangers.
>
> … The Trust Regulations lay down what extent of land you may be issued with – not exceeding 4 morgen. Land under irrigation is issued in economic units, i.e. 1 ½ morgen per holder.[140]

Thus, Rammalo was unable to put more land under cultivation and was threatened with removal from the farm, without compensation for his trees or crop, should he continue to resist Trust Regulations and fail to pay fees to Maake.[141]

Mamathola's location was removed in 1957, after decades of lobbying by the local white farmers association. The removal took place under the rubric of 'betterment' – the old location was overcrowded, the new one would be neatly planned and managed.[142] At Metz and Enable – the farms on which the new location was to be situated – the amount of land any 'farming' family could have was restricted: 80 families would receive plots of 1 ½ morgen under summer and winter irrigation; 84 families would receive 2 morgen of land under summer irrigation, and 25 families would be allowed a 6 morgen dryland plot.[143]

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[139] WHP, SAIRR, AD 843/RJ/C 2.1 Letter, A.M.D Molele to Director of S.A. I. Race Relations, 17 October 1946.
[140] LA, Naphuno Magistrate file, Box 29, N2/7/3(7) Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Tzaneen to Mr Saul Rammalo, 30 April 1962.
[141] Ibid, Hattenbach, Abraham & Morris to The Bantu Commissioner, Tzaneen, 17 March 1967.
[142] J. Starfield, 'For Future Reference'.
[143] SANA NTS 10233, 24/423/13 Ad Hoc. Komitee verslag oor die Beplanning en Vestiging van Naturelle op Strassburg en Metz, 4 February 1957; SANA NTS 10233 24/423/13, Ondersekretaris to Die Sekretaris van Naturellesake, 'Fooie betaalbaar deur Mamathola stam op Metz. 7 February 1957.

Those with irrigated plots would be allowed 5 head of large livestock, and those with dryland plots 12 head of large livestock.

Conclusion:

From the 1930s, with the establishment of the Department of Native Agriculture, the government began to intervene seriously in African agriculture to attempt to improve farming methods in reserve areas. They also supported small scale irrigation schemes, and in Letaba district helped create and subsidise the LBFC, which saw enormous success in its early years. Similarly, a coterie of more serious black farmers emerged, who were geared towards commercial production.

However, the racist assumptions of the time – that African farmers should be satisfied with lower prices, and small plots, while white farmers were making far more money and trying to prevent Africans from competing with them, most likely led to a loss of morale amongst African farmers. There is also evidence that producers were dissatisfied with the Co-operative marketing system in which they were not free to sell their produce to whomever they wanted, when they wanted, and get immediate returns.

The decline of the Co-operative can partly be explained by the political context of the time which may have alienated farmers. But it was also due to other factors that have little to do with politics. The decision to purchase the truck, the condition of the roads and cost of transport generally, the climate and weather, pests, marketing problems such as gluts, all contributed to the decline of the Co-op. The actual workers on the scheme tended to be women, who had little security of tenure, who may have had complicated relationships with the men whose plots they worked, and who had many other tasks to attend to.

More broadly, this chapter shows the importance of the individual efforts of Native Administrators. The government was not a homogenous entity intent on destroying an African peasantry and turning farmers into exploited labourers. To the contrary, people like Pienaar attempted to help groups of farmers to become more successful and self-sufficient. But just as the broader political context alone cannot explain failure, policy and the efforts of officials cannot explain the increased interest and productivity of African farmers in this period.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Land settlement and Agriculture during the Bantustan Era, 1960s to 1994

This chapter is about transformations during the Bantustan era, looking in particular at two key themes that are relevant to my thesis. The first section deals with processes of removals and resettlement, and how political changes giving chiefs more powers over land affected the way ordinary people accessed land. As in chapter two I continue to emphasise the importance of understanding these processes from the perspective of the homestead and the individual, rather than imagining the removal and destruction of enduring communities. I also look at the increasing importance of ethnicity, which is critical in understanding the context of rural areas by the 1990s, when land restitution was introduced.

The second part of the chapter looks at government intervention in agriculture in this period. I point out as in chapter 4 that although the policy of segregation and removals resulted in overcrowding and degradation of the reserves, the government, in this case homeland governments, made an effort to create a small class of smallholder producers. Rather than simply dismissing these farming projects by virtue of the fact that they were implemented by illegitimate and often corrupt regimes, I argue that it is worth developing a better understanding of how they performed. This is particularly important in the light of current arguments in favour of smallholder irrigation farming in rural areas as a cornerstone of rural development.

Separate development and the creation of bantustans

In the mid-1950s Verwoerd and the NP government rejected the recommendations of the Tomlinson Commission, and the entreaties of intellectuals in the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (Sabra) who insisted that apartheid could only last if the reserve areas received heavy investment and were allowed to develop separately. But this outright rejection did not last long. By the late 1950s the ANC was becoming more militant, and urban black

townships were becoming more volatile. International trends of decolonisation and African nationalism suggested to the NP that they had to do something drastic to check black resistance to white rule, and provide an outlet for Africans' political ambitions and desire for independence.[1] The government's urban labour preference policy of the 1950s had been one attempt to deal with growing unrest in urban areas. The aim of the policy was to create a stable black urban population by reserving jobs for urban Africans, giving urban Africans rights to remain in the city (under Section 10 (1) of the Urban Areas Act) and denying the same rights to migrant workers. It failed to achieve its aims.[2] Thus by the late 1950s the policy towards urban Africans shifted and all Africans in urban areas 'were redefined as permanent inhabitants of ethnic homelands/bantustans whose status in urban areas was that of migrant workers with the right of 'temporary sojourn' in the urban area in which they were employed.'[3] The same went for Africans in white rural areas.

Within the reserve areas, the Bantu Authorities Act was passed in 1951 which changed the administrative system in the reserves, to be based on chiefs and tribal authorities, rather than local and national councils which had previously been the case. This was based on the culturally essentialist idea that 'chieftainship was the central and authentic institution within African culture, upon which an alternative and distinctive domain could be constructed'. [4] There was also a more pragmatic recognition that chiefs, given a 'drop of honey', could be allies of the government, and control the enormous rural African population.[5]

The Bantu Authorities Act led to profound political change in the reserve areas. Under this Act the government tended to recognise those chiefs who promised to co-operate with them and implement unpopular betterment policies. This meant that '[G]roups who readily accepted the establishment of tribal authorities were often allocated land claimed by groups who had resisted the system.'[6] Many other chiefs found their domain diminished

[1] J. Lazar, 'Verwoerd versus the 'Visionaries': The South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (Sabra) and Apartheid, 1948 – 1961' in P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds.) *Apartheid's Genesis'* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993, pp. 384 – 385; P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel 'Introduction', ibid. pp. 32 – 33.
[2] Bonner et al, *Apartheid's Genesis*, p. 32.
[3] Ibid.
[4] P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1996, pp. 78 – 79. Also A. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth Century South Africa,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, pp. 153 – 169.
[5] Ibid.
[6] P. Delius, 'Contested terrain: land rights and chiefly power in historical perspective' in A. Claasens and B. Cousins, *Land, Power and Custom: Controversies generated by South Africa's Communal Land Rights Act,* Cape Town: UCT Press, 2008, p. 231.

and their land (even that purchased through tribal levies) allocated to another chief. Or they were placed under the authority, as a subject 'headman', of a chief they did not recognise.[7]

According to section 4(1)(b), chiefs were given 'the powers, functions or duties conferred or imposed upon its chief or headman under any law, as are in accordance with any applicable Black law and custom, or in terms of any regulations.'[8] Some chiefs used their position to assert greater control over land, to demand extra payments from subjects, and punish political opposition.

But the Bantu Authorities Act did not change the ethnically heterogenous nature of settlement in the country, especially in the northern and eastern Transvaal where Sotho, Shangaan-Tsonga and Venda speaking people lived intermingled.[9] This was done by the Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959, which was the basis for the creation of banstustans. The Act was based on the notion that 'The Bantu people of South Africa… form separate national units on the basis of language and culture.' [10] Thus, ethnically based Territorial Authorities were created in the early 60s, and in 1972 and 1973 the homelands of Lebowa and Gazankulu were established.

Removals, ethnicity and politics

The 1960s ushered in a period of intensified removals as separate development was implemented with more vigour.[11] Greater influx control in urban areas meant that many people were 'endorsed out' of cities and townships. The government finally took action against black owned farms in white areas as defined by the 1913 Natives Land Act and 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, resulting in a spate of 'black spot' removals that would continue until well into the 1980s. Economic changes in white agriculture, including increased mechanisation and the utilisation of more land, meant that labour tenants were gradually pushed out of white rural areas, as farmers preferred wage labour. These developments

[7] Ibid, pp. 230 – 232.
[8] Ibid.
[9] P. Harries, 'Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The emergence of ethnicity among the Tsonga speakers of South Africa' in L. Vail (ed) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa,* London*:* James Currey, 1989, p. 104.
[10] Ibid.
[11] See L. Platsky and C. Walker, *The Surplus People,* Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985.

finally made it politically possible for the government to implement Chapter IV of the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act; this provided for far stricter control of labour tenants and allowed government officials, aided by farmers, to remove those labour tenants they considered 'excess' on a farm.[12] Within the bantustans, homeland consolidation led to a series of removals as boundaries were drawn. Where people of different ethnicities lived intermingled, populations were separated and resettled according to their ethnicity.[13] Betterment policies were continued; 'villagisation' involved the removal of scattered homesteads and villages to closer settlements. New development projects within the bantustans, for example the development of large agricultural estate schemes and large dams, also led to removals.

Much of the literature on removals emphasises the break-up of communities, destruction of property, people moving from a relatively comfortable economic independence to poverty in soulless resettlement camps or concentrated residential areas.[14] But one of the other pernicious features of these processes of removals, resettlement and homeland consolidation was that many 'communities' found themselves under the rule of chiefs they did not recognise. A classic example of this in Gazankulu was the removal of the Makuleke Community and their resettlement under Chief Mhinga, who dominated them politically and was considered to be illegitimate by the Makuleke.[15] Thus goes a song, which ends,

> They take us to the wilderness because they say he is not a chief
> And they take the one who is our uncle (Mhinga) and call him a chief
> We come from the chief at Makuleke the son of Phela
> Whom they say is not a chief
> And yet he is the rightful chief.[16]

[12] Ibid; S. Schirmer, 'Struggle for Land in Lydenburg 1930 – 1970' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1994, pp. 287 – 311.
[13] Harries, 'Exclusion' pp. 105 – 107; E. Ritcken'Leadership and conflict in Bushbuckridge: struggles to define moral economics within the context of rapidly transforming political economies.' Unpublished PhD thesis, Wits University, 1995.
[14] C. Desmond, *The Discarded People,* Braamfontein: The Christian Institute of South Africa, 1969; Platsky and Walker, *Surplus People*; C. de Wet, 'Betterment Planning in a Rural Village in Keiskammahoek, Ciskei' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 15 (2) 1989; Hendricks, 'Loose Planning'; later literature: C. de Wet, *Moving Together, Drifting Apart: Betterment planning and villagisation in a South African Homeland,* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995; Delius, *Lion Amongst the Cattle*, pp. 142 – 147.
[15] P. Harries, '"A Forgotten Corner of the Transvaal": Reconstructing the History of a Relocated Community through Oral Testimony and Song' in B. Bozzoli (ed.) *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987.
[16] Ibid, p. 123.

What a lot of this literature has in common is the emphasis on the plight of communities faced with larger destructive forces. I argue here that the histories of 'communities' and families, and their experiences of removal were very diverse. As I argued in chapter two, the link between individuals and communities, and communities and specific farms, was less static and primordial than imagined. Also, individuals within communities had a large degree of independence and were remarkably mobile even in a period of tightening controls. This can be illustrated with a few examples, beginning with the removal of the Sterkrivier community.

In 1979 the Gazankulu government began to plan for the removal of 250-300 families of the 'Sterkrivier Community' to make way for the construction of a large dam, due to be completed in 1981. The community, or at least a large part of it, was led by Gon'on'o, an independent headman who was born at the farm New England in the Sibasa district. At some point the white owner of that farm evicted him, but the majority of 'his' people stayed behind. The farm was later bought by Chief Senthumule. Gon'on'o moved to Middleplaas with some followers, where another headman eventually 'approached him and said that there cannot be two bulls in one kraal'.[17] He then was 'removed to Marisis … but was later advised by Mr Goosen the Agricultural Officer to go and settle at Caledon'. At this point he had 150 followers, most of them still living at New England. In 1972 he moved to Shell-farm (Sterkrivier) where many of his old followers joined him. In 1974 he claimed that '75% (plus) of Sterkrivier people are his followers'.[18] (Thus 25 per cent of people living at the same place were not – this was not a homogenous 'community'). In 1979, when Gazankulu officials met the community to discuss their resettlement, Gon'on'o 'stressed the fact that people must decide for themselves where they want to be settled', but he himself would stay in the broader area where his forefathers were buried.[19] Thus although the government attempted to co-ordinate the resettlement of the community, it is clear that in many cases

[17] Gazankulu Archive (GA), Department of the Interior (DINT) Box 112, 8/4/1-1, Complaint: Headman Philemon Makasela Baloyi Better Known as Headman Gon'on'o if Khomanani Community Authority.
[18] Ibid.
[19] GA DINT Box 112 8/4/1-1, Minutes of the Meeting Held at Sterkrivier Giyani District, the 29th March 1979.

people chose to 'go their own way'.[20] Finding a place to resettle also meant becoming subjects of another chief. In this case, 160 of the 250-300 families at Sterkrivier chose to settle under Chief Hlaneki in his tribal area.[21]

There is evidence that many families were moving around independently to settle under a chief they chose, rather than staying in a political situation they found untenable. For example, 'Petty Headman' J. Yingwani complained that 'many of his followers left his area with or without permission' possibly because they did not want to be subordinate to Headman Nkuri in the Malamulele district. [22] Because of this, Yingwani asked permission for himself and his remaining followers (60 families) to move and settle under a different headman.[23]

Likewise, the story of Headman Ntshuxi reveals that people were very mobile and took initiative in choosing where to settle. Headman Ntshuxi had been resident at Mashamba, but trouble arose between him and Chief Mashamba in 1965 'when he was ordered to serve as headman' under said chief, when the area became a part of Venda Regional Authority.[24] This he would not do because he had been previously independent with his own area, and he was Shangaan while Chief Mashamba was Venda. Ntshuxi was resettled at a place called 'N Magoro':

> Later 53 families joined him and presently there are more than 700 families wanting to come and settle under him because Chief Mashamba would not want to have anything to do with them. Much as he [Ntshuxi] would like to receive them because there is sufficient space to settle them where he is but he is now told by the local Magistrate to move from N. Magoro and settle under Headman N'wamatatani which thing he does not understand because he is reckoned as Independent Headman by his people.[25]

In 1975 Ntshuxi took his problem to the Chief Minister, asking that N Magoro be replanned so that he and his followers could stay there independently. His plea was favourably received by Phakula, the Administrative Officer of the Department of Chief Minister and of

[20] See for example GA DINT Box 112, 8/4/1-1, Report on meeting held at Khomanani Community Authority 18 May 1979.
[21] Ibid, Secretary for the Interior to The Procurement Officer, July 27, 1981.
[22] Ibid, Magistrate, Giyani, 30 August 1971.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid, Meeting with Headman Ntshushi [sic] 16 September 1975.
[25] Ibid, Independent Headman Ntshuxi's Visit to the Office of the Chief Minister, 26 August 1975.

Finance, and Mahatlane, Private Secretary to the Chief Minister, because he had been a 'pioneer of many Changana/Tsonga who later resettled in Gazankulu from Vendaland', and they did not want to further alienate him and his followers, 'a thing not desirable politically'.[26] They pointed out that,

> The question of these people being absorbed into the community of N'wamatatani is to our thinking purely political. It is to the advantage of N'wamatatani as it will increase the population of his area and thereby enhance his standing in the community authority, while on the other hand it is to the disadvantage of Headman Ntshushi [sic] as he is going to loose his status as Independent Headman.[27]

It is not clear what eventually happened to Ntshuxi. What is clear is that the relationship between land and community in this instance was dependent on context, not a sense of attachment to 'ancient' land. Shangaan people at Mashamba wanted to move from their homes because 'they are time and again reminded that they are not Venda' and the area 'does not belong to them.'[28] Their new home on the other side of the river had more meaning to them in this context. While the new land 'belonged' to them in a symbolic sense as the homeland of the Shangaan-Tsonga, many of the families had a history of settlement on a different farm.

Many pre-existing, independent communities found themselves suddenly under the rule of chiefs they did not recognise, even without physically moving to a new location. A good example comes from the farm Tours. As I discussed in chapter 2, the community on Tours was made up of people with different backgrounds. A significant portion of the farm population had moved there in around 1931 when Charles Solomon Mogoboya asked for permission to reside on the farm with a number of followers, after he was unsuccessful in his bid to become chief of the Mogoboya 'tribe'. After Charles Solomon failed both to purchase the farm with the money he had collected from the community, and to pay rent, he and many of his followers were evicted. A number of families stayed behind, now under the headmanship of Saul Rammalo, a man with no 'royal blood' but who had experience of leadership in the Modder east mine compound.

[26] Ibid, Meeting with Headman Ntshushi [sic] 16 September 1975.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

By 1965 Maake, the Bakgaha chieftainess was given authority over Tours, which she had argued before was 'ancient tribal land' of the Bakgaha (other groups disagreed).[29] Those presently living on Tours had the option either of remaining and recognising the authority of Maake, or leaving the farm to move to Mogoboya's location, which the authorities considered was their own 'tribal' land.[30] This was a deep irony of course as many of these families were descendants of the group that had moved from Mogoboya's location in protest against the chief forty years previously.[31] In 1965 a number of families chose to move from Tours to the farm Craighead, within the Mogoboya Tribal Authority area.[32] Others stayed behind, including Mack Rammalo.

Saul Rammalo and his son Mack were angered by being put under Chieftainess Maake, they 'adopted hostile attitudes towards the rangers', refused to pay the extra tribal levies demanded by Maake and her levy collectors. Mack 'wrote…letters three times to the chief which state that he is not the Bakgaga subject [sic]' and refused to come to her court when called.[33] Mack complained to the Magistrate, 'it is funny for us to be sold like mealies'.[34] Saul Rammalo had his headmanship taken away from him – in fact, officials retrospectively denied that he had ever been a headman.[35] Mack requested the Bantu Affairs Commissioner at Tzaneen to allow him to take over 'his father's seat' as headman.[36]

With the amount of political manoeuvring going on, along with the complicated history of settlement and authority over land, few people had any real idea of who actually had authority over land historically – or rather, sometimes there was no answer because the question itself was problematic. For example, in 1972 Chief Hlaneki approached the Magistrate at Giyani to point out that three of his indunas and hundreds of his followers were living on Blinkwater, in Headman Msengi's area of jurisdiction. In fact, Hlaneki pointed

[29] SANA, NTS 3727 1993/308, Investigations Native Affairs Commission, Letaba District, Tzaneen, 12 August 1937, Native Evidence, p. 3.
[30] Lebowa Archive (LA) Naphuno Magistrate Files (NM), Box 29, N2/7/3 (9), Bantoesakekommissaris, Tzaneen to die Hoofbantoesakekommissaris, Re Klagtes van inwoners van Tours, 1 March 1967.
[31] LA, NM, Box 32 6/3, Mack Rammalo to The Magistrate, Naphuno, 9 September 1971.
[32] Ibid; LA NM, Box 29, N2/7/3 (9), Bantoesakekommissaris, Tzaneen to die Hoofbantoesakekommissaris, Re Klagtes van inwoners van Tours, 1 March 1967.
[33] LA NM Box 29 N2/7/3 (7) Bantu Affairs Commissioner Tzaneen to Mr Saul Rammalo, 30 April 1962; Secretary Tribal Authority to Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Tzaneen, 14 February 1967.
[34] LA NM, Box 32 6/3, Mack Rammalo to The Magistrate, Naphuno, 9 September 1971.
[35] Ibid, Magistrate Naphuno to Mack Rammalo, 24 September 1971.
[36] Ibid, Mack Rammalo to V.H Dixon, 11 May 1972.

out, Blinkwater had actually been in his own area of jurisdiction before Msengi and his followers were settled there. He asked if Headman Msengi was thus subject to his own [Hlaneki's] authority or not, and if not, could he get new residential land on which his old followers could come and settle (and pay taxes) under him, should they wish to leave Msengi's area. [37] To assess this request, the Magistrate wanted to know if Blinkwater had in fact been under Hlaneki's area of jurisdiction, 'as distinct from his sphere of influence' and if so was he given alternative land when Msengi settled there? The Director of Community Affairs responded:

> We have very little knowledge about the whole set up. The only knowledge we have is that about 1963 the subjects of chiefs Hlaneki and Mamaila (a Sotho chief) and headman Msengi and Ndengeza lived intermingled and it will be difficult at this stage to determine and distinguish who the followers of each of the abovementioned were.[38]

Failing to offer a solution, the Director of Community Affairs referred the problem to the Agricultural Officer, who possibly knew more, having played a role 'in the execution of the agricultural planning of these areas.'[39]

People moving into the homelands from urban areas, 'white' farmland or other homelands had to mobilise their ethnic identity to find a place to live. [40] Outsiders who wished to access land in the homelands had to declare their 'tribal identity'. Letters in local archives from individuals who wanted to move to Gazankulu reveal how they tried to negotiate around this. Elias Maringa from Pretoria, wanted the Gazankulu government to pay his removal expenses, and wrote: 'The speech by Mr Jeleni provoked a burning keenness in me to abandon what I was in the process of cherishing – to be a Tswana – and drift back to what I really am – a Tsonga'.[41] For Mrs Kekana, Tsonga identity was a matter of self-preservation. Her family's request to live in Nkowankowa in the baNkuna (Mohlaba) tribal authority had been refused, because her husband was Sotho. They had been living in an area that had since been designated part of Venda so could not return there. They then moved to

[37] GA DINT Box 112 8/4/1-1, Magistrate Giyani to The Director of Community Affairs, Giyani, 16 November 1972.
[38] Ibid, Director of Community Affairs to The Magistrate, Giyani, 30 November 1972.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Harries, 'A Forgotten Corner of the Transvaal' in Bozzoli (ed) *Class, Community and Conflict* (Braamfontein, Ravan Press, 1987) pp.106-107. Harries, 'Exclusion', pp. 104 – 105.
[41] GA DINT Box 107, 8/3 Elias Maringa to Representative of Giyani District, undated [official translation].

Johannesburg where her husband had a house, but he soon passed away. Because women could not lease houses in urban areas, Mrs Kekana was forced to reside on a temporary basis with 'sympathetic beings'. [42] Unable to live in either a Venda or Sotho 'homeland', she pleaded: 'When a child cries she/he runs to the mother for help. So even if I met disappointment last year at Nkowankowa I can't see the way out, than to go to the Tsonga areas again'.[43]

Some people contrived to forfeit their 'tribal identity' in order to remain in their homes. For example, after being removed from Shakuvhadzi in 1968, when it was incorporated into Venda, Frans Mafanele's family made repeated enquiries to the Director of Community Affairs about the possibility of return. [44] In his plea to the Director of Community Affairs in February 1972, Mafanele suggested that if he could not hold what he called 'dual allegiance' to both the Venda and Shangaan Governments, he would like to move back to Shakuvhadzi, and become Venda.[45]

This new order had the effect of further entrenching the loss of political rights experienced by Africans with the perverse promise of 'self-government'. In order to access land in a homeland, one had to become subject to a chief, get permission from that chief to reside there, and live under his or her rules. A striking example of what this might mean for individuals comes from a note from the Secretary of the Nyabana Tribal Authority, responding to a query by the Magistrate of Ritavi regarding the settlement of 470 Shangaan families from Pretoria. The Secretary wrote that these families could stay only:

> a) If such families are prepared to become full subjects of the Nyabana Tribal Authority and if
>
> b) As immigrants they will make no claim to executive powers in headmanship, chieftainship etc within the tribal authority
>
> c) If they will be prepared to pay all fees that may be imposed from time to time by either the Nyabana Tribal Authority or the Machangana Territorial Authority.

[42] GA DINT Box 106 8/3 Mrs A.B Kekana to The Secretary, Giyani Bantu Authority, 5 April 1971.
[43] Ibid.
[44] GA DINT Box 107, 8/3 Frans Mafanele to the Director of Community Affairs, 7 January 1972.
[45] Ibid. Frans Mafanele to the Director of Community Affairs, 29 February 1972.

> d) If the authorities will, at all times, assist the tribal Authority in ejecting out from the given area, any of the people who will be guilty of having communistic tendencies.[46]

Chiefs also used requests to absorb 'surplus people' to ask for more land for their tribal authorities. The Baloyi [Mamitwa] Tribal Authority in Gazankulu, for example, refused to accommodate 470 Shangaan families from Pretoria unless extra land was forthcoming, on the grounds that there was not enough space. However, the Nyabana Tribal Authority also wanted the farms the Baloyi had identified, and today there are at least two conflicting claims over this land.

The increasing importance of ethnicity

With the creation of tribal authorities and ethnic homelands, ethnicity came to be increasingly important for elites wanting power and access to resources, and for ordinary people trying to access land for residential or other purposes. This had implications for the vigour with which ethnic nationalism was embraced: 'whereas ethnicity in the earlier part of the century often involved defence of rural resources and an old way of life, it was now also mobilised in competition for new economic and political resources.'[47]

Harries has shown how ethnic consciousness became a very powerful force amongst the Tsonga. The roots of Tsonga ethnic identity were deep, but also constructed: Missionaries in the late nineteenth century created a new ethnic group or 'tribe' by creating a new language, ethnic-based migrant organisations offered support and stability in urban areas and the mines, and an educated and politically conscious bourgeoisie harnessed an ethnic identity for their own means. Ethnic identities were also rooted in the experience of being 'the other'. The key point is: ethnicity had already proven itself a powerful idea for ordinary people. It was also enormously divisive in the context of homeland consolidation.[48] As Harries shows:

> Starting with the break-up and distribution of the funds and powers of the old multi-ethnic Regional Authorities, ethnic bitterness reached a peak as politically arbitrary borders such as roads, railways and farm boundaries were defined in order to separate the different

[46] GA DINT Box 106 8/3, M.W Mabunda, S.M.W Mabunda, G.M Bvuma, to The Magistrate, Ritavi, 19 April 1970.
[47] W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa,* Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 224.
[48] Also see Ritchken, 'Leadership and conflict', pp. 163 – 231.

> 'homelands'. This immediately created disadvantaged ethnic minorities on both sides of the border. It is the competition for resources that has compelled many people to adopt an ethnic consciousness. This competition takes place between ethnically differentiated people living under the same chief, between ethnic minorities and a Bantustan government or between the members of different Bantustans.[49]

In this context, tens of thousands of people were 'encouraged' by Bantustan leaders using powerful rhetoric to settle in 'their homelands'. In a speech by Prof Ntsanwisi, the Chief Councillor in the Machangana Legislative Assembly, which was directed at Shangaan people living in Sinthumule and Kutame locations in Venda in 1971, he used strong moral tones.

> It is not a question of whether or not it is optional for you to leave Vendaland but it is a question of whether or not your faculty distinguishing between right and wrong is clear…Those who think they are at home … are deceiving themselves. Their children will blame them and will never forgive them for their foolish act of trying to behave like wild Cats [sic] which leave the comforts of a home to go and lead a wild life chasing mice in the veld and even getting into peoples [sic] homes uninvited, for the purpose of stealing in order to whet their appetite.[50]

And to Shangaan people at Davhana, Chief Netshimbubfhe, the Councillor of Community Affairs in the Venda Legislative Assembly, emphasised the great cultural difference between Venda and Shangaan, ending with a threat:

> Although we have been staying together for many years, our customs and traditions were never the same. You Shangaan people have your own which make you distinct and conspicuous. The same applies to Vendas. Let us all go and enrich our respective Homelands. It does not help you to remain here because we shall never regard you as one with us. We shall consider you as foreigners as long as we know that you remained here purposely when your people were moved. If you think we are going to forget that you are Shangaan/Tsonga then we shall remind you in our Drinking Parties [sic] and other places of entertainment that you are undesirable elements amongst us.[51]

Such rhetoric fuelled ethnic tension and introduced a xenophobic discourse which was used by the highest levels of government, and encouraged amongst ordinary people. In these kinds of speeches land and the resources of government were expressed as something that

[49] Harries, 'Exclusion' , p. 105.
[50] GA DINT Box 111 8/4 Report on Meeting of Shangaan and Venda Leaders At Sinthumule and Kutame locations on 28th July 1971, by A.D Mahantlane.
[51] Ibid, Report on Meeting of Venda and Shangaan Leaders at Davhana Location on 27th August 1971.

belonged to people of a specific ethnic group. Outsiders, defined in ethnic terms, were 'foreigners', even thieves, regardless of how long they had lived in the area.

The long lasting effects of this rhetoric on conceptions of land and belonging in South Africa's rural areas would have an impact on how land restitution was to play out in Mopani district, as I discuss in the next chapter. As Harries pointed out in 1989,

> Ethnicity has emerged out of the acceptance and propagation by various classes of cultural symbols that cut across class barriers and distinguish and unite people as 'Tsonga'… Nor is ethnicity merely a product of Bantustan politics, and it is unlikely that the abandonment of apartheid and the Bantustan system will end the regional underdevelopment which, through the politicization of cultural differences, is one of the major causes of ethnic exclusivism.[52]

Agriculture in Gazankulu and Lebowa

Dealing with a large influx of people, limited land and the problems of congestion and environmental degradation led to the very cynical implementation of betterment, referred to as 'loose planning and rapid resettlement'.[53] Those writing on homeland agriculture during the 1990s tended to focus on this and the negative aspects of the 'one man one lot' system: with increasing congestion, families had access to smaller and smaller plots of land on which it was impossible to do anything other than sub-subsistence farming.[54] Meanwhile, a lack of money and lack of labour (due to migrancy as well as the increasing importance of education), were major constraints on people's ability to farm or keep cattle.[55] Thus the most ingrained image of the bantustans is that of agriculture in sharp decline. However, there is a lot more to understand about bantustan agriculture than the effects that betterment planning, influx control and migrancy had on the ability of the homeland population to farm.

[52] Harries, 'Exclusion', p. 110.
[53] Delius, *Lion Amongst the Cattle*, p. 140. F. Hendricks, 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement: The Politics of Conservation and Control in Transkei, South Africa, 1950 – 1970' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 15 (2) 1989.
[54] D. Cooper, 'Agriculture in the bantustans' p. 243. Hendricks, 'Loose Planning'; Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle.*
[55] Delius, *Lion Amongst the Cattle,* pp.145- 146, 152.

Some views of homeland agriculture are less historically informed: in a recent book on land reform, Hendricks et al suggest that:

> Compared to the massive state subsidisation of white-dominated commercial agriculture, very little was invested in the development of agriculture in the bantustans. In fact, active steps were taken to discourage the rise of the class of black farmers that had been emerging in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century bantustans served largely as labour reserves, thus creating the conditions for proleterianisation of the indigenous people.[56]

As I argued in chapter 4, it is important to look beyond these ahistorical formulations.

It was in fact imperative for the government to make some attempt at developing the reserves, so that 'homelands' could be a conduit for the economic and social as well as political aspirations of black people. 'For the homelands policy to work, even to the extent that it did' Beinart pointed out, 'local co-operation was required and there were beneficiaries of the system.'[57] This meant finding areas of the economy that could grow, and encouraging growth. While the government was still unwilling to make the enormous sacrifices and investment necessary for the reserve areas to become economically viable (if that was even a remote possibility), they nevertheless 'funneled large quantities of money into the homelands' which represented 'a substantial boost of expenditure on areas long starved of government funding'.[58] Considerable resources were made available to chiefs who accepted bantu authorities, at the same time an entire professional strata was expanded: teachers, traders, nurses, extension officers, civil service etc. The government was also serious about creating more farmers, and improving agricultural production in the reserves.[59]

The Bantustan governments' funded different types of agricultural schemes and projects, which filled two purposes: increasing agricultural production in the reserves, and creating employment in the homelands, thus preventing urbanisation. By 1985 there were a large number of projects, following different models, and managed by different bodies, including

[56] F. Hendricks, L. Ntsebeza, and K. Helliker, *The Promise of Land: Undoing a Century of Dispossession in South Africa,* Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013, p. 9.
[57] Beinart, *Twentieth Century*, p. 222.
[58] W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century*, p. 224
[59] N. J. Rhoodie, P. Smit, J. J Stadtler, J. Adendorff, M. Louw (eds.) *Homelands: The Role of the Corporations,* Johannesburg: Chris van Rensburg Publications, 197? [no publication date given], pp. 83 – 85.

the homeland Departments of Agriculture, private farm management companies (such as Measured Farming), the homeland development corporations, and Tribal Authorities.

On the smallest scale, many households had small gardens in which to grow vegetables and some maize. Aside from this, within the territories of Tribal Authorities it was possible for people to hire small plots of dry land and irrigated land as private and subsistence farmers.[60] The next level of agricultural production was more organised 'community gardens' where vegetables and fruit were grown to supply the local community and 'train the inhabitants in market garden production'.[61] These did not classify as agricultural 'projects' however, but rather 'women's organisations', as were fruit and vegetable markets. The Department of Agriculture (DoA) and the Shangaan-Tsonga Development Corporation (STDC) sometimes provided assistance with inputs such as fencing, water supply and fertiliser. In 1984-85, 46 such gardens were cultivated in Gazankulu and there were 2,564 members.[62].

In Gazankulu by 1984/85 there were seven farmers associations with 122 members. It was hoped that these would one day become farmers' Co-operatives.[63] The area of land under irrigation in Gazankulu grew from 1,534 ha in 1969[64] to 2,370 ha in 1985.[65] By 1985, there were 37 agricultural projects in Gazankulu, including 14 irrigation schemes.[66] In Lebowa's Bolobedu, Naphuno and Namakgale agricultural regions (today making up parts of Mopani District), there were seven Co-operatives and 19 agricultural projects by 1985, of which 14 were irrigation projects.[67]

[60] Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), *Gazankulu Development Information*, 1985, 'Section 7 Agriculture and Mining' p. 4.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] GA Box 158 6/3, Director of Agriculture to Secretary, Bantoe-administrasie en ontwikkeling, re Inligting Benodig Deur Sy Edele Die Minister, 6 Januarie, 1970.
[65] DBSA, *Gazankulu Development Information*, Section 7 Agriculture and Mining, p. 2.
[66] Ibid, p. 10 – 11.
[67] DBSA *Lebowa Development Information*, Section 7: Agriculture. p. 18 – 26.

Fig. 8. Agricultural projects in certain districts of Lebowa and Gazankulu[68]

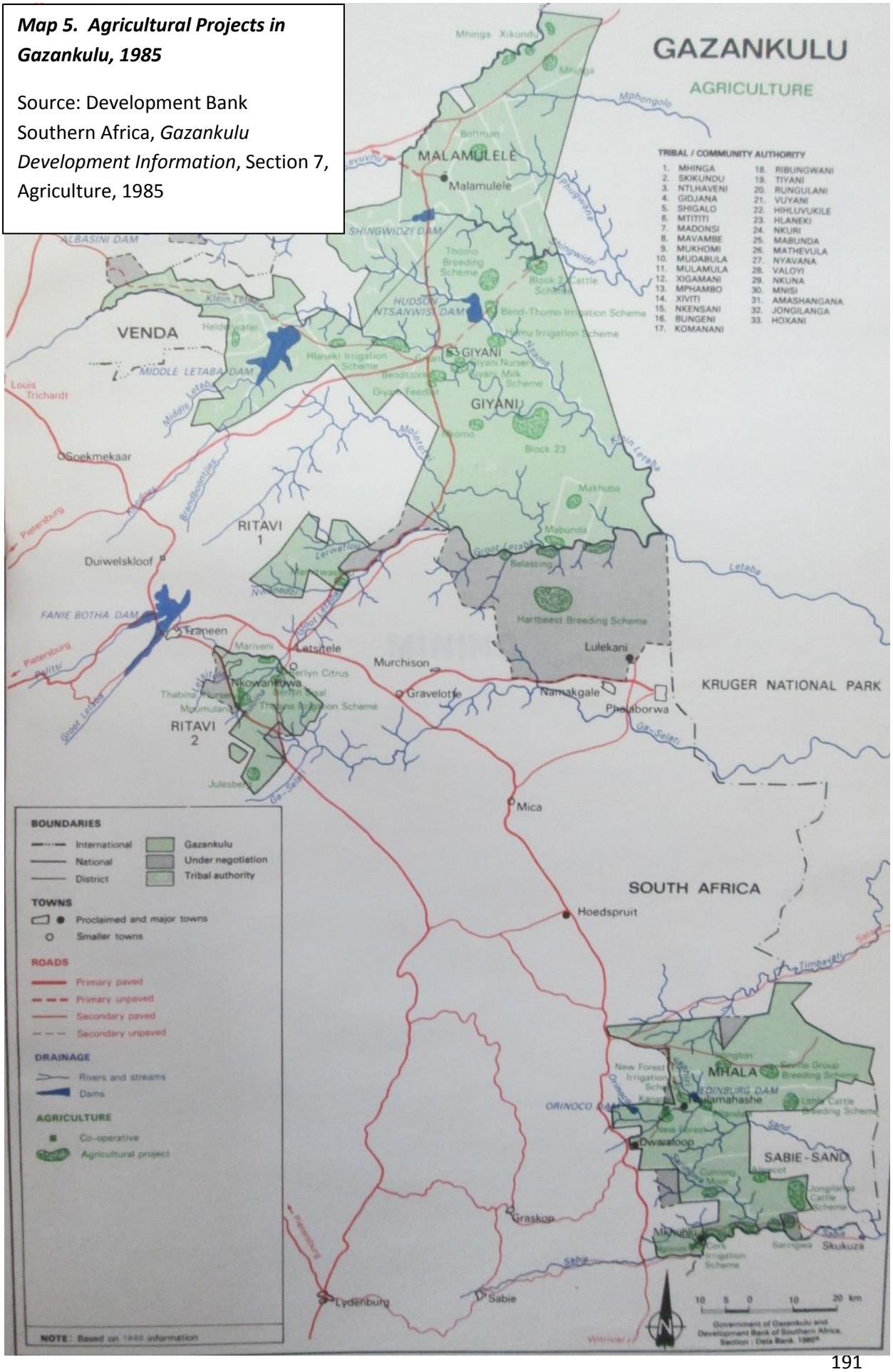
District	Project	Size	Managed by	Employees Perma-nent	Employees occass-ional	Farmers
Bolobedu	Worcester	180ha	Lebowa Department of Agriculture (DoA)	27	30	0
	Modjadji	63ha	Measured Farming	23	0	0
Namakgale	Makushane Dairy (milk scheme)	35ha	Lebowa DoA	4	0	0
	Makushane (Irrigation)	35ha	Lebowa DoA	0	0	0
	Seloane (Irrigation – lucerne)	70ha	LAC	2	24	0
Naphuno	Metz (dairy/milk scheme)	176ha	Lebowa DoA	3	0	0
	Tours- LAC (Irrigation)	100ha	LAC	3	237	0
	Strassburg (Irrigation)	83ha	LAC	3	93	0
	The Oaks/The Willows (Irrigation)	181ha	LAC	3	94	0
	Lorraine (Irrigation)	75ha	LAC			62 (1.2ha each)
	Sekororo (Irrigation)	132ha	LAC			111 (1.2ha each)
	Tours – Maake (Irrigation)	75ha	LAC			62 (1.2ha each)
Naphuno - Mapulaneng	Zoeknog (Dairy and Irrigation)	140ha	LAC and community	8	246	
	Dingleydale (Irrigation)	855ha	Measured farming	2		398 (2ha per farmer)
	Green Valley (Irrigation)	20ha	Measured farming	5		
	Champagne (Irrigation)	600a	Measured farming	25		
	Sandford (Irrigation and livestock)	953ha	LAC	6	98	
Giyani	Bendstore (dry land sisal)	1496ha	Gazankulu Dept of Agric and Forestry (DoA)	55 male 330 female		
	Nkomo (dry land sisal)	300ha	Gazankulu DoA	7 male, 60 female		
	Helderwater (dry land sisal	192ha	Gazankulu DoA	13 male 60 female		
	Makhuba	188ha	Gazankulu DoA	3 male 47		

[68] DBSA, *Gazankulu Development Information*, Section 7 Agriculture and Mining; DBSA *Lebowa Development Information*, Section 7: Agriculture.

	(dryland sisal)			female		
	Homu (irrigation sheme)	174ha	Gazankulu DoA	10 male 50 female		
	Hlaneki irrigation scheme	110ha	Gzankulu DoA	N/a - still in developme nt c/a 1985		
	Bend-Thomo irrigation scheme	1400ha	Gazankulu DoA	N/a - still in developme nt c/a 1985		
	Giyani nursery	4ha	Shangaan-Tsonga Development Corporation (STDC)	5 males		
	Giyani milk scheme	96ha	STDC			4 farmers given 14ha each
	Belasting (dry-land, irrigation, game farm)	509 excl game farm	STDC	61 men, 3 women	193 men, 519 women	
	Mabunda (dryland, irrigation)	280ha	STDC	10 men	225 men and 761 women	
Ritavi	Berlyn (Sisal)	512ha	DoA	48men, 254 women		
	Berlyn Citrus (irrigation- citrus, litchies)	281ha	DoA	35 men, 178 women		
	Mamitwaskop (irrigation- maize and vegetables)	35ha	DoA and Tribal Authority	N/A		
	Thabina irrigation scheme (Irrigation, maize, vegetables, groundnuts, cowpeas)	256ha	DoA and Tribal Authority			200 (each allocated 1.2ha to 5ha)
	Thabina nursery	1ha	DoA	2 men, 12 women		
	Julesburg (dry-land/irrigation bixa, coffee, mangoes, macadamia and pecan nuts	120.5ha dryland, 58ha irrigation	DoA	38 men, 79 women		
	Mariveni (Dryland-dairy, cotton, tobacco etc)	150 ha dryland; 15ha grazing	STDC	35 men, 3 women	7 men, 150 women	7 farmers 18 ha each

Map 5. Agricultural Projects in Gazankulu, 1985

Source: Development Bank Southern Africa, *Gazankulu Development Information*, Section 7, Agriculture, 1985



Thus by 1985 in the area roughly making up Mopani district today around 9,892.5 ha were under some kind of farming scheme. The table does not have information for all the farms, but what information is available show that 1,512 people were employed as permanent workers, 2,677 as occasional workers, and 844 were farmers. Thus, the majority of people benefitting from these schemes were workers rather than farmers, and more women were employed as permanent and occasional workers than men.

All people theoretically had available to them the guidance of Agricultural Extension officers, although for those in more remote areas this would require some travelling. The job of extension officers was to 'help people help themselves' in agriculture.[69] The approach was to encourage or assist people to form Co-operatives and generally undertake a more scientific form of agriculture, using particular kinds of seeds, manure, fertilisers and so on. They were meant to help make tractors and other inputs available. They also assisted farmers to get production loans.

Taking only the most basic indicator of agricultural production into consideration, agricultural revenue in Gazankulu grew from R1,921,000 in 1971 to R7,671,000 in 1976.[70] In the Bantustans in general, agricultural production increased from R56.2 million in 1970 to R163 million in 1985. Schirmer argues that much of this was due to large estate – style schemes which benefited a small elite made up of white farmers, black businessmen and chiefs.[71] It is well known that the economic development of the bantustans had the effect of considerably expanding the rural elite – chiefs in particular were in a good position to benefit from the resources and opportunities presented by increased spending in the reserves.[72] Chiefs were also responsible for allocating land, and sometimes allocated land based on a persons' ability to pay a bribe, so the poorest people were not able to access land. But there may be room for more differentiation than looking simply at an 'elite' versus the 'poorest' of the poor. According to Bernstein, 'far from being homogenous, the

[69] H.W.L Lilley, *Attitudes and Opinions of Some Tribal Leaders in Lebowa Towards Their Department of Agriculture and Forestry* Department of Bantu Administration and Development, May 1977, p. 2.
[70] GA, *Gazankulu Leads the Way 1970 – 1980*, (unpagenated)
[71] S. Schirmer, 'Policy Visions and Historical Realities' *African Studies* (59, 1), 2000, p. 152; also see M. Cobbet, 'The Land Question in South Africa: A Preliminary Assessment' *The South African Journal of Economics,* 55 (1), p. 69; E. Lahiff, *An Apartheid Oasis? Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods in Venda,* London: Frank Cass, 2000, p. 31; D. Cooper, 'Agriculture in the bantustans: Towards development policies' in M. de Klerk, (ed.) *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa,* Cape Town: Idasa, p. 251 – 253; H. Dolny, *Banking on Change,* Johannesburg: Penguin, 2001, p. 40
[72] Delius, *Lion Amongst the Cattle,* p. 145.

agricultural sector is highly differentiated along lines of class, gender and generation, with substantial numbers of farmers producing for the market, both 'formal' and 'informal' .[73] DBSA figures suggest that in Lebowa a huge (unknown) number of subsistence farmers contributed about 73.3 per cent of agriculture's contribution to the GDP.[74] There were also 716 commercial farmers, estimated to contribute R7 million to Lebowa's GDP. [75] In Lebowa and Gazankulu opportunities were created for some small scale farmers or farm workers at different scales, as shown in the table above.

I cannot look at the performance of all these schemes here, but will focus on irrigation schemes as they have been a feature of policies to improve agriculture in the reserves for many decades and are popular amongst many development practitioners and land activists today. Irrigation schemes were considered to be very important in an area of low rainfall and periodic drought, and were thought to have huge potential in the rural areas to stimulate agriculture. Around 1980 it was estimated that 28,600 ha of land in Gazankulu could be put under irrigation if the necessary dams were built. This would allow 8,500 farmers to be settled on irrigated land, earning an annual income of R2,500. Furthermore, '[an] equivalent of 27,500 permanent jobs will be created'. This was estimated to cost R263 million, and the annual gross production value resulting from this would be R101 million.[76] In 1985 it was estimated that 12.5 per cent of the land making up Gazankulu was potentially arable, and of that 12.5 per cent, 25 per cent was considered to be potentially irrigable. That is 3.125 per cent of land in Gazankulu, or 20,286 ha.[77]

The performance of homeland era irrigation schemes fell far short of expectations: they were economically inefficient, by the 1990s they were heavily indebted, and it is not clear that farmers taking part in them actually made a profit.[78] Perret suggests that part of the reason for this was that irrigation schemes in the past had been focused mainly on ensuring food security and a subsistence base, they 'spoon fed' farmers who rarely produced for the

[73] Lahiff, *An Apartheid Oasis?,* p. 7 citing H. Bernstein, 'South Africa's Agrarian Question: Extreme and Exceptional?', *Journal of Peasant Studies,* 23 (2/3) 1996, p. 38.
[74] DBSA *Lebowa Development Information*, 1985, section 7, Agriculture and Mining, p. 11.
[75] Ibid.
[76] 'Agriculture: 28,600 ha Can be Put Under Irrigation in Gazankulu' *Gazankulu, 1970 – 1980.*
[77] DBSA *Gazankulu Development Information*, Section 2 Natural Features, p.4.
[78] S. Perret, 'Water Policies and Smallholding Irrigation Schemes in South Africa: a history and new institutional challenges' Working paper 2002-19, Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, University of Pretoria, p. 7.

market, and paid for very costly infrastructure maintenance and upgrades.[79] There were 'weak market opportunities and poor agribusiness environment'.[80] Cooper suggests that Bantustan schemes were unprofitable because they made use of inappropriate technologies – pesticides, chemical fertilisers, hybrid seeds and mechanized farming methods – rather than animal draught, manure and mixed cropping.[81] Elite capture meant that 'disputes arise between the membership and the elites who run the schemes', which 'paralyse' the project.[82]

Aliber et al in their major study on 'Strategies to support South African smallholders' barely consider the history of irrigation schemes in South Africa. They point out that 'a range of measures' supported white agriculture while 'most' of the measures introduced 'in respect of' black agriculture, 'served to undermine rural production and land-based livelihoods'.[83] Furthermore, the Department of Native Agriculture had a tiny budget and 'focused on soil conservation and the regulation of livestock numbers.'[84] Homeland agriculture, they say, 'revolved around centrally managed showcase capital-intensive projects' and 'became hugely expensive and inefficient', but Aliber et al do not look at why this was so.[85]

Lahiff attempts to fill a gap in the research on homeland agriculture but has very little on the history of irrigation schemes, except that they were encouraged after the Tomlinson Commission but were soon eclipsed by large-scale schemes, which later shifted to farmer-settlement schemes.[86] The problems with small-scale agriculture mentioned in his literature review include a shortage of labour leading to underutilization of resources and purchased inputs, as well as poor access to markets.[87] His own study of the Tshiombo Irrigation Scheme in Venda was based on fieldwork conducted during only one year – 1995. As he points out: a

[79] Perret, 'Water Policies' p. 7.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Cooper, 'Agriculture in the bantustans' pp. 246, 253.
[82] Cooper, 'Agriculture', p. 251. During feedback to an early version of a paper looking at the reasons for the failure of homeland irrigation schemes Aninka Claasens and Jeff Peires suggested elite capture and corruption were critical in understanding how schemes performed.
[83] M. Aliber, M. Baiphethi, R de Satge. J. Denison, T. Hart, P. Jacobs and W. van Averbeke, with R. Alcock, M. Antwi, A. Belete, B. Cousins, L. Field, I. Mariga, P. Masika, S. Materechera, D. Mayson, N. Monde and B. Tapela, *Strategies to support South African smallholders as a contribution to government's second economy strategy, Research Report 41, vol. 1*, Cape Town: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, School of Government, Faculty of Economic Management Sciences, University of Cape Town, 2009, p. 16.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid, p. 17.
[86] Lahiff, *An Apartheid Oasis?,* pp. 30 – 31.
[87] Ibid, p. 36.

longitudinal dimension 'might have revealed more about the changing fortunes of households over time.'[88] In the following section I provide a historical perspective of the performance of irrigation schemes during the Bantustan era looking at a range of factors impacting on farmers within these schemes, and make a case for the significance of water shortage and drought in particular.

Irrigation Schemes

In 1977 and 1991, H.W.L. Lilley from the Department of Plural Relations and Development looked into the reasons for the poor performance of the extension services and agriculture in Lebowa. The report provides the official explanations for why agriculture was performing poorly in the reserves. The transcripts of interviews and meetings appended to the report, provides insight into some of the deeper problems experienced in reserve agriculture, including problems in irrigation schemes and Co-operatives.

The view of extension officers tended to be that people did not have money for inputs, did not pay back credit offered to them by the extension service or anyone else, were lazy and did not understand the concept of co-operative farming. [89] Extending credit for smallholders, farmers associations' and other 'Interest Groups' such as tomato farmers, was clearly a problem: farmers had to go through development organisations and government departments to access credit, as the banks would not lend directly to them. There was some uncertainty over who farmers should approach for funding, what could be given as a grant and what should be considered a loan. A Senior Extension Officer from the Sekororo Tribal Area for example pointed out that the farmers' association on the Lorraine Irrigation Scheme approached the DoA for funding for a tractor, but the Department said the responsibility for this lay with the Tribal Authority. The Tribal Authority would not provide them with the loan or a tractor. The Senior Extension Officer explained:

> There is some good reason for this, because a Bantu just does not repay a credit loan. They will take your offer of seed and fertilizer, but they will 'eat' the seed and tell you their crop failed and that they therefore cannot pay back the debt.[90]

[88] Ibid, p. 257.
[89] Lilley *Attitudes,* Appendix E: Notes on the Meeting Held with Extension Staff of Chieftainess Sekororo's Tribal Area in the Naphuno District of Lebowa, 26 July 1976' p. 61.
[90] Ibid, p. 58.

In this example the SEO seems to be suggesting that crop failure was used as an *excuse* for failing to repay a loan. The image of a lazy farmer unwilling to take initiative was used again by the Agricultural Foreman at the same meeting:

> In November 1972 we held a meeting with the farmers and asked them why they would not farm the way we prescribed on the irrigation schemes. They said "We have no money". We said "Right, then we will help you". So we took all the available tractors in the District and ploughed their lands for them. We also fertilised their lands. We even took planters and sowed their lands with improve [sic] seed. All they were asked to do was skoffel (weed) and irrigate their lands when it became necessary. They did not do it and the crop failed. They either could not, or would not, repay their debt (credit). The extension workers were blamed for the venture.[91]

Not only were farmers portrayed as lazy, they were blamed for being ignorant too: 'The trouble with irrigation is that the people do not understand this business of repaying after the harvest… this thing of "selling together" and "paying after the crop" they do not understand.' The Tribal Authority, whose job it seems was to relay information about co-operatives to the farmers, was blamed for failing to do this properly. [92]A lack of interest in farming was also given as a key reason for why irrigation was performing so poorly.

A propaganda book in praise of the homeland project echoes official explanations described above. Ten factors affecting agriculture were provided, including some of the usual explanations: apathy, disinterest and an aversion to change, motivated individuals prefer jobs in urban areas, insecure land tenure caused by traditions, lack of co-operation between individuals, lack of credit and marketing facilities for individuals, disinterest in using cattle as a source of revenue or security for credit, 'poor management and control systems after initiation of intensive development projects', and lack of communication.[93] These explanations tend to place the blame on homeland residents themselves – they lack motivation, entrepreneurship, and management skills, and their poverty makes them difficult to integrate into a market economy. As Lilley, citing Professor P.J Burger, put it, the 'enemies of the rural community' include:

[91] Ibid, p. 60.
[92] Ibid, p. 61.
[93] Rhoodie et al, *Role of the Corporations,* pp. 84 – 85.

> low food production, wrong attitudes, lack of knowledge (ignorance), lack of skill, lack of motivation (incentive to change), undeveloped leadership potential, and a host of other physical, psychological, cultural, organisational and management problems.[94]

Tellingly, Prof. Burger and Lilley suggest that the extension service 'must be thought of as a force in constant battle' against these enemies.[95]

However, two other reasons provided in *Homelands* place the blame on the planners themselves: 'Training facilities for males although the females are traditionally responsible for agricultural production', and '[t]he fact that most development projects are designed by engineers, economists and agricultural scientists who often ignore the socio-political aspects.'[96] Similarly, although it never deals with it explicitly, the Lilley report also contains evidence that the relationship between women, who were for the most part the actual workers on the schemes, and the extension officers, was also a cause for plots not being properly worked. In hundreds of pages where farmers are spoken about in the masculine, there is finally direct reference to women working on the scheme, an important but very brief point. When a speaker was asked 'what about the teachings of the Extension Worker, are they acceptable to you?' the response was 'The teachings are good but the problem is that the farmers on the scheme are mostly women. When they are pregnant they do not work well.'[97] The speaker was then asked, in light of the fact that most farming was done by women, how he felt about female extension officers. Everyone present murmered in agreement. 'They seek the advice of women nurses do they not?'[98]

Despite the recognition of the importance of women in agriculture, this was often expressed as a symptom of the problem of 'lack of interest' in agriculture in the area. According to an extension officer, the courses offered to farmers at a Farmers' Training Centre in Lebowa, 'does not seem to work': 'If a man is nominated he often sends his wife or children. The usual class consists of a lot of old ladies.'[99]

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[94] Lilley *Agricultural Extension Efficiency in Lebowa: A Preliminary Investigation of the Extension Situation at Ward Level*, Department of Plural Relations and Development, 1978, p. 24.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Rhoodie et al, *Role of the Corporations*, p. 84 – 85.
[97] Lilley, *Attitudes*, Appendix J: Notes on the Meeting Held with the Tribal Authority of Chief Malekane's Area in the Sekhukhune District of Lebowa, 10 February 1977, p. 118.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Lilley, *Agricultural Extension Efficiency*, p. 107.

Evidence given to the Lilley Commission highlights some the reasons for the 'lack of interest' in working on irrigation plots. Going to work was apparently perceived as being more beneficial to plot holders than actually staying on their plot:

> The people of this area find it easier to go and work than to farm. They get a salary immediately and in many cases – as when they go and work for white farmers – they get food for their families as well. As a matter of fact they often get so much food that they can sell some of it to other people.[100]

The Tribal Authorities had no problem with this and did not try to prevent plot-holders from leaving:

> The White farmers go to the T.A. and ask for labour. They pay the T.A. R1,00 for a labourer. The T.A. wants the money, the farmer wants the labour and the African wants a short-term salary. They therefore leave their plots and go and work. Most of them work. [101]

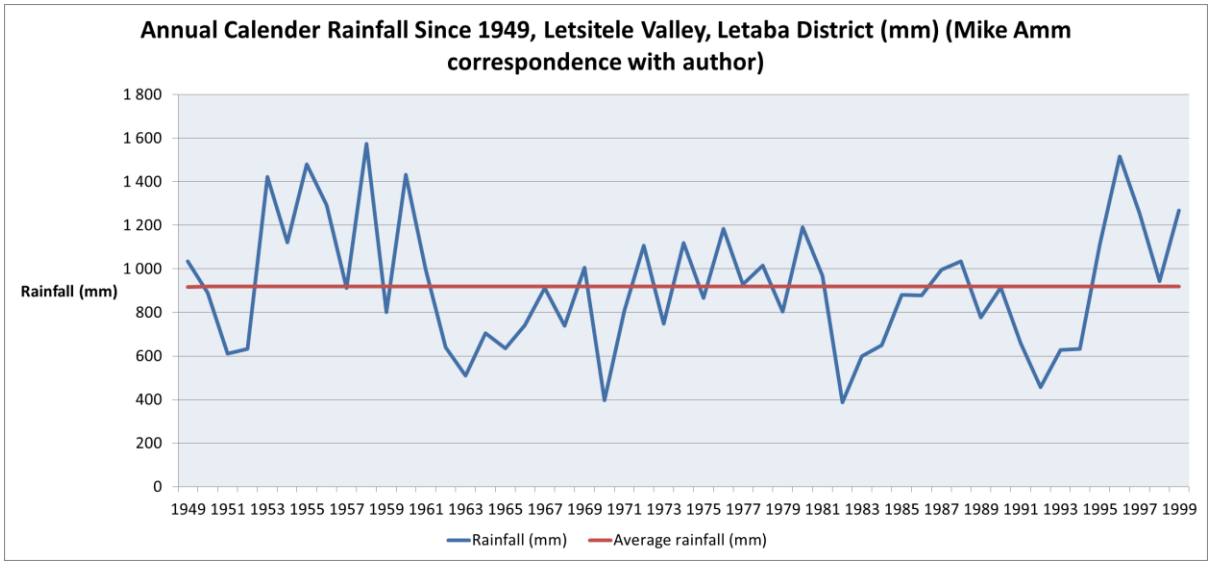
Distrust between the Extension Service, DoA and the farmers also ran high, and may have contributed to unwillingness to farm on the schemes. When people from the schemes tried to go and work they were often accosted by extension workers who tried to physically prevent them from leaving. After the 1972 debacle of farmers not paying back the DoA for the services provided to them, the Department decided to 'teach them a lesson' and confiscated the land of 50 plotholders using Proclamation No. 5 of 1963. The farmers were outraged and approached Chieftainess Sekororo, who 'told her tribesmen to "take up your sticks against those who do this sort of thing"' and took the DoA to court.[102] The plotholders had their land returned to them, but the incident caused ill-feeling. Even before the incident occurred with the DoA ploughing the lands of the plotholders, the farmers 'were completely negative. One even said "Why do these white people not leave us alone to carry on in our own way."'[103]

Alluded to in the Lilley report but never fully examined, was the reality of water shortage and other environmental constraints. I argue that this should be seen as one of the key constraints to agriculture through the century. From around 1960 to 1995, in the Letsitele Valley and surrounds (which included the Naphuno ward of Lebowa and Ritavi ward of

[100] Lilley, *Attitudes,* Appendix E, p. 59.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid, Appendix F, p. 68.
[103] Ibid, Appendix E, p. 61.

Gazankulu), there were more years of below average rainfall than average or above average rainfall.

Fig. 9. Annual Calendar Rainfall 1949 - 1999, Letsitele Valley, Letaba District



According to Chieftainess Sekororo in 1977, the reason some people on the irrigation scheme had little interest in farming was the water on the irrigation scheme 'often fails. When it fails we are forced to go and work.'[104] At another meeting a speaker from the audience said that 'Die dam by Sekororo is baie klein en ons kan nie genoeg water kry nie. Die skema moet natgelei word. Die beeste vrek dus kan ons nie spanosse kry nie.'[105] (The dam by Sekororo is very small and we can't get enough water. The scheme needs to be watered. The cattle die, so we cannot get span-oxen.)

The annual reports of the Gazankulu DoA illustrate the effects that drought, combined with other factors, had on various irrigation schemes in the area. In 1984-85 the Julesburg Coffee Project, where coffee, bixa and later on mango and macadamia nut trees were grown, was affected by water shortage which resulted in poor yields.[106] Many bixa trees were killed by the drought and so were cleared in 1985-86 to make way for macadamia trees. That same year many macadamia trees died due to drought, and disease. Mango

[104] Ibid, Appendix F: Notes on the Meeting Held with the Tribal Authority of Chieftainess Sekororo's Area, p. 68.
[105] Ibid, Annexure I: Vergardering Gehou te Sekororo op 4 Oktober 1972' p. 73.
[106] Gazankulu Department of Agriculture and Forestry Progress Report, 1984/85, pp. 25 - 25

trees were doing well, but 'there was no yield due to the strong winds which we had during the flowering season'.[107] In 1990-91 the coffee project was reduced in size from 73 ha to 40.1 ha due to poor soil and erratic water supply, and in that year labour unrest also caused 'the crop to dry up on the trees'.[108] In 1992-93 the scheme was further reduced in size, to 37.12 ha, and 'a yield of nil tons was realised, due mainly to lack of water.'[109]

The Thabina Irrigation scheme was also affected by water shortage in 1984-85.[110] The next year '[t]he scheme usually experienced shortage of water, even after the end of the drought.'[111] In 86-87, the scheme 'was again hit by a severe drought. Farming activities were practised minimally' (though not stopped entirely, and 198 farmers continued to cultivate around 156 to 178 ha of the 256 ha scheme).[112] From 1990 to 1992, the demonstration plot on the scheme was not used due to shortage of water, and the number of farmers on the scheme dropped to 131 out of the expected 200.[113] The micro-irrigation system at the Berlyn Project saved it from the drought in 85-86, but a massive hail storm damaged the mango trees.[114] The next year, there was no mango harvest.[115] In 1990-91 the farm was leased to Bosveld citrus due to financial constraints.[116]

These schemes just mentioned were located in the Ritavi district of Gazankulu – the fertile, arable foothills of the Drakensberg. A number of other large irrigation schemes were developed or replanned during the 1980s, including Cork Sabie River Irrigation Scheme, New Forest Irrigation Scheme, Dumphries Irrigation Scheme, Makuleke Irrigation Project, and Middle Letaba Irrigation Project. Makuleke was the only one that appeared to function during the severe drought of 1991-1993.[117] On the rest of the schemes, the water supply was low and erratic. New Forest experienced financial problems which slowed its replanning in the eighties. [118] In 1992-93 only 82 ha of this 664 ha scheme were ploughed, but these

[107] Ibid, 1985/86, pp. 17 – 18.
[108] Ibid, 1990/91, pp. 18 – 19.
[109] Ibid, 1992/93 p. 11.
[110] Ibid, 1984/85, p. 25.
[111] Ibid, 1985/86, p. 19.
[112] Ibid, 1986/87, p. 19.
[113] Ibid, 1990/91, p. 13.
[114] Ibid, 1984/85, p. 23.
[115] Ibid, 1985/86, p. 17.
[116] Ibid, 1990/91, p. 18.
[117] Ibid, 1992/93, p. 11.
[118] Ibid, 1991/92, p. 14.

crops were destroyed.[119] After years of developing the Dumphries scheme, in 1992-93, 'The drought situation has revealed that any further expansion will only be possible if a dam can be constructed.'[120] At Middle Letaba, the drought of 1991-1993 'caused some 700 to 1,000 labourers to be laid off, meaning a salary loss of R500,000 plus per month… It is also estimated that farmers can have a revenue loss of R2.5 million for the period.'[121]

In the 80s and 90s the country experienced some of its worst long term droughts of the century. In 1983 the Chief Minister of Gazankulu noted that 'the prevailing drought is the most horrifying experienced in Gazankulu. Forty-five thousand head of cattle have died. If we give a monetary value to the dead cattle our people have lost R18,000,000.'[122] In December 1993 it was reported that:

> The extended drought, recorded as the worst in living memory, decimated the vulnerable crops of subsistence farmers and literally left thousands mainly women and children, destitute and starving… Even the large estate-type operations were hard pressed to survive the trying conditions with dried up water sources and failed crops being the common factor in their management reports. [123]

Veld fires compounded the problems of drought, destroying grazing land, orchards and plantations.[124] By November:

> People queue with their animals in the dried up river beds to get some water to just wet their throats. Many have to travel kilometres and then join a long and never ending line for their precious water. People are not caring about personal hygiene, but using their few litres of water for drinking and cooking purposes.[125]

By 1995 the Tzaneen dam was dry, and no irrigation along the Letaba river valley was possible. 'Projects in Mhala district of Gazankulu are experiencing high shortage and water restrictions. Letaba River is dry and hundreds ha [sic] of orchards are already dead of busy drying out. Giyani has no irrigation water available and existing crops are dying.'[126]

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[119] Ibid, 1992/93, p. 11.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid, p. 13.
[122] Extracts from Chief Minister's Budget Speech, 1983/03/24. *Gazankulu Leads the Way*
[123] 'Gazankulu Development Corporation Review 1992/1993' *Deeds Magazine,* December 1993.
[124] 'Agricultural crisis under spotlight' *Gazanbowa Times*, Friday September 16, 1994.
[125] Author Unknown, 'When will it rain?' *Gazanbowa Times,* 25 November 1994.
[126] Author unknown, 'Conditions are bad', *Northern Herald,* 6 January 1995.

The reality of water use in communal areas was that there was enormous pressure on what little water there was, and the reservation of water for irrigation purposes was difficult. A farmer, 'Samuel'[127] who began farming mangoes, cash crops and keeping various livestock at the Mamathola Tribal Authority at Metz in the early 1990s remembers that during the drought of 1993 he was often called in by the chief who warned him against allowing his cattle to drink water that was meant for people. He lost 21 head of cattle when they ate plastic littered around the communal areas. Similarly, Samuel had to abide by water usage rules for his crop farming, which meant his crops were getting water about once or twice a week – which was not enough.[128] People used irrigation water for other purposes: cattle drink it and people use it for washing and, in more desperate circumstances, for cooking and drinking.

It is not only in drought years that the effects of water scarcity are felt. While drought is obviously the major cause of water scarcity, water scarcity has been a constraint to agriculture even in periods of normal rainfall. Although some parts of the homelands were arable and well-watered, other parts were very dry. Drought also has a long term impact. For example, 'N. Vink and E. Kassier… estimate that dry weather reduced the value of field crops by as much as forty-five percent from 1982 to 1988. While drought may last only for a season or two, its financial aftermath lasts considerably longer'.[129] The long term impact of drought is especially evident in livestock grazing areas, where it does not make sense for some farmers to sell their cattle at a point when prices will be low, and so the veldt is degraded more and takes longer to recover than it might do otherwise. Similarly, infrastructure was damaged that would take years to repair: The number of dams in Gazankulu dropped dramatically, from 192 to 90, after 1973 because during the drought they cracked and broke.[130] By 1975 there were still only 95 dams, the rest of the dams were damaged, 44 still to be repaired, and 40 were irreparable.[131] The table below also shows how the amount of land under irrigation decreased after 1972 before increasing again slowly.

[127] Not his real name. He wanted confidentiality due to the sensitivity of topics discussed in his interview.
[128] MH confidential interview, 27 April 2012.
[129] M. de Klerk, 'The Financial Crisis in South African Agriculture and Post-Apartheid Agrarian Reform' *Canadian Journal of African Studies,* 27 (3), 1993, p. 369.
[130] GA Box 158 6/3, Director of Agriculture to Secretary, Bantoe-administrasie en ontwikkeling, re Inligting Benodig Deur Sy Edele Die Minister, 4 Desember 1975.
[131] Ibid, 4 Januarie, 1974;Ibid, 4 Desember 1975

Fig. 10. Land under irrigation and dams in Gazankulu 1969 - 1975[132]

Year	Land under irrigation (ha)	Dams	Farmers Co-operatives
1969	1534	187 (178)	0
1970	1669	189	0
1971	1717	192	1
1972	1141	191	3
1973 (drought year)	1141	192	3
1974	1173	90	2 (3rd not yet registered)
1975	1313	95 (the rest of the dams were damaged, 44 still to be repaired. 40 irreparable)	2 (3rd not yet registered)

There was already a serious backlog for building dams and other infrastructure, caused by limited capacity in the DoA. In 1978:

> According to the organisation and establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Forestry provision has been made for 278 permanent posts, of which only 137 has been filled appropriately at this stage. These circumstances has [sic] a very retarding effect on the progress of various activities of this Department. At present there is a serious shortage of especially professional officers and qualified artisans.[133]

Thus, lack of capacity in the DOA exacerbated the problems caused by drought. Poorly maintained irrigation canals and systems end up wasting water, or make the scheme unworkable.

[132]GA Box 158 6/3, Director of Agriculture to Secretary, Bantoe-administrasie en ontwikkeling, re Inligting Benodig Deur Sy Edele Die Minister, 6 Januarie, 1970; Ibid, 23 Desember 1970; Ibid, 2 Desember 1971; Ibid, 22 Desember 1972; Ibid, 4 Januarie, 1974; Ibid,4 Desember 1975.
[133] GA, Box 158 6/3, Department of Agriculture and Forestry Contribution Towards Official Opening Speech of Deputy Minister Hartzenberg at the Gazankulu Legislative Assembly 1978.

In 1992-93 about R20,370,000 was made available for drought relief. This included drilling 316 boreholes (of which 163 were successful)[134], creating 2,573 job opportunities, paying out R878,116 to farmers who had suffered crop losses, and R1,545,000 to subsidise farmers agricultural inputs.[135] In 1995 the DoA initiated disaster/drought relief schemes available to small farmers in the Northern Province (present day Limpopo Province), to the amount of R67 million, although there were numerous conditions for being eligible.

Interest in Agriculture

Looking at the constraints to farming, it is little surprise that in this context farming was not an occupation that many people aspired to. A detailed report on the Mahlobyanini Agricultural Scheme in Mhala District of Gazankulu (near Bushbuckridge), mentions that:

> The extremely precarious character of agriculture in the area makes it very difficult for individuals to sustain a reverence for farming as a way of life. That this process is already under-way can be seen in the diminishing numbers of active members. Although the list of members given to the researchers by the secretary contained 61 names, only about 30 members were working their fields after the good rains in December brought on the planting season.[136]

In 1978 a special Agricultural School, Kheto-Nxumayo Agricultural High School, was opened, and the aim of the school was, as its name suggests, to develop skills in agriculture and create good farmers and agricultural scientists. [137] The school became extremely popular and was viewed as one of the most prestigious schools in Gazankulu. This was not, however, an indication of a growing interest in agriculture. An admiring Deeds magazine article declared, '[h]ere, sons and daughters of the political hierarchy share with children of labouring stock hostels dormitories, library books and dreams of becoming doctors and lawyers.'[138]

The school principal Ishmael Siska pointed out ten years after its establishment,

[134] For the time being. Boreholes once drilled do not always remain functional.
[135] Gazankulu Department of Agriculture and Forestry Progress Report, 1992/93, p. 1.
[136] M. Bosman, P. Delius, S. Schirmer, J. Sender, 'Operation Hunger Socio-Economic Survey, Mahlobyanini Farmers' Scheme', undated but 1980s, p. 28.
[137] 'Address by the Chief Minister, Prof H.W.E Ntsanwisi at the Inauguration of the Kheto-Nxumayo Agricultural High School in July 1978 at Giyani, *Gazankulu 1970-1980.*
[138] 'Agricultural school celebrates 10 years', *Deeds Magazine*, December 1988.

> A very few actually go into agriculture. The problem is that the pupils have a poor perception of agriculture and also that they come here because the school has a record of producing doctors, engineers, teachers, nurses and other professionals.'[139]

Although the school was clearly conceptualised as an Agricultural School, even in his address at the inauguration of the school the Chief Minister referred far more to the importance of science, that 'science in modern living has sine qua non become number one.'[140] He secondly emphasised the fact that the school would equip students for a university education, 'in all scientific directions, and not necessarily agriculture'.[141] He stressed that Gazankulu could not fall behind other nations in developing its capacity to teach science, and have citizens educated in scientific disciplines. 'For a country and its people the value thereof cannot be calculated in terms of money.'[142] He did of course move on to the importance of agriculture, particularly in terms of its importance in the nation's food supply. But he reflected on the reasons young people and their parents neglected agriculture, or did not aspire to becoming farmers:

> Unfortunately it is generally believed in some quarters that progress and development can only be brought about by moving away from the agricultural sector of our economy. In the circumstances people begin to believe that good employment and higher salaries can be obtained in the cities and it is only the backward people who adhere to the agricultural sector.[143]

In essence, he emphasised that agriculture would be stimulated by the scientifically based mixed farming taking place on the school's 1,000ha farm, and not by turning its students into farmers. Rather, the vision was that the students would become 'chemists, physicists, physicians, mathematicians, pharmacists, agricultural and other engineers, specialists in all fields' who were equipped with 'the knowledge and understanding of the land on which they live.'[144] And who could further advance agricultural science and technology.

Kheto-Nxumayo Agricultural High School was for the best and the brightest, but in general this period was characterised by the enormous growth in secondary school education, and a

[139] Ibid.
[140] Address by the Chief Minister, Kheto-Nxumayo Agricultural High School in July 1978 at Giyani, *Gazankulu 1970-1980*.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.

shift in the aspirations of youth. The number of secondary schools in Lebowa for example quadrupled between 1977 and 1982.[145] In previous decades '[m]igrants, particularly those working in 'the firms (factories), became increasingly convinced of the importance of schooling in obtaining better pay and conditions, and their commitment to securing an education for their children increased.'[146] In a survey of secondary school pupils in Lebowa, '[a]lthough the majority… felt that agriculture was important for development in Lebowa, only 2.5 % said that they would like to make agriculture their career.'[147]

Lilley and a few high school teachers interpreted this statistic as showing that students had a lack of knowledge of what modern agriculture entailed. But it is quite possible the students and their parents had a good idea of what agriculture entailed, and certainly what niche of 'modern agriculture', particularly small scale agriculture, they could expect to enter.

People with agricultural training themselves did not necessarily want to continue in agriculture. For example, bursary students funded by the DoA to attend college occasionally applied 'to be transferred to the Department of Education after they completed their education because teachers earn higher salaries than our agricultural officers.'[148]

That said, many people did farm and viewed landownership and farming as part of a 'diversified strategy of survival'. [149] Many of those without land, wanted access to land, and many of those who did have land still valued it as a form of economic security even if they did not use it. In the context of increasing unemployment in the '80s, as well as drought that killed large numbers of cattle and thus destroyed wealth, members of the Mahlobyanini Farmers' Scheme repeated the phrase, 'On the land, I can get everything for myself... Even if you lose your job… you will still have land to give you something.'[150] Just looking at this one scheme, a report by Operation Hunger (OH), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), showed that a heterogeneous group of people was engaged in farming, and they did so for different reasons. Retirees hoped to supplement their pension, either by producing food to

[145] Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* p. 156.
[146] Ibid, p. 155.
[147] Lilley, Agricultural Extension Efficiency, p. 58.
[148] Gazankulu Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Discussions and Questions by Legislative Members of Giyani District during the 1991 Session, p. 15.
[149] Bosman et al, 'Mahlobyanini Farmers' Scheme', p. 20.
[150] Bosman et al, 'Mahlobyanini Farmers' Scheme', p. 20.

sell at a profit, or for own consumption.[151] Tractor owners – the wealthiest members of the scheme – supplemented a larger income and some made a profit from farming, although sometimes with the aid of poorly paid workers or 'servants'.[152] Both retirees and tractor owners tended to spend much or some of their time on the scheme. Migrant workers, making up most of the scheme's membership, did not work on the scheme but their wives and sometimes one or two hired workers did.[153] This was a way for some migrants to bring in an extra income or supply of food for the family, and it gave some women a certain degree of economic independence. Widows too found that the scheme gave them independence and some economic security. Within all of these groups there were variations in the wealth of individuals, and the degree of dependence they had on the scheme.

Another group of workers on the scheme were employees rather than plotholders. This group was made up almost entirely of female immigrants from Mozambique, who had some form of physical ailment or lacked education that would allow them to get better paying work. They were paid very low wages – between R70 and R100 a month, and were referred to not as labourers or employees, but as servants.[154] Casual workers were hired by the day when needed, and there was also a form of labour tenancy being practiced on a portion of the land.

Although many of the people interviewed stated that farming gave them a sense of security, the scheme did not yield a harvest during the two year drought from 1991 - 1992, and all the workers were recipients of the relief feeding programme run by OH.[155] There was evidence 'that some of the farming practices are environmentally unsound and unsustainable.'[156] The wealthier members who were not as reliant on the scheme for their livelihoods were more likely to farm environmentally sustainably, which required investment. The scheme was certainly not self-sufficient, particularly for the poorer members. To be able to sell maize and vegetables at a low enough price to undercut stores, farmers needed help with inputs. OH helped with inputs like tractor ploughing, fertiliser and

[151] Ibid, pp. 29 – 30.
[152] Ibid, p. 34.
[153] Ibid, p. 38.
[154] Ibid, p. 57 – 58.
[155] Ibid, p. 65.
[156] Ibid, pp. 2 – 3.

fencing, and so 'the food produced at this scheme costs the members very little.'[157] The poorer members of the scheme asked Operation Hunger for any form of assistance – food or money because they were poor. Some members wanted OH to provide them with tractors and even the wealthier members wanted OH to assist in building a dam, which would cost millions of rands.[158]

Thus, this small farming scheme was heavily reliant on outside aid – essentially, it relied on subsidies. In this case the scheme was funded by an outside NGO, but there were some government run programmes that echoed this model. One in particular was the Care Group, a popular programme which a number of women from Dan Village, in the Nkuna Tribal Authority (Mohlaba's location) area became involved in. The Care Group started in 1984, and was aimed specifically at women. The focus was on providing guidance around healthcare and agriculture, 'teaching people to take care of their life'.[159] Women were assisted in setting up home gardens, and taught about growing vegetables, including which manure to choose, and which seeds to use. The emphasis was on keeping the family healthy: from cleaning the house and garden, to the nutritional value of vegetables, to the importance of drying towels. Extension workers taught them the value of using improved maize seeds. In the past, the growing period of maize was uncertain and variable – maize required a lot of rain – and if conditions were not right the maize might grow taller and taller without producing any grain. The new seed was called 'three months': it grew in three months, it was more reliable in producing grain, and it required less rain. Thus it could be grown with more certainty.

The group also became 'responsible' for the wider community. They acquired a plot of land through the chief, near to a river, and were given an irrigation pump. Extension officers ploughed their fields using a tractor, and supplied the group with subsidised manure and seed. The produce – cabbage, piri piri and tomatoes – was marketed. The Care Group's heyday is remembered fondly, and the women today lament the loss of government

[157] Ibid, p. 30.
[158] Ibid, p. 48 – 49.
[159] MH and RM interview with Somisa Rikotso, Dan Village, 7 October 2012. The section following is taken from the interview.

assistance they once enjoyed, and the economic benefits to them of irrigated, subsidised farming.[160]

This paints a different portrait of the extension service than is familiar to scholars. It is well known that only a small number of extension officers served a very large population, and they were generally very unpopular. But their relationship with Bantustan residents could also be quite differentiated. Agricultural Officers specialised in particular aspects of agriculture and resource management. Those who specialised in crop production were more accepted by locals than those involved in environmental resource management, that is, controlling grazing land, preventing people from chopping green wood, and limiting stock numbers – a job akin to law enforcement.[161] Extension officers in the area tended to come from outside of the community and were treated as such, while rangers – those involved in enforcing regulations – were normally elderly men known and feared by the community, who justified their actions by telling people that they were not against the community but simply following the orders of other people.[162] According to Jeremiah Mogwashe, by marrying into the community, some extension officers found that they became more accepted, and were listened to more.[163] Female extension officers, such as Jane Baloyi, helped people to establish small community vegetable gardens, backyard gardens, and also taught home economics.[164] They were specially recruited by the DoA to train at Fort Cox and other institutes. Baloyi for example was chosen partly because she had an interest in agriculture, but also because she was the only one in her area who passed matric.[165]

Thinking about Privatisation

By 1991 the DoA had been under strain for many years. The budget was never enough to keep up with the demands of the various farming schemes, communities and private farmers. During the 1991 session of the Gazankulu Legislative Assembly, requests were made for the DoA to provide earth dams, water troughs, irrigation canals, fencing, fencing

[160] Ibid.
[161] MH Interview with Jeremiah Mogwashe, Sekororo Agriculture Department Office, 9 October 2012.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] MH and RM interview with Jane Baloyi, Berlin Farm, 9 February 2012.
[165] Ibid.

repair, tractors, fruit trees, dipping tanks, auction pens, bush clearing, transport, an agricultural college, a training centre, and vegetable markets. The response to nearly all the requests was that funds were not available (and, with regard to fencing repair in particular, not the responsibility of the DoA).

The farming schemes were not being run at a profit. Asked, '[w]hy do private farmers manage to farm profitably while the Department fails to do so?' a member of the Legislative Assembly responded,

> The basic aim of the Department is not so much to make profit but rather to provide employment opportunities and the generation of income. Due to increasing shortage of funds and an increase in labour wages, the Department is unable to meet the financial requirements in managing the projects. I also wish to indicate… that private organizations pay their workers much less than the government.[166]

Aside from paying higher wages to workers on the schemes, the DoA provided various subsidies, and supported agriculture through significant expenditure. In particular, the Department provided ploughing units, bulk infrastructure such as underground pipes, pump stations, dams, dipping tanks and dip, fences and so forth were paid for by the government, and fertilizers, seeds etc. were also subsidised. The cost of hiring plots of land was kept low by South African standards. Farmers paid rent of R200 per annum for irrigated land, R100 of which was actual rental, and R100 of which was for water and electricity. But according to the speaker, 'this amount is heavily subsidized because the actual cost is more than R300 per ha per annum.'[167] Engineering works were undertaken that often had poor results. For example, the department was requested to help private farmers in one area with irrigation:

> …At one stage my Engineering division sent a bulldozer to dig out sand in the river in attempt to assist the private farmers, but this did not help much because during floods the holes are again filled with sand. My Department will investigate the situation but I cannot make any promises at this stage that the problem will be solved.[168]

[166] Gazankulu Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Discussions and Questions by Legislative Members of Ritavi District During the 1991 Session, p. 5.
[167] Ibid, Giyani District, p. 9.
[168] Ibid, Ritavi District, p. 12

In another area, a diptank was built at a particular spot but some community members decided to settle around the camp making the diptank inconveniently situated.[169] Fences erected by the DoA were frequently damaged, and the Department devolved responsibility for maintaining fences to the Tribal Authorities, farmers themselves and the Department of Works when the fence was next to a main road.

Compounding the problem of slow infrastructure development was tension between the DoA and the Tribal Authorities, both responsible for different aspects of infrastructure development and maintenance. Discussions between the Lebowa and Gazankulu governments regarding a major dam building project at Radoo caused delay in implementing the scheme (the Development Bank of Southern Africa was willing to release funds as soon as agreement had been reached between the two territories), and the irrigation scheme at Thabina was also without water for a period while the Lebowa and Gazankulu governments negotiated.[170]

By 1991 the Department was looking towards privatising farms in order to encourage more profitable agriculture, in the context of high demand for agricultural infrastructure and limited funds. At a request for tractors in the Shiviti area 'because cattle lose value when we use them for ploughing and people are arrested when the cattle have wounds', the official responded:

> It is impossible for my department to provide tractors to the community because of the financial constraints… but it does not mean that my department is not aware of the situation, hence the farmer support programme has been introduced to mobilise farmers to support themselves.[171]

In Ritavi district, the DBSA was conducting a viability study at the Allandale Citrus Project, the Majeje Citrus Project was being privatised 'to deserving individual farmers', and there were moves to privatise the Julesburg Scheme. The DoA entered into an arrangement with the DBSA whereby they would assist with tractors only for farmers in institutions such as co-

[169] Ibid, Giyani District, p. 14.
[170] Ibid, Ritavi District, p. 14.
[171] Ibid, Giyani District, p. 9.

operatives, through which the funds would be channelled under the farmer support programme.[172]

Conclusion

Bantu Authorities and the creation of bantustans profoundly changed the way people gained access to land and introduced new conditions under which they could do so. It also resulted in a proliferation of illegitimate chiefs, many of whom were given territories, and the subjection of many other chiefs and independent headmen. It led to increased ethnic tension, tension between 'tribes', tension between chiefs and headmen, and between subjects and chiefs. This period also saw enormous mobility and resettlement as individuals navigated their way around the realities of influx control, the imposition of tribal authorities, and creation of ethnic homelands. The conditions under which individuals could gain access to land were increasingly constrained.

In this context it became harder for ordinary households to access adequate land for farming. However, the homeland governments introduced a variety of agricultural schemes and projects to improve homeland agriculture. Irrigation schemes were one of them. These performed poorly for a range of reasons. 'Official' explanations tended to blame producers themselves for their lack of business sense, laziness and lack of interest. However, it seems that waged work, including employment on white farms, was more rewarding than working on the irrigation schemes. The reality of water shortage and drought was a major constraint on their performance, and the heavy handed responses of extension workers towards what they saw as laziness contributed to the negative perceptions plot-holders had of these schemes.

Women were the main workers on irrigation schemes, but their needs seem to have been ignored. Nevertheless, the work of extension officers, the subsidies on seed and fertiliser by the DoA and outside development agencies, was important for small scale female farmers outside of these schemes. Farming provided them with livelihoods, but also gave them a sense of independence. This kind of farming was heavily subsidised, either by the state or NGOs, but enormously valuable to those who benefited.

[172] Ibid, Ritavi District, p. 9.

However, the cost of agriculture to the state and the poor returns generated eventually led to discussions around privatisation. Furthermore, while a few people continued to engage in agriculture, in general there was a lack of interest in farming in this period. A striking example of this is the trajectory of the Kheto-Nxumayo Agricultural High School, which prepared the best and the brightest for well paid jobs in the professions.

Chapter Six

Land Restitution, 1994 - 2015

In this chapter and the one to follow I look at the performance of land reform, and how it has affected the lives of rural black South Africans living in Mopani district. I show that land reform has failed in its original main objectives, which were to bring redress by returning land to those who were dispossessed, and to reduce poverty by making land available for smallholder production (although this objective has changed over time and now includes a variety of land-based economic activities, such as eco-tourism, and development initiatives such as building clinics). Land reform in Mopani district has been dominated by restitution: most of the district is under claim, and many farms are under multiple conflicting claims.[1] Land claims in the district tend to be large community and tribal claims (although there are some smaller family claims). These claims are predominantly for lost 'informal' land rights, that is, lost labour tenancy rights or, more commonly, customary rights. In this context, land redistribution through other land reform programmes has taken a back seat to restitution, with implications for how aspirant farmers can gain access to land.

The most obvious point regarding the failure of restitution to bring redress is that many claims still remain to be settled seventeen years after the date for lodgment passed. (Despite this, land restitution has been re-opened, delaying even longer the settlement of these original claims.) In the Mopani district only 41 claims out of approximately 113 'gazetted' claims had been settled or partly settled by 2014.[2] It is unclear how many claims still remain to be gazetted. But the issues run far deeper. In 2000 James made the point that land restitution 'despite its communal rhetoric, is likely to exclude more people than it incorporates', because having a claim to land depended on being descended from a

[1] Conversations with officials from Land Claims Commission; MH interview with Theo de Jager, (then president of AgriLetaba and Chairman transformation committee, Agri SA) 24 April 2012.
[2] Data received from Limpopo office of the CRLR, February 2014. They warn that the data may be inaccurate. Thus, these figures can only be used as an illustration of a trend rather than the real situation on the ground. 'Gazetted' refers to claims deemed ready for investigation after a preliminary screening and published in the Government Gazette.

previous landowner or someone who lived on the farm in question.[3] This is despite the fact that landowners had many experiences in common with non-landowners. The rhetoric around descent and ancestry in claiming a right to land became interwoven with ideas of ethnic separateness.[4] More recently, it has become increasingly apparent that the claims that have been prioritised hark back to apartheid's system of indirect rule through tribal chiefs. This was something restitution was explicitly not intended for.[5] Land restitution was imagined in a limited sense to bring redress for black spot removals and other unambiguous forced removals of communities from land they formally owned. With regard to extending the date for which land claims were legitimate (pre -1913 claims) the 1997 White Paper on land policy acknowledged that 'ancestral land claims could create a number of problems and legal-political complexities that would be impossible to unravel' because 'most deep historical claims' are tribal claims. To entertain such claims 'would serve to awaken and/or prolong destructive ethnic and racial politics', because the population had increased dramatically in the last century and, where land had 'been occupied in succession' by different groups, there was potential for overlapping claims.[6]

The government's redistribution programme was intended to target those who did not qualify for restitution. Nevertheless, as some have noted with regard to other parts of the country, land restitution has increasingly become about giving land to chiefs, effectively extending a system of traditional authority and communal tenure.[7] This is so in Mopani district, where at least 19 of the 41 claims settled have been explicitly tribal claims (possibly more, because the words 'tribal' and 'community' are frequently interchanged in

[3] D. James, ''After years in the Wilderness: The Discourse of Land Claims in the New South Africa' *Journal of Peasant Studies,* 27 (3), 2000, p. 154.
[4] Ibid.
[5] D. James, *Gaining Ground*: *'Rights' and 'property' in South African Land Reform,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007, p. 204.
[6] Department of Land Affairs, *White Paper on South African Land Policy,* 1997, p. 55.
[7] M. Brown, J. Erasmus, R. Kingwill, C. Murray and M. Roodt, 'Land restitution in South Africa: An Independent Evaluation' Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management, 1997, p. 53; C. Walker, *Landmarked: Land Claims and Land restitution in South Africa,* Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2008, p. 215-216; C. Walker, 'Restitution in Default: Cato Manor, Durban', in C. Walker, A. Bohlin, R. Hall and T. Kepe, (eds.) *Land, Memory, Reconstruction, and Justice: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa,* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010, p. 269.

documentation).[8] The commission also consolidated many smaller claims into massive 'community' claims. Of the 41 claims settled by 2014, 39 were for communities with between 175 and 20,000 beneficiaries. Of these, only 14 were for communities with less than 1,000 beneficiaries.[9]

What is at the root of the privileging of 'community' claims? According to Walker, underpinning land restitution was a particular idea of how dispossession had occurred in the past, and a particular notion of 'community'.[10] Walker termed this the 'master narrative of loss and restoration': coherent egalitarian communities who had held land beneficially from 'time immemorial' were forcefully removed by the government. Furthermore:

> The land question is embedded in discourses around rights, social justice and identity that operate primarily within a group rather than an individual paradigm – individuals are members of primordial, racially defined groups, and it is this membership which provides that most useful explanation for individual experience and behavior.[11]

Imagining a past of happy primordial communities is not a uniquely South African approach to restitution. [12] The indigenous peoples' movement, which has gained momentum around the world, is based on a romantic notion of primordial communities surviving – only just – till today.[13] There are land claims processes for these indigenous groups underway in Canada, New Zealand, the US and Australia.

James and Fay noted that 'contemporary restitution typically imposes expectations that people should lay claim to land as communities rather than as individuals.'[14] Brown et al argued that 'this was partly because of a desire to encourage the re-establishment of communities, but also because it makes the Commission's work of facilitating negotiations

[8] Data received from the Limpopo office of the CRLR, February 2014. It is not entirely clear with the information given whether the claims are 'tribal' or otherwise constituted 'community'. I base my estimate on the names of the claimant 'communities': many of the names are of recognised 'tribes'.
[9] Ibid.
[10] C. Walker, *Landmarked.*
[11] Ibid, p. 39.
[12] D. Fay and D. James, 'Giving Back Land or Righting Wrongs? Comparative Issues in the Study of Land restitution' in C. Walker, A. Bohlin, R. Hall and T. Kepe, (eds.) *Land, Memory, Reconstruction, and Justice: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa,* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010, p. 49.
[13] A. Kuper, 'The Return of the Native' *Current Anthropology,* 44 (3) 2003.
[14] Fay and James, 'Giving Back Land', p. 49.

easier.'[15] As early as 1996, Levin expressed concern that legislation was 'biased towards the submission of unitary claims from homogenous communities', and thus '"The chieftaincy will emerge as the key institution for filing successful claims" given that it provided bounded and substantial social units rather than the vaguely-defined, splintered and overlapping identities generated by family or clan-based claims.'[16]

But processes of dispossession, relations to the land, and belonging to communities, are far more complicated than the assumptions underlying land restitution allow.[17] Adding to this complexity is that memories of dispossession and community can be inconsistent and contradictory: people's own historical narratives do not necessarily align with others. Some historians recognized this, and its implications for land restitution, before land restitution began. In 1990, de Klerk, drawing on Davenport, noted that restitution would raise the 'complex questions of verifying and adjudicating between conflicting claims.'

> Although the greater part of the black population is now urbanized, the volume of claims can be expected to be substantial, for… 'popular memories about loss of land tend to bite deep…the losers remember even when the victors forget'. And… 'both sides invent.' There is therefore good 'reason for paying close attention to the historical evidence in the handling of today's problems.' [18]

There was a need 'not merely for a broad macro-understanding of how land changed hands, but for a detailed micro-understanding by district and almost by farm' and this:

> is only part of the task of gathering information on who is laying claim to what area, on what basis and with what purpose in mind. Without this information, no procedure for adjudicating between claims can operate effectively and equitably.[19]

In 1997 Delius, Kingswill and Chaskalson wrote about the multiple layers of land rights in rural areas and gave some background to land tenure, noting that, historically, homesteads

[15] Brown et al, 'Land restitution', p. 22.
[16] James, p.205, citing R. Levin, 'Politics and land reform in the Northern Province: a case study of the Mojapelo land claim' in M. Lipton, F. Ellis, M. Lipton and M. de Klerk (eds.) *Land, Labour and Livelihoods in Rural South Africa, Volume 2: Kwa Zulu Natal and Northern Province,* Durban: Indicator Press, pp.357-392; R. Levin 'Land restitution, the Chieftaincy and Territoriality' paper presented at African Studies Centre, Univeristy of Illinois, (March 1996) p. 6.
[17] Brown et al, 'Land restitution', p. 55.
[18] M. de Klerk, 'Restructuring the rural economy: A strategy for land access – editorial review' in *Development Southern Africa: Special Issue: Restructuring the rural economy: A strategy for land access,* 7, 1990,, p. 415.
[19] Ibid.

held the strongest rights to land that had been allocated to them, but that this had become threatened due to changes in the institution of chieftainship. [20] Thus, there was potential for overlapping claims, and claims for different orders of land rights.

Since land restitution began, James and Walker have stressed the complexity of claims to land, the potential for difficult-to-resolve overlapping claims, and the differentiated and heterogeneous nature of communities.[21] Recently, Ross, noting the unavoidably historical dimension of land restitution, that claims have to be based on actual historical events and that land restitution is expected to redress past inequities, states, 'The problem with such laudable proposals is that history has sometimes developed in too complicated a way for the simple assumptions of the Land Claims Commission to be fulfilled.'[22] After providing an account of the complicated history of land settlement in the Kat River Valley he asks, 'To whom... should land be returned? In principle there can be at least five *de jure* or *de facto* claimants for every hectare of ground…'[23]

In this context of overlapping claims, one of the ways that officials and some claimants themselves have come to see the validity of a claim is to determine who was there first – this is tied into the privileging of indigeneity. And 'indigeneity' is narrowly defined – Venda and Sotho people can claim to be indigenous to north east Limpopo, but Shangaan-Tsonga people are called 'foreigners'.

In this chapter I try to explain the issues identified above: why land restitution has been so difficult and time consuming to implement, why working out the validity of claims has so often been bypassed or done poorly, how land restitution has become dominated by tribal and large community claims, and how the idea of indigeneity has played out in Mopani district. In much of the literature on land restitution, the willing buyer willing seller model, in which land is purchased from landowners by the state at market-related prices, is blamed for the slow speed of restitution. This is an inadequate explanation, as I discuss below. I argue that a key reason why land restitution has taken the shape it has, is that policymakers

[20] P. Delius, R. Kingwill and M. Chaskalson, 'A Historical Investigation of Underlying Rights to Land Registered as State Owned', document compiled for Tenure Reform Core Group, 11 December 1997.
[21] Walker, *Landmarked*; James, *Gaining Ground.*
[22] R. Ross, 'Land Compensation in the upper Kat River Valley' in P. Hebinck and B. Cousins (eds.) *In the Shadow of Policy: Everyday Practices in South African Land and Agrarian Reform,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013, p. 149.
[23] Ibid, p. 156.

failed to appreciate the histories of the people and places they were trying to transform. With regard to land restitution in particular, policymakers failed to comprehend the great complexity and depth of tensions around land and authority.

The government has also failed to appreciate another element of history: historical methodology and rigour. In the second section I show how the Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) and some of the consultants they hired were unable to conduct adequate research on the historical validity of land claims. Many claims were also settled through administrative settlements, where their validity was not necessarily investigated. As a result, many claims were settled before their validity was determined. Some claims have been settled even before all overlapping and conflicting claims were discovered and gazetted. But just as important as appreciating the value of rigorous historical research is an appreciation of its limits: can evidence and the discipline of history help to resolve all claims?

Willing Buyer Willing Seller

'Being a conventional farmer in South Africa one of the toughest jobs around', a recent report on South African Agriculture claimed. [24] The agricultural policies followed since the early 1990s made agriculture an even more challenging sector to work in than it had been previously. Meanwhile, the murder rate on farms grew to about eight times the already high national average.[25] According to Theo de Jager, who was president of AgriLimpopo when I spoke to him, and Chairman of AgriSA's transformation committee, there were a few 'gory' farm murders in the Mopani district in 2005/2006, and crime has been a huge problem, 'Farmers who originally said "I will never sell my land in land claims" eventually decided to sell because they couldn't survive the crime.'[26]

While a few farmers have received settlements that were excessive, some have not received the full market value. According to de Jager, with regard to Mopani district:

[24] Amy Goldblatt, 'Agriculture: Facts and Trends in South Africa', World Wildlife Forum, pp. 5, 23. http://awsassets.wwf.org.za/downloads/facts_brochure_mockup_04_b.pdf,
[25] Ibid.
[26] MH interview with Theo de Jager, 24 April 2012.

> it started off with the Gunyula claim, in August 2007 the land claims commission stopped paying market related prices in land restitution. They had a market related valuation done, and then they offer only 60 per cent of that valuation. And if you decline, they threaten the farmers, 'you will not live in peace, you are going to be an island. You will beg us to buy your farm later.'[27]

A farmer recounted a meeting he had been to with the Land Claims Commissioner, where valuations were being discussed with a group of landowners. One man was offered R30,000 for his plot of land. This was a fraction of the R250,000 the landowner thought the value of his property was, ('you can't buy a stand in Jo'burg for that money', he said). The commissioner refused, saying 'it doesn't work like that'. According to one farmer, 'the guy was crying there. He wanted to retire there. That's why he bought it'.[28] Over 300 farmers complained to AgriSA about the low prices offered for their farms. AgriSA took it up with the Human Rights Commission in 2008 but had no response, and in 2012 they took the Human Rights Commission to the Public Protector.

While this is only anecdotal evidence, it suggests that the argument that the willing seller model has led to higher land values and above-market price settlements needs to be properly investigated before it is used as a reason for why land restitution is taking so long at such great expense. The argument that the willing seller model prolongs the settlement of claims is also problematic. While some farmers may take the Commission to court over the validity of claims, many others are anxious to complete negotiations quickly, and then wait years for the finalisation of their claims.[29] This has economic implications which I look at in chapter 7. Rather than causing delays, many farmers are as caught up in them as anyone else. At root of the delays are some intractable problems regarding conflicting claims to land which have deep historical roots, and the difficulty of researching claims.

The Historical Context

In contrast to the idea of primordial egalitarian communities living on a particular piece of land for 'time immemorial', I have shown in previous chapters a different history of Mopani district. Rather than living in static communities for generations to the point of

[27] Ibid.
[28] MH interview with farmer, 1 May 2012.
[29] Based on conversations and interviews with farmers and officials from the Land Claims Commission.

dispossession, many people have in fact been very mobile, for a number of reasons.[30] Some of the reasons for mobility have been clear cut cases of forced eviction or removal. Most are more complicated, and involve individuals exercising their agency to seek better places to live (although under increasingly constrained circumstances).

In the twentieth century, as the government introduced measures to control the rural African population, the conditions under which 'ordinary' Africans could access land were gradually constrained. This was a slow process with different stages, and the culmination was the establishment of homelands. Accessing land in homelands came with the requirement that individuals belong to an ethnic group and a 'tribe', subject to a chief. Over the course of a century, with new rules governing access to land and new ways of making a living opening up (even if limited compared to opportunities for whites), rural society became increasingly differentiated. Gender, age and social cleavages and conflicts deepened and were exacerbated by differential access to land and resources.

For chiefs, and in fact for any leader wanting political power and access to state resources, power and authority has increasingly (and only seriously since around the 1950s) depended on having jurisdiction over land – having territory. Access to land could depend – in theory at least – on having a 'historical' and 'customary' claim to land, based on notions of 'ancient tribal land' and belonging beloved of colonial and especially apartheid ideologues.[31] But these histories of ancient tribal claims to authority and land have been manipulated, sometimes even invented by government officials and chiefs for a century. Despite the rhetoric around 'custom', many chiefs were given jurisdiction over land arbitrarily, based principally on their loyalty to the apartheid government.

However, the idea of 'tribe' and ethnic identity was and is not simply a tool employed by rulers to exercise control over people. Ethnic and 'tribal' identities have also been created from below. There is a rich literature looking at these processes.[32] Many people identified

[30] James, 'After years in the Wilderness', pp. 154 – 155.
[31] J. Comaroff, 'Chiefship in a South African Homeland: A Case study of the Tshidi Chiefdom of Bophuthatswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 1 (1), 1974.
[32] Delius, P. 'The Ndzundza Ndebele: indenture and the making of ethnic identity' in Bonner, P., Hofmeyer, I., James, D., *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa,* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989; L. Vail (ed) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa,* London*:* James Currey, 1989; S. P. Lekgoathi, '"Colonial" Experts, Local Interlocutors, Informants and the Making of an Archive on the "Transvaal Ndebele" 1930 – 1989' *The Journal of African History,* 50 (1) 2009; S.P Lekgoathi, 'You are

with particular tribes or ethnicities because it suited them and helped to advance their own interests. Many people also supported the institution of chieftainship, even if it became increasingly repressive over the course of the century.

Despite tightening constraints on how people could access land and who their chief (or political leader) would be, people have nevertheless at different points in time followed the leadership of someone whom they trust, have a history with, or has made a direct appeal to them. Leaders have emerged who do not fit the rigid tribal hierarchies created by government ethnographers, or the mould of the western-style democratic African nationalist. The strength of the 'traditionalist' discourse even in a context of democratic change should not be underestimated.[33] James notes how even the more democratic civics (who opposed apartheid and illegitimate tribal authorities) have tended to use 'the rhetoric and style of chieftainship', and 'those mounting challenges to chiefs often did so in terms which continued to endorse, rather than contest, that institution.'[34] Looking at a hundred years of popular politics in Sekhukhuneland, Delius suggested that 'popular political culture' could 'provide a troublesome legacy for those nurturing a new political order.' 'Local level democracy – like "the community" – is not a chrysalis ready to fly from its cocoon with the first light of a new dawn.'[35]

This history has had significant implications for land restitution. Very few people in Mopani district held and lost formal rights. But the informal rights they held and lost do not necessarily fit easily into the two types defined in the Land Restitution Act, that is, 'labour tenant' or 'customary rights' (for tribal claims). For example, a person could be a labour tenant viewing a white farmer/landowner as 'chief', going through a farm induna to resolve minor disputes and air grievances, but also identify as Mapulana and take an interest in the goings on of various chiefs, and the politics of the creation of tribal authorities. Changing location from farm to farm, a person would be under the authority of different leaders, landowners, indunas, chiefs. They could change their political affiliation, and identify with a group based on a sense of common history, common grievance, and/or hopes for the

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Listening to Radio Lebowa of the South African Broadcasting Corporation': Vernacular Radio, Bantustan Identity and Listenership, 1960 – 1994' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 35 (3) 2009.

[33] James, *Gaining Ground*, pp. 202 – 205.

[34] Ibid, p. 203.

[35] Delius, *Lion Amongst the Cattle,* p. 226.

future. Their ancestors may have lived in the area long before white people arrived and began putting up fences around properties. Their attitudes towards chiefs versus democratic local governance may be very complicated. There are many possibilities for how such an individual might present their history and their claim to land. What determined the route that they took? Why have so many people accessed land restitution through large communal claims based on imagined accounts of history, rather than through individual claims that more closely reflect the loss of independent access to land that most rural families and individuals experienced?

Community claims: shifts post 1994

The first point to make is that land claims in Mopani district in 1994 looked very different to what they later became. The examples of two 'communities', which in 1994 made the local news for invading land, is illustrative of the shifts that have occurred in how people have presented claims to land.

In 1994, near Trichardtsdal, the community from Balloon Mantjana village marched onto neighbouring farms, led by the Balloon Civic Association, the Balloon branches of the ANC and AZAPO (Azanian People's Organisation), as well as the chief's council of elders.[36] The reason for the land invasion was that farmers had erected fences which cut off villagers' access to water and firewood.[37] The Balloon Mantjana community had also made representations to the Commission on Land Allocation (COLA), an early version of land restitution initiated by the NP government, and were frustrated by the year-long wait for resolution. They decided to 'take action into their own hands'.

One of the farms they invaded belonged to Rex Manetja, who was perhaps one of the first beneficiaries of the government's early attempts at land reform, purchasing the farm Toul in 1993 under a credit scheme. Co-incidentally, Manetja also had an historical link to the farm. His grandfather arrived on Toul with Chieftainess Mantjana when she left Sekororo after a succession dispute in the early 1920s.[38] Toul was the first farm on which they lived

[36] 'Villagers treaten [sic] to take action into their own hands' *Northern Herald,* 23 September, 1994.
[37] Ibid.
[38] MH interview with Rex Manetja 1 May 2012, see also N. J. Van Warmelo, 'The Banarene of Sekôrôrô', *Ethnological Publication No.13,* Pretoria: Department of Native Affairs, 1944, p. 32; SANA, NTS 7140 583/323 Natives on Balloon 1929 – 1932.

independently from Sekororo, before moving to Balloon.[39] This historical link was, for now, irrelevant with regard to his access to land.

After land restitution began, a number of claims were lodged over a number of farms in the area, including Toul. Rather than dealing with them separately as small community (and probably also some family claims) they were grouped together under one large conglomerate claim: under the Sekororo Traditional Authority. Thus in 2005, the Commission was able to report on the settlement of the Sekororo Community Land Claim, saying that 'The Sekororo community was gradually dispossessed of its rights to land between 1937 and 1958 on the farms Balloon 71KT…' (among others).[40] The 2005 event was attended by chiefs and senior government officials, as well as busloads of community members.[41] Toul was transferred later. Thus, in an ironic twist, both the Balloon Mantjana village community, and Rex Manetja, whose forebears had moved away from Sekororo and rejected his claim to chieftainship in the 1920s, became part of the Sekororo community claim.

A similar trend can be seen in the trajectory of the other newsworthy land invasion of 1994. Ronnie Mokgoloboto, leader of the Mokgoloboto Civic Association, led an occupation of land between Dan Village and Tzaneen. According to the Association, this was in order to reoccupy land from which the Mokgoloboto community had been removed during apartheid.[42] According to a spokesman for Mohlaba, the people occupying the land were 'Zimbabweans, Zaireans, who came to South African [sic] for business', who chose to live there because, 'they were in a democratic South Africa and everyone had the right to choose where they wanted to live' and who paid the 'civic members' an unspecified amount for a stand.[43]

In 1994 or 1995 a land claim was lodged on behalf of the Mokgolobotho community, based on the premise that 'community members' had actually lived on the claimed farms. Then, on 29 December 1998, a second claim was lodged on behalf of the Mokgolobtho Tribal Authority, under Kgoshigadi Mafase Emelina Mokgolobotho. This claim was based on the

[39] Ibid.
[40] Annual Report of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, 2005 – 2006, p. 32.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Moses Malatji, 'Government to probe Muhlaba land dispute' in *Northern Herald*, December 9, 1994.
[43] Ibid.

'jurisdiction' of the chief, according to an ancient tribal boundary, and the idea that 'historically, the land used to belong to chiefs'.[44] When the Regional Land Claims Commission (RLCC) began settling claims, they decided to merge the two claims, on the grounds that it was 'the same community'. The claim by the Traditional Authority was chosen to represent the community. Unfortunately it is not clear who made this decision, whether it was the claimants themselves, or whether significant input came from the RLCC or lawyers.

The history of the area does not reflect the claim that the land belonged to Mokgolobotho, or any one chief. In the nineteenth century the area was ethnically mixed, with people living in dispersed kraals or villages. Mohlaba's location was demarcated in the early twentieth century. Besides the location, there were a number of villages and small homesteads situated on white-owned farms in the area. Over time, black families were evicted from these farms. When the apartheid government created bantustans, many Sotho families were chased from Mohlaba's location and told to go to Lebowa. Apart from these events, people in the area were mobile, and had family histories that did not just tie them to one 'chief'. In all the ethnographies and histories of the area I have read, there is no reference to Mokgolobotho – which is not to say there was no chief Mokgolobotho with his followers, but it is unlikely that this was a major 'tribe' to which all people in the area belonged.

Nevertheless, the history of dispossession, given to Nkuzi Development Association in 2002 when they were conducting research into the historical validity of over 2000 claims, included reference to the 'tribe' and was as follows: Regarding the farm Sivurahli:

> The have [sic] been dispossessed of this farm on 25 March 1919 by the Central Government of the Union of South Africa when it was decided to transfer this farm to Andries Ferdinand Meyer… The Mokgolobotho tribe was then told to vacate the farm. They received no compensation for it. The tribesmen who were occupying the farm had to join their fellow tribesmen who were already in occupation of the north-western portion of Mohlaba's location at that time…[45]

For Mohlaba's location, the form said:

[44] Confidential interview 5 October 2012.
[45] Document in my possession.

> The tribe is only claiming the south western portion that have [sic] always been occupied by them and is still being occupied by them. They, together with the Letsoalo tribe, were forcibly removed from this land in 1962 by the Department of Bantu Affairs of the Republic of South Africa in terms of "Apartheid" laws.[46]

The historical narrative underlying the claim has become more grandiose over time. The version of history I was given in 2012, in an interview with key figures involved in the claim committee, stretched back two hundred to four hundred years. This was, according to him, a time when the Mokgolobotho chief was the paramount chief of the entire eastern Transvaal. Mohlaba was portrayed as a 'foreigner' from Mozambique to whom Mokgolobotho gave permission to settle on the land (which still belonged to Mokgolobotho). Mohlaba, I was told, later collaborated with the Boers, and was thus given Mokgolobotho's land.[47]

As of 2013, the Mokgoloboto Communal Property Association (CPA) was entirely dysfunctional and meetings sometimes degenerated into physical violence. 'He was very intelligent' one individual said of one of the key CPA committee members, 'he was standing on behalf of the community to the government, which is why he got access to the money.' The community members, who were 'very old and lack education…go to him with their identity documents and every detail of themselves and leave them with him though he uses the information to claim the money.'[48] Another recalled being told by someone to 'stop following the Tsonga people, don't you see they are sheep?' and said she felt the way the claim was proceeding was an insult to the Tsonga people as 'they [the Sotho Mokgolobotho's] are using us to claim the money.'[49] Ronnie Mokgolobotho, who led the civics in 1995, is now laying claim to the Mokgolobotho chieftaincy. According to rumour, he began using magic to defeat his rivals; magical powers being a sign that he is the rightful chief. When the claim was initially lodged in 1995 there was an idea that the community could exist without a chief. Now, the dominant idea is that community members living within a chief's territory, are subjects of that chief.

[46] Ibid.
[47] MH confidential interview, October 2012.
[48] MH confidential interview with community member, September 2011.
[49] RM confidential interview with community member, May 2012.

Explaining Community Claims

When land restitution was announced in the 1990s, illiteracy in rural areas was very high, especially amongst the older population, and many households were poverty stricken and isolated. This may explain the 'widespread ignorance and confusion' around land restitution that Edward Lahiff, a land activist who played a significant role in disseminating information about land reform, found in rural communities in northern Limpopo.[50] Lahiff also puts this down to 'the failure to adequately publicise the process within the province and the failure of the RLCC and PDLA (Provincial Department of Land Affairs) to involve other public bodies in the process'.[51] Those who knew about land claims may not have had money for the transport required to submit a claim and follow it up. Land claim forms were only available in Polokwane and Pretoria. When the Regional Land Claims Commissions were set up, only one office, based in Nelspruit, served both Mpumalanga and Limpopo/Northern Province.

Thus, by 31 December 1998, the cut-off date for lodging a land claim, many people may not have had independent access to information regarding land restitution, because of the context of poverty in which they lived. How did they find out about land restitution? The first point of course is that many did not. Many others only found out years after claims were lodged, and added their names to lists of community beneficiaries during 'claimant verification' procedures.[52]

James made the point that many people who could claim informal rights tended to be poor and often illiterate rural dwellers. For them, brokers or 'big men' have been very important in how they access the land restitution programme which they themselves know very little about.[53] These could be chiefs, or others canny, altruistic, or ambitious enough to form and lead a claimant community.

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[50] E. Lahiff, 'The impact of land reform policy in the Northern Province' in B. Cousins (ed.) *At the Crossroads: Land and Agrarian Reform in South Africa into the 21st Century'* Belville: Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), School of Government at the University of the Western Cape and National Land Committee (NLC), 2000, p. 102.

[51] Ibid.

[52] 'Claimant verification' takes place in the process of settling a claim. In this stage, 'community members' are identified and added to a list. A number of claimants I have spoken to said they first heard about restitution after 2000, when they were asked to provide their ID books to committee members leading a claim. I have also heard this through personal communication with Mpumalanga land claims officials.

[53] D. James, *Gaining Ground,* pp. 200 – 224.

Land activists also disseminated information and assisted communities to claim. Nkuzi Development Association played a significant role in this regard. Even lawyers and landowners – important beneficiaries of land restitution - have encouraged particular groups to claim.[54] Thus, the assumptions of these facilitators, and their attitudes towards chiefs, were critically important in shaping the form that land claims would take. In what follows I look at the attitudes of some of these facilitators.

Chiefs

In a post-bantustan Mopani district, the issue of traditional leadership and the legitimacy of recognised chiefs is very contentious. Nevertheless, according to Brown et al 'One RLCC thought that people often used chiefs to claim their land, not because chiefs had their support, but because they were seen as the most representative individuals to lodge a claim. This made them very powerful.'[55] However, some groups and individuals have challenged existing traditional authorities, and criticised the government for keeping them in power – but these critiques have very often drawn on the rhetoric of chieftainship.[56] For example in a submission to the Premier of Limpopo by the 'Gaza Tihosi' of the 'Gaza Kingdom' Traditional Authorities are criticised for failing to deliver services, and that 'the rightful rulers have been reduced to nothing… Instead, we have imposters seating (sic) on the throne'.[57] Some land claims are rooted in a sense of grievance about past policies that gave some chiefs land and made others subordinate to chiefs they did not recognise. In some cases, land restitution can be seen as a continuation of a decades' long struggle by some individuals to gain both recognition and territory.

A particularly striking example of this is the Moletele Community claim.[58] This is a claim for between 48 and 55 farms[59] in the Mopani district, although it crosses over to other districts.

[54] This is common knowledge amongst landowners and officials involved in land claims in Limpopo.
[55] Brown et al, 'Land restitution', p. 53.
[56] See for example gazankulurepublic.blogspot.com/2012/02/history.html, accessed 17 March 2015; Hosi H. Sibisi's presentation on the Traditional Courts Bill in Cape Town, 19 September, 2012. pmg-assets.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/docs/120919hosi_0.ppt, accessed 18 March 2015.
[57] gazankulurepublic.blogspot.com/2012/02/history.html, accessed 17 March 2015.
[58] P. Delius, M. Hay, R. Douglas and N. Leontsinis, 'Report on the Historical Validity of Land Claims by the Moletele Community and Others Concerning Farms in the Maruleng Region' unpublished report, 2014; Also see E. Ritchken, "Leadership and conflict in Bushbuckridge: struggles to define moral economics within the context of rapidly transforming political economies." Unpublished PhD thesis, Wits University, 1995, pp. 193 – 219.

The farms gazetted were the large original farms which have since been subdivided extensively. So the claim ultimately involved around 1,300 properties, over an area of 120,000 ha or more, stretching over provincial boundaries, involving 700 landowners, 14 (recorded) conflicting claims as well as 56 right-holder defendants. [60] The claim is not simply for land, but for recognition of Chief Chiloane as the paramount chief of the entire area. 'Chief Moletele's headmen both Sothos and Tshangaans, and in particular headmen Setlhare, Mnisi, Jonglilanga and Nxumalo were… promoted by the apartheid regime to chieftainship,' the claim form stated, and:

> The whole area now inhabited by Setlhare Tribe, Nxumalo, Jongilanga, Mnisi Tribes belonged to the Chiloane and the other MaPulana Chiefs and their tribes regarded Chief Chiloane their paramount Chief and recognized and accepted him as such.[61]

Needless to say, the chiefs listed above do not ascribe to this view, and there have been numerous overlapping claims to some of the farms included in the claim. Some of these overlapping claims are family claims, and single-farm community claims.

The historical evidence shows that the population in the area was very mixed, and people followed a variety of chiefs or headmen. A quote from Ramsay, the Native Commissioner in Bushbuckridge, from 1938/1940, is illustrative:

> Tribalism has absolutely broken down and nothing has been substituted. Indunas appointed by General Erasmus, a Republican Landrost, now call themselves Chiefs. When one asks a Native who his Chief is, he gives the names, as often as not, of his local induna. Chiefs and indunas generally have no prestige or authority.[62]

Nevertheless, Ramsay wrote, 'They, and many of their people, however, are very anxious to have tribal areas.'[63] The grievance of the Moletele chiefs was that in a critical period, spanning decades, when the government was creating tribal authorities connected to

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[59] Some of the farms were named twice but given different farm numbers. It is also very difficult to get concrete information about numbers of farms claimed by any one community, because of issues of changing farm borders, numbers, the question of whether only sections are claimed or entire farms, and because claims get augmented or consolidated with other claims over time.
[60] MH confidential interview, November 2011.
[61] Land Claim form signed by Chief Lackson Abuthi Chiloane, 3 July 1995, from Delius et al, 'Moletele', p. 101.
[62] SANA NTS 10226 17/423, Reclamation of Locations Pilgrims Rest, Ramsay, Reclamation Survey on Native Settlements: Pilgrims Rest, Undated but probably between 1938 and 1940.
[63] SANA NTS 10226 17/423, Reclamation Survey on Native Settlements: Pilgrims Rest, Undated but probably between 1938 and 1940, in Delius, et al, 'Moletele', p. 95.

territorial areas of jurisdiction, the chiefs of the Moletele received neither recognition nor land. They were overlooked despite having followers scattered over a large part of the district, living predominantly as labour tenants under insecure tenure. Annias Chiloane, who became chief in 1959 or 1960, made a claim for land based on a particular historical narrative of ancient 'tribal' belonging as early as 1961. He gained followers by opposing betterment and 'taking the cudgel on behalf of the evicted… Bantu from European farms who find it just about impossible to find other accommodation'. [64] While consolidating his authority by becoming an important political leader of the area, he made claims to being a paramount chief by birth, even using 'a rubber stamp, "Paramount Chief of the Mapulana" on his letters…'[65] He approached the NAD a number of times for recognition but because there was 'no suitable land in the Released area available for the purpose' his request was declined.[66]

Annias Chiloane was not recognized, but Josiah Chiloane, head of the Sehlare section of the 'Mapulana tribe', was. Annias Chiloane had a problem with this, seeing himself as the senior to Josiah Chiloane. He wrote to the Native Commissioner, Bourquin, in 1969:

> As far as we know we are the second to Sekhukhune Lekoba the parent of Noletele [Moletele] the ruler of the present ground. In this we can be pleased to have a meeting where can discuss this confusion. There is a cry indeed. Two bulls cannot be in one kraal otherwise there is trouble.[67]

Annias wanted jurisdiction over the farms from 'Acornhoek to Salique'.[68] Thus, the Moletele claim, although deeply rooted in a grievance regarding the creation of tribal authorities and bantustans, is based on a particular notion of rigid tribal hierarchy, with roots in the nineteenth century or earlier. This was a method commonly used by the colonial and apartheid government to promote chiefs, although even 'rigid' definitions of chiefly lineage and custom could be manipulated. As for the Moletele, as I have shown, the nineteenth

[64] SANA NTS 327 44/55, Report of Special Departmental Committee Appointed to Investigate and Make Recommendations Re-Various Administrative Matters to Pilgrims Rest District (Bosbokrand), 25-27 April 1961 pp. 9-10.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] SANA BAO 5/200 F54/1080/19, Annias Chiloane to C.T. Bourquin, 20 February 1969, in Delius, et al, 'Moletele', p. 115.
[68] Delius et al, 'Moletele', p. 115.

century was in reality no golden age of paramountcy. An 1879 report on 'Native tribes living in and adjacent to the District of Lydenburg' focuses mostly on the Swazi, Pedi and Ndzundza Ndebele who were considered the most powerful groups, but mentions:

> there are other tribes of minor importance living principally North and North East of Lydenburg. They are the Knobnoses [Tsonga] Amapulana and Mambayas [Pai]. They are generally speaking the remnants of other tribes formerly destroyed and driven away from other locations by more powerful Cafir nations. They have no great chief only small or petty chieftains in most instances. Each kraal has got its headman so that some old cafir will call himself a Captain although he has but 4 or 5 families...[69]

Other evidence supports the view that there was no paramount chief of the Mapulana, and the other groups living in the area lived independently from the Moletele.[70] Nevertheless, the Moletele claim has received serious consideration by the Limpopo Land Claims Commission and in 2012 the government transferred 10,000 ha of prime citrus, arable and eco-tourism land to the Moletele Community, at a cost of R242,165,110.[71]

In this context, one official of the Limpopo Land Claims Commission, and a previous land activist, made the point relating the ideal of land restitution to the reality of what it means on the ground:

> land reform was meant in a very noble and restricted sense to address problems that people were faced with of displacement, the issue of correcting the results of… apartheid spatial planning… It's no longer serving that purpose. Because through restitution, once you give people land you create new entities, you create new chieftainships, you create people who now say "this is our land and nobody can tell us anything" …the actual problem we have here in Limpopo is not the land reform problem… The issue which we have unconsciously become involved in is the issue of chieftainship… Even when you are addressing claimants, it comes up every time and we do not always have good answers. We always tell people "you see, this is not about chieftainship, this is a land rights programme, it's rights based." But to chiefs it means nothing, because rights are tied to the land, rights are tied to custom.[72]

[69] SANA TA SN 1 T105/79, Report upon the Native tribes living in and adjacent to the District of Lydenburg, by the Landrost, 20 May 1879, in Delius et al, 'Moletele', p. 64.
[70] Delius et al, 'Moletele'.
[71] Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights Annual Report, 2012- 2013, p. 41.
[72] MH confidential interview, Polokwane, 25 November 2011.

Assisting in Land Claims: Nkuzi Development Association

On the ground, the situation may have been primed for large communal and tribal claims. The assumptions of activists, policymakers, and others helping with land claims complimented these realities on the ground.

Nkuzi Development Association played an important role in disseminating information about land claims in the Mopani District. In 1997, with the cut-off date for lodging a claim looming, a group of land activists working in the district began a campaign to encourage people to lodge claims. Marc Wegerif, one of the founders of Nkuzi, was working at the time with local black farmers and later the Akanani Rural Development Association in Shirley Village in the Venda homeland. Wegerif was 'very conscious of the past injustices of land dispossession' that resulted in the 'injustice of dramatically unequal land access and the constraints that imposes on development options for people.'[73] Nkuzi's mission was to 'assist marginalized communities… assert their land rights' and to redress a situation where 'over 80% of the land belonged to 5% of the population'. [74] 'To be mildly blunt' Nkuzi's website stated, 'it was in the hands of a settler colonial white minority that has benefited immensely from apartheid.'[75] Nkuzi was associated with Landless Rural Worker's Movement (MST) in Brazil, which has led land occupations of large landed estates in Brazil.[76] Wegerif and Lahiff saw smallholder farming as the most appropriate land use for addressing rural poverty. Given these broader aims for large scale redistribution, and frequent use of the rhetoric of 'community', it seems likely that Nkuzi's founders' primary concern was about transferring as much land as possible as quickly as possible to 'communities', rather than getting caught up in the detail of multiple confusing claims.

And as Wegerif and others found, in rural areas chiefs were the de facto leaders of communities. Although aware of 'the imposition of chieftaincy' on people, Nkuzi found that it was necessary to work through chiefs. According to Wegerif:

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[73] MH email correspondence with Marc Wegerif, 21 August, 2013.
[74] Nkuzi webpage http://nkuzi.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=42&Itemid=59, accessed 8 December 2012.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Webpage http://www.mstbrazil.org/whatismst, accessed 18 March 2015.

> …it would be hard to get people to attend a meeting if it was not endorsed by the chief. We knew we needed to work with them as far as possible and it was easier if they were on board with claims, so we always tried to respect them and collaborate with them, while being clear on the rights of people and insisting on wider community participation in any claims process.[77]

Compounding this problem was the fact that very few people, including rural dwellers, leaders of Civics and Transitional Local Councils, and even government officials themselves, knew much at all about the government's land reform policies and how they could benefit local people. Thus, Lahiff wrote in 1999, 'Up to now, the initiative for land reform (that is, land claims) in the area has come entirely from the tribal leaders and their supporters, and is widely seen as a means of re-establishing the historical power, and territory, of the chiefs.'[78]

Nevertheless, the team of activists, including Wegerif, Lahiff, Shirhami Shirinda, took the approach to work with 'all community leaders' who wanted to lodge a claim. While there was strong support for the institution of chieftaincy in the area, there was also significant tension between those supporting chiefs and those supporting the more democratic civics and transitional local councils. [79] Although working through chiefs a lot of the time, Nkuzi activists were also 'clear on the rights of people and insisting on wider community participation in any claims process.'[80] They insisted on the formation of elected claims committees which included women, and discouraged chiefs from being part of them. Furthermore, 'where a group, whether claiming to have a traditional leader or not, had a potentially valid claim and wanted to pursue it we would assist them even if the officially recognized chief in the area did not want it to proceed and would not co-operate.'[81] They found that 'in many claims the issue of claims to chieftainship overlapped with claims to land'. [82]

Nkuzi continued to work with the Land Claims Commission, 'this included gathering baseline information for the validation of the claims, verifying claimants for each claim, setting up legal entities, keeping in constant contact with the RLCC, and assisting claimants during

[77] MH email correspondence with Marc Wegerif, 21 August, 2013.
[78] Lahiff, 'The impact of land reform', p. 98. See also James, *Gaining Ground,* p. 205.
[79] Ibid, pp. 98, 101.
[80] MH email correspondence with Marc Wegerif, 21 August, 2013.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

negotiations for the settlement of claims'.[83] The approach they took was to attempt to settle very large claims, and consolidate smaller claims into large community claims. In their 2002 annual report for example, Nkuzi points out that one of the claims they had been working on – the Bakgaga ba Maupa claim – had been gazetted and its settlement 'will resolve a number of claims in the Letaba region, which have been found to be part of the Bakgaga community during the validation process.'[84] In 2006 Nkuzi became a member of a newly set up 'Restitution Forum' which also involved stakeholders such as the Farmers' Unions and the banks, and aimed 'to find a way of improving the settlement of land claims as well as resolving land disputes before they go to court.'[85] They thus played a role in the negotiations during which multiple overlapping claims were grouped together into massive community claims.

The problem of institutional challenges and targets

Accepting and gazetting claims

When I asked an official from the Land Claims Commission what they thought of the Moletele land claim, he said he wanted to throw it out, as 'harassment to the state'. But it was not thrown out, because, the official said, 'there was some evidence'. Technically, when a claim is received, it has to be verified before it is gazetted. Given the severe capacity constraints of the commission and the vast number of claims, the requirements for a claim to be considered potentially valid, and therefore be gazetted, were minimal. Mashile Mokono, the former Chief Land Claims Commissioner of Limpopo, explained:

> Our responsibility as the commissioner is to say, "is there evidence of removals in history?" Yes there is evidence… "is there a land claim lodged on this land?" yes… the law of the court says all we have to say is there an arguable case? Not that it is valid… And when you can prove that you put it in the gazette.[86]

As Walker argues with regard to KwaZulu Natal, the overly simplistic master narrative may have been important in shaping not only the presentation of claims, that is, the narratives

[83] Nkuzi Development Association Annual Report, 2003, p. 3.
[84] Ibid, 2002, p. 3.
[85] Ibid, 2006, p. 9.
[86] MH interview with Mashile Mokono, 23 August 2011

that were written on the claim forms, but the reception of land claims as well.[87] Officials working for the land claims commission already accepted certain narratives as true, even without research being done, they thus pushed the land restitution process beyond what it was meant for and capable of.[88] According to an official from the Limpopo Regional Land Claims Commission (LRLCC), a common narrative has emerged in Mopani district. Similar to the master narrative Walker discusses, but just as much rooted in local politics as in official and NGO discourse:

> They will say 'we were living here as a community, we used to enjoy our customary land rights. We have been a community before the promulgation of the 1913 land act… We've had peaceful and undisturbed possession of the land or control of the land for an indeterminable period of time, and that land was passed from generation to generation held in ancestral trust on behalf of the community. People will tell you that. And they will say that their claims were not borne out of the fact that they were labour tenants.[89]

Phile van Zyl, a board member of ZZ2 tomato farms in Mopani district (which are under numerous claims), pointed out that many chiefs had affidavits outlining their claim to land, but suggested that, 'if you look at the affidavits you can see it's an affidavit written by one person and duplicated by a few more.'[90] Many dubious claims have been gazetted because of the belief of RLCC officials in the verity of the narrative of loss that many of the claimant communities use in their application forms. The result is that thousands of claims were gazetted, many conflicting and overlapping.

Besides being burdened with a problematic understanding of land issues, commissioners were overburdened with work and lacked basic office infrastructure necessary to function effectively. As a result of gross underestimation of the magnitude of the job of providing restitution, the Commission was severely underprepared for the task it has been given. Walker, as the first Land Claims Commissioner for KwaZulu Natal, set out the huge institutional challenges faced by the RLCCs.[91] When land restitution first began, three main agencies, the Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights, the Department of Lands and

[87] Walker, *Landmarked,* p.47.
[88] Ibid pp. 48 – 50.
[89] MH confidential interview, Polokwane, November 2011.
[90] MH interview with Phile van Zyl, Mooketsi, 14 May 2011.
[91] C. Walker, 'Finite Land: Challenges Institutionalising Land restitution in South Africa, 1995-2000', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 38 (4), 2012.

the Land Claims Court were responsible for settling land claims. The CRLR was meant to be a temporary Commission which would operate for five years, during which time it was imagined restitution would be completed. Original support staff were primarily *ad hoc* staff on short term contracts.[92] Initially it was assumed that the Department of Land Affairs, with its more permanent staff, would do the research and settlement of claims, and so RLCC offices were given 'a total complement of just six relatively junior administrative posts. Initially no provision was made for research, legal support and community facilitation, nor for trained registry staff to handle the rapidly mounting piles of paper.'[93] There was already a backlog of 3,000 claims from the Commission on Land Allocation – an early programme of restitution started by the NP government. Thousands more claims were coming in. In 1997 the CRLR identified six challenges it was faced with:

> (1) database ('design, control, centralisation'); (2) network ('capacity, reliability'); (3) computer infrastructure ('allocation, quality'); (4) policy ('content, centralisation'); (5) help-desk ('regional dependence on experts in Pretoria') and (6) skill ('no computer/information technology expertise within offices')[94]

Not even mentioned in the document was that no proper archiving or record keeping systems were established either. Until the other problems were resolved, the document stated, 'the Commission will continue to waste time, energy and resources trying to make a defective system work.'[95]

The RLCC for Limpopo was only set up in 2001 and Mashile Mokono was appointed as the first Land Claims Commissioner of the new Limpopo office. He began with 12 staff, which grew to 200 by 2008. Mokono had to find offices, set them up and get the land claims process going. When Mokono started at the Commission, he found that 5,014 claims were lodged for Limpopo.[96] By 2001, 655 claims were gazetted in Limpopo, 691 claims validated, 1 dismissed and 330 claims settled, including the Mamathola land claim in Mopani district.[97] By 2003, 777 claims were settled.[98] By 2004/5 they had settled 3,000 claims.[99] By 2006, the

[92] Ibid, p.813.
[93] Ibid, p.819.
[94] Ibid, p.823.
[95] Ibid.
[96] MH interview with Mashile Mokono, 23 August 2011.
[97] Annual Report of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, 2000-2001, pp. 116 – 117.
[98] Ibid, 2002 – 2003, p. 42.
[99] MH interview with Mashile Mokono, 23 August 2011.

Commission claimed to have settled all but 788 rural land claims out of 5,814 claims lodged. However, there was 'general acknowledgement that the land claims that are left are more difficult and complex than the land claims that are already resolved.'[100] By 2014, they said they had settled 3,655 claims.[101]

Institutional challenges, poor filing systems and a drive to reach unrealistic deadlines and targets resulted in some outrageous errors. Farms were gazetted which were not even claimed, such as in the Magoebaskloof case:

> On that claim form they [the claimants] claimed 6 farms. But one of the farms had the same name as a farm in the Louis Trichardt area, so in brackets they said, 'Magoebaskloof'. And then the commission gazettes 665 farms: the whole of Magoebaskloof and way beyond Magoebaskloof. Now apart from the conflict it created because it overlapped with 18 other large claimant groups, it put the whole economy of Magoebaskloof in the freezer box.[102]

This has had dire consequences for the developmental and economic outcomes of land restitution, which I look at in the next chapter. This also impacted on the Land Claims Commission, as it made their job settling claims much harder, because the 'rural nature' of the land claims meant that they were very difficult to research. Furthermore, their annual report states:

> The complexity of this task has been rendered acute by the fact that we are dealing with communities who had no title deeds or any form of documentary evidence or proof of ownership, occupation or possession of the land that they were removed from. In some instances we had to deal with boundary disputes, as there are no historical diagrams depicting the land and its natural and traditional beacons.[103]

Mashile Mokono was more candid. Even if one found archival evidence – which they sometimes did – he asked:

> But still, these natives at that time, in 1924, nineteen-thirty-what? Who are they now? If you have a bunch of names do you say 'line up, I'm going to call names, everybody should tell me who these people are, who's related to them.' You don't have that. You have a letter from the native commissioner of Tzaneen, informing the other commissioner of Louis Trichardt, reporting

[100] Nkuzi Annual Report, 2006, p. 9.
[101] Annual Report of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, 2013-2014, p. 21.
[102] MH interview with Theo de Jager, 24 April 2012.
[103] Commission on Restitution of Land Rights Annual Report, 2006, p.31.

> on the planned removals of people to the location of so and so after they've agreed with chief so and so… Compensation that was given to them was because they had mud houses… That's basically what you're running with, and sheesh…[104]

Researching Claims: ignoring history

The Commission itself has not had the capacity to conduct historical research reports for all claims, but they have been under enormous pressure to speed up the delivery of restitution. Three of the methods used for doing so have been to consolidate claims where 'people of the same communities lodged separate land claims on similar farms'.[105] Another was to resort to administrative settlement of claims, something I will look at later. Finally, although historical validity reports for some claims were researched by officials themselves, many others were outsourced to consultants.[106]

Consultants come in many forms, with diverse backgrounds. Nkuzi Development Association undertook research for the Commission. Other consultants included trained historians, social anthropologists, volkekunde-trained ethnologists, new BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) consultancies, all with widely differing levels of professionalism and capacity to research claims. To generalise, volkekunde trained ethnologists have done a lot of work for white landowners, and BEE consultants for the Commission, although there is some overlap. The approaches that these different consultants, as well as officials in the Commission, take are characterised by particular flaws. [107] Most display ignorance of the historical context of the areas, people and processes they are investigating, beyond the simplistic 'master narrative', or alternatively the volkekunde approach. Much of the discussion below is based on research conducted by Peter Delius and myself on various land claims, and our reading of the previous research reports on these claims.

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[104] MH interview with Mashile Mokono, Polokwane, 23 August 2011.
[105] Commission on Restitution of Land Right Annual Report, 2006, p.31.
[106] Nkuzi Development Association 2001; Annual Report of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, 2005 – 2006, p. 36.
[107] Research reports by ethnologists were analysed and discussed in a number of reports: A selection include: P. Delius, S. Delius and L. Phillips, 'Report on the farm Magdalena and the occupation of land by the baMaseke ba Phalaborwa' unpublished report, 2011; P. Delius, M. Hay, R. Douglas and N. Leontsinis, 'Report on the Historical Validity of Land Claims by the Moletele Community and Others Concerning Farms in the Maruleng Region' unpublished report, 2014; P. Delius and Michelle Hay, 'Report on Claims Lodged by Various Communities in the Sabi Sands Area' unpublished report, 2013.

While the research conducted by ethnologists is fairly rigorous in terms of sources used, it tends to be guided by problematic conceptions of community and tribe. Some of the consultants contracted to do research on land claims are the same ethnographers who worked for the apartheid government in the past and/or who were trained in the volkekunde approach.[108] Volkekunde was a branch of anthropology, taught in Afrikaans-medium as well as Bantustan universities, that is concerned with descriptions of ethnic groups as 'bounded cultures', with histories and traits unique to that group. Volkekunde 'assigns overwhelming explanatory power to the phenomenon of ethnicity, which it conceives in the narrowest, most rigid terms possible.'[109] This is based on ethnos theory, which is the idea that people necessarily belong to an ethnic group, nation or *volk,* into which they are born and raised, and which determines aspects of their personality, beliefs and behaviour.[110] This was the ideology that underpinned separate development and the creation of Bantustans. Ethnographers with volkekunde training thus received jobs in departments such as the Department of Bantu Affairs and later the Departments for Co-operation and Development, Community Development, and Coloured Administration and Indian Affairs.[111] As 'experts' on ethnic groups, these anthropologists were later asked to help judge the merits of various land claims. Their adjudication of claims is guided by 'a tribal political and cultural model' that places emphasis on the central role of chiefs and tribes. De Beer, a retired anthropologist who is very active in land claims research, mainly on behalf of landowners, wrote when discussing the complexity of land claims:

> Due to the long process of living together in the same habitat, members of an ethnic group develop a territorial consciousness in the area in which they live. Such a consciousness is closely related to the history of the ethnic group concerned which evolves within their own native land so that the group's attachment to its homeland with its unique topographical configurations and other scarce and valuable resources often fosters bonds of patriotism as an inexplicable and unfathomable force and one of the mightiest revelations of the soul of people associated with emotions and beliefs 'connoting belonging, love, loyalty, pride and care toward a group and land'. It is not surprising therefore that few, if any, multi-ethnic states have been able to avoid

[108] Delius and Hay 'Sabi Sands', pp. 15 – 17.
[109] J. Sharp, 'The Roots and Development of Volkekundige in South Africa' *Journal of Southern African Studies: Special Issue on Anthropology and History,* 8 (1), 1981, p. 31.
[110] Ibid, p.19.
[111] Ibid, p. 31.

> conflicts and even civil war pertaining access to land, land rights and inequitable distribution of land.[112]

Good research into claims, according to de Beer, is to conduct archival research, oral history interviews, and to consult the work of members of the ethnography section of the Department of Bantu Affairs, like Van Warmelo and Breutz, to untangle tribal history. But Van Warmelo and Breutz wrote descriptive, short publications based on oral traditions, without analysing the changes they were seeing.[113] Rather than theorising about the nature of succession disputes for example, Van Warmelo preferred 'to record the micro-history in pre-dispute tranquility.'[114] Lekgoathi has shown how Van Warmelo's accounts of tribes were also shaped by local African interlocutors who had their own agenda with regard to contemporary struggles over chieftainship.[115] Van Warmelo's ethnographies of 'tribes' were certainly not grounded on an 'objective' scientific body of evidence.

Part of the challenge de Beer sees in adjudicating the merit of claims is to find out whether a chief in question has the correct lineage to claim for an ancient territory. Anyone else living on the land, de Beer considers to only have labour tenant status and thus cannot claim customary land rights. The idea that only longstanding 'tribes' led by chiefs could claim customary rights was overturned in 2007 at the Constitutional Court, in the Popela Community judgment regarding a land claim on a farm near Mooketsi, in the Mopani district, where a group of labour tenants claimed part of the farm as a community.[116]

Regardless of this judgement, there is widespread assumption that Africans accessed land only through chiefs, and that this is the entity to which they belong and should lodge claims. Templehoff, for example, in a report on Kapama Nature Reserve (later part of the Moletele land claim), argued that a restitution claim was unfounded because no forced removals took

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[112] F.C de Beer, 'The roots and complexity of the land issue and of land claims in South Africa' in *Anthropology Southern Africa'* 29 (1&2), 2006, p.24.
[113] W. D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa's Anthropologists, 1920 - 1990,* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1997, pp. 113 – 118.
[114] Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters,* p. 113.
[115] S. P. Lekgoathi, '"Colonial" Experts', pp. 61 – 80.
[116] Constitutional Court of South Africa Case CCT 69/06, Popela Community and others versus Goedgelegen TropicalFruits (Pty) Ltd. Para 40 and 41 available at http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2007/12.pdf. Accessed on 18 March 2015. For original court case where the Popela Community were deemed not to be a community because they had no tribal identity (among other things), see Land Claims Court of South Africa Case LCC 52/00, Popela Communtiy versus Department of Land Affairs and Goedgelegen Tropical Fruits (Pty) Ltd. p. 19.

place, but this was despite clear evidence of many instances of resettlement of entire farm populations, and evictions. He suggests that where removals took place, 'it might have been on a more humane basis that elsewhere in the former Transvaal'. His recommendation however was that:

> It might be worth giving the concept of nature conservation a more all-embracing content... It might be worthwhile to give consideration to ways in which especially traditional culture of the African people can be conserved.[117]

This reveals striking ignorance of other paradigms and more recent scholarship, but it does reflect a deeply seated tribal paradigim in wider society. It is also worth pointing out that Templehoff used ethnographies and archival material in his report, but did not conduct any oral history interviews with individual claimants.

The principle weakness of research conducted by BEE consultants tends to be that they do not make use of a variety of sources, particularly archives, and do not reflect on the methodology they use. For example, with regard to the Sabi Sands claim, we found in one untitled report by a consultant:

> under the heading 'Archival Research': 'An extensive though not exhaustive research has been conducted and we will gladly take the challenge to be more receptive to any information that will come in handy for the commission...' The body of the report, however, shows very little evidence of systematic research on archival sources, and the limited sources that have been used are fundamentally misunderstood, with conclusions being reached on their meaning which are serious distortions and misrepresentations of their content.[118]

In another report by 'Enrichment Consultants', we found that:

> The entire report is based on participatory research methodology including holding community meetings, collecting group and individual oral histories, undertaking mapping exercises and limited in loco inspections. [119]

But these sources were not used critically, or triangulated with other evidence, despite the deep methodological challenges discussed below.

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[117] J. Templehoff, 'Human industry and the land: An historical perspective of the phenomenon in the vicinity of Kapama Nature Reserve' May 1996, p. 67.
[118] Delius and Hay, 'Sabi Sands'.
[119] Ibid, p. 14.

Some consultants were given extremely tight deadlines for the completion of validity reports. For example, in 2001 Nkuzi was given a contract to validate 2140 land claims. Although they hired an extra 11 people to help with this project, they still had a small staff of only 26 by the end of the year (plus five volunteers). By the end of 2002 almost all the validation reports were concluded.[120] Even if all staff members worked on the claim reports, each person would have needed to complete a report every 3 days (based on there being 250 workdays in a year). The research they conducted 'involved meetings with land claiming communities, administering questionnaires to gather necessary information, compiling histories, deeds research and archival research.'[121] But clearly, the time they had did not allow them to do this adequately, if at all.

Most of the consultants hired did not have training in historical research methods or a background in South African history. Historians are aware that sources cannot be used uncritically as evidence for actual events. Training, and even more so experience, in historical methodology is a skill historians need in order to make sense of a complicated past. The problem with sources is that, if used selectively, they can be manipulated to fit a particular narrative. This manipulation does not necessarily involve a conscious effort to deceive. People often firmly believe in a particular narrative of the past if it supports their understanding of the present, and vision for the future. That said, there is plenty of scope for knowingly manipulating evidence to support a claim for significant resources and power. As James writes:

> The need for recognizable proof of 'beneficial occupation', amongst Commissioners and claimants alike, has led to a sharpening of memory and to a rethinking of the past. In the process, aspirant chiefs have tried to reconstitute empires; subjects have rejected chiefs and affiliated themselves to other leaders; and anthropologists, restyled as consultants, have collected genealogies and traced the location of cattle byres and initiation lodges in an attempt to find 'fixed proof' of land occupancy. Graves, in particular, have acquired a heightened significance as sites for the concentration of social memory.[122]

To navigate through shifting narratives and malleable memories, historians need to have an appreciation of the context in which the sources were created. What was happening when

[120] Nkuzi Development Association, Annual Report, 2002.
[121] Ibid, para 2.1.
[122] D. James, 'Burial Sites, Informal Rights and Lost Kingdoms: Contesting Land Claims in Mpumalanga South Africa' in *Africa,* 79 (2), 2009, p. 238.

interviews were conducted? Who spoke and who kept silent? What was the purpose of official government reports on chiefs in the 1930s to 1980s? And so on. Historians also need to understand the historical context in which events were said to transpire. Oral accounts that are not consistent with what we know about economic and social relations of a certain period need to be treated with caution. Accessing as many accounts as possible – through interviewing a wide range of people and conducting archival research allows historians to triangulate data which assists them to build a more accurate a view of an event or period.

Oral History

According to an official of the LRLCC, who has conducted research on many land claims and written historical validity reports:

> A particular claim might be misleading because due to the disjuncture between time of dispossession and now, claimants have relied on oral narrations being passed from generation to generation, the information is not always reliable, it is reliant on memory, there is always discrepancy. Most of the key informants in communities have already passed away.[123]

People who lodged claims in 1995 are today twenty years older than they used to be, their experience of dispossession took place between thirty and eighty years ago. As old age brings the deterioration of mental function and memory, the past that needs to be recounted drifts further and further away. The failure of the commission and researchers to record and properly archive people's life histories at the beginning of the land claims process means that an opportunity was lost which can never be recovered. A related complicating factor is that many claimants are hard to trace. They may have died or changed address, the phone number provided on their claim form may have been cut off. The CRLR, with its files and offices in disarray, has now put the job of finding claimants out to tender.[124] But the challenges of using oral history as evidence for land claims run much deeper.

While all sources are vulnerable to manipulation to fit a story, oral history is vulnerable to manipulation in the very process of its creation. And as Bickford-Smith et al pointed out:

[123] MH confidential interview, Polokwane, November 2011.
[124] Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights Annual Report 2012- 2013, p. 9; Bid No: K7/3/6/3 (CLCC-04) 2014/2015: The Appointment Of A Panel Of Service Providers (Research Institutions) To Research Land Claims.

> Popular memories are particularly influenced by the fluid uncertainties of collective myths and personal fantasies. People do not simply remember what happened, they very often consciously and unconsciously change their memories to fulfil personal wishes or to fit community, cultural or traditional myths…Popular memories are also constructed within a context of shifting power relationships. Opportunities to narrate one's memories and stories for audiences are shaped by position, resources and power relations.[125]

Community myths are important in claiming land. Land restitution promises people not just symbolic redress for the land they lost, but substantial resources – land and money – to the value of millions of Rands. At the same time, land restitution also narrowly defines what type of loss people can claim for. As Walker points out, it provides a narrative for claimants to use.[126] But loss of rights to land in the context of racial discrimination encompasses many experiences which do not fit into this basic narrative. It is in group leaders' interests to ensure that a single official history is given which fits into the pre-defined narrative of the Land Claims Commission. Intimidation and scare tactics are sometimes used to encourage more independent individuals to join group claims and keep quiet about contradictions. Claimants may also believe that if their narratives do not fit into the group narrative, their claim is jeopardized. They may not be aware that they can lodge family claims, or have been encouraged to merge family claims with community claims. Thus even where individuals are interviewed, they may be just as interested in creating consensus as the leaders. When Delius and I attempted to interview some individuals, we came to recognise a 'coached' narrative:

> A particular account of the past which leading members of groups think will lead to a successful outcome are taught to and rehearsed within the wider group. In addition, over the many years that these claims have awaited resolution, and as a result of repeated and often not very skilled research processes, elements of a collective narrative have developed. These are clearly influenced by the existence of claims and a growing understanding of both the process of, and criteria for, settling claims. The impact of this growing orthodoxy amongst claimants was enhanced by the sad fact that many of the individuals who had lived on the farms died without their detailed knowledge being recorded and drawn upon.[127]

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[125] V. Bickford-Smith, S. Field and C. Glaser, 'The Western Cape Oral History Project' in *African Studies,* 60 (1), 2001, pp. 17-18.
[126] Walker, *Landmarked,* pp. 48 – 50.
[127] Delius and Hay, 'Sabi Sands', p. 19.

This is very similar to Muluadzi's experience when conducting research for his PhD in the mid 1990s. [128] However, the 'official' narratives emerging from land claims tend to be inconsistent with the picture of the area and group that emerge from archival research, secondary sources and interviews with unscripted individuals.

Fortunately for community leaders, the most common way that consultants collected oral histories as evidence was to interview leaders, chiefs, and to conduct group interviews.[129] This process is vulnerable to many of the flaws of badly designed and executed 'Participatory Rural Appraisal'. This is an approach whereby researchers meet with 'the community', to discover local knowledge. This intensive workshop-style approach is used partly so that a researcher can achieve in a few days what might otherwise take weeks or even years to do.[130] The problem is, some members of the 'community' may feel uncomfortable and even frightened of expressing a differing perspective from the group leaders. There is also a tendency to want to reach consensus, which masks conflicting interests.[131] While individual experience might be ignored, the views expressed by an elite are often taken as the views of the community.[132] And, Slim and Thompson point out, 'the collective voice of any community tends towards generalisations, simplifications or half-truths and is dominated by the loudest voices.'[133] Thus, in a group situation, a leader is sometimes free to provide the 'official' account of history, without contradiction.

Finding out 'the community history' is of course a deeply problematic exercise anyway, something which Stadler pointed out in 1995 in *Development Southern Africa,* a journal which published many articles related to land reform and was aimed at an audience of development 'practitioners':

[128] M. Mulaudzi, '"U Shuma Bulasi" Agrarian Transformation in the Zoutpansberg, District of South Africa up to 1946' PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2000, p. 22.
[129] Delius et al, 'Moletele', Delius and Hay, 'Sabi Sands', Delius and Hay 'New Belgium'.
[130] R. Chambers, 'Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Analysis of Experience' *World Development,* 22 (9), 1994, p. 1264 – 1265.
[131] J. Stadler, 'Development, research and participation: Towards a critique of participatory rural appraisal methods' in *Development Southern Africa,* 12 (6) 1995, pp. 810 – 812.
[132] H. Slim and P. Thompson, *Listening for a change: Oral Testimony and Development*, London: Panos, 1994, p. 4 -5.
[133] Ibid, p. 5.

> many communities in the rural areas of southern African do not have shared histories. Indeed to presume this ignores the multitude of historical experiences in a single social context. Different sectors of communities also experience history in different ways.'[134]

Physical features

Physical features such as trees, hills, old cattle kraals, graves and sites used for circumcision rituals, can all be used as evidence for a claim. These can bring to life a story of removal and dispossession, as with a group of claimants from the Mavuraka Community, a small group of claimants for a farm in the Sabi Sands area. The claimants took us to the sites of their former homes and told how they were evicted with little notice, and had to trek away on foot, with whatever they could carry. Near to the sites of the burnt down houses lay broken pieces of large clay pots, heavy cast iron pots, and other items too heavy or too frivolous for harried tenants to carry during a sudden eviction. These items were testament to their story. Their claim conflicted with an enormous claim for twenty two farms in the Sabi Sands area. The physical evidence combined with their story made it clear that their claim had merit.

In contrast was the experience a landowner recalled of a visit by an official from the Land Claims Commission and members of a large tribal land claim. After spending hours driving around the farm claimants were unable to point to anything substantial, they said that there were graves somewhere on the farm, but could not find them. Anyone can claim that a grave or a kraal belonged to their ancestors, and many do, according to an official in the Mpumalanga land claims commission, and a member of the public at a hearing of the land restitution amendment bill held in Nelspruit.[135] This is easy to do – old gravesites often resemble a few scattered rocks deep in the bush.

Given this possibility, in one situation officials looked at what was inside a grave to determine who the rightful claimants were. An official from the Land Claims Commission described to me how DNA testing was carried out on bones found in a gravesite in the iconic Makuleke claim. This was to try settle a dispute between Mhinga, a traditional leader

[134] Stadler, 'Development', p. 812.
[135] Personal communication; D. Skosana, 'Community views on the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Bill, Report 1' unpublished report commissioned by the Centre for Law and Society, November 2013, p. 15.

presiding over a Traditional Authority in former Gazankulu, and the Makuleke community over land in the northern reaches of the Kruger National Park.[136] The exercise complicated matters even further: only 10% of the remains were 'Tsonga', 20- 25% were 'Venda' and, completely unexpectedly, 70% were 'Ndebele'. Clearly, the remains at the gravesite were more of a hindrance than a help in resolving the question of belonging. Perhaps the lesson to have taken from the findings was not that the wrong people benefitted, but that DNA cannot be used to prove the political and cultural identity of people. Graves and their contents thus remain malleable forms of evidence.

Archives

Archival evidence is rarely used in consultants' reports. This is despite the Commission having privileged access to the archives: its offices are full of old files and documents. The problem is, there is no proper filing system, and a stray document with no name and no home is of little use to a researcher. Many researchers also have tight deadlines which make archival research impossible. Furthermore, many relevant archival documents tend to be in Afrikaans, which is not understood by many working in the CRLR or as consultants. But even if they had the documents, time, and an understanding of Afrikaans, those conducting and managing land claims research often lack training in how to access and use archival material.

Documents cannot be read as truthful sources: one needs an understanding of the shortfalls of archival documents and an understanding of the context in which they were written. An example is the use of 'farm files': documents that were generated when landowners wrote to the Native Commissioner regarding residence rights for Africans under the terms of the 1913 Natives Land Act. In these documents, Africans are referred to as 'squatters', and in some forms there is a question asking which chief the individual follows. Without a deep understanding of the population movements and political and social arrangements of this period, one might use this document as proof that the farm was the territory of the chief named in the form, or as evidence that there can be no valid claim for restitution as the residents were simply 'squatters'.

[136] S. Robins and K. van der Waal, '"Model Tribes" and Iconic Conservationists? Tracking the Makuleke Restitution Case in Kruger National Park', in Walker, C., Bohlin, A., Hall, R., Kepe, T. (eds.) *Land, Memory, Reconstruction and Justice: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa,* Athens: Ohio Press, 2010 , p. 178.

Sometimes there is no information on a farm, and one needs to know how to interpret that as well. The lack of information on a farm may indicate that very little happened there to get the attention of officials. It suggests that there was no large scale removal of a community, that the farm was not considered for inclusion in a location or released area, or claimed by any chief as part of a traditional authority area. However, the lack of information does not prove these things, and it does not indicate that no individual or homestead was present on the farm for a long period and experienced eviction.

Apart from information gaps such as this, there is a more serious problem with the usefulness of archives in assisting with land claims research: they are in terrible condition.[137] It is possible for government departments to remove files from the National Archives in Pretoria, and many files are not returned – in my own experience, the missing files are often those that specifically relate to particular chiefs or farms.

The old Bantustan archives are in worse condition.[138] While the archivist at the Lebowa archives is very helpful, there are no finding aids, and enormous piles of historical documents litter the floor. The Gazankulu archives at Giyani were in reasonably good order, though the finding aids were limited, and the Tsonga and English speaking archivists could not read them as they were in Afrikaans. In neither archive was there an adequate system to locate relevant files on farms or chiefs.

Consequences

Without adequate historical research wild statements can be made, and have been used, to support large tribal and community claims. For example the acceptance report of the baPhalaborwa baMaseke land claim stated:

> The Community occupied the land from time immemorial and enjoyed ownership until they were finally removed in 1920's [sic] by the Assistant Native Commissioner Lydsdorp. [sic] … The Ba-Phalaborwa Ba-Maseke had customary unregistered rights over the land that they occupied. The land was on behalf of the Community kept in custody of the Chief.[139]

[137] Shula Marks, 'Do not let our archives turn to dust' *Mail and Guardian*, 29 June 2012, http://mg.co.za/article/2012-06-28-do-not-let-our-archives-turn-to-dust.
[138] See for example S. Ally, 'Material Remains: Artifice versus Artefact in the Archive of Bantustan Rule' ,Paper presented at the NRF Chair in Local Histories and Present Realities Seminar 16 April 2014.
[139] Dcoument in my possession: Baphalaborwa ba Maseke Land Claim Acceptance Report, p. 15.

With no references whatsoever, and in an account clearly influenced by the idea of Africans as inherently tribal, it is stated:

> When Act 27 of 1913 became law on the 19th of June 1913, the Ba-Phalaborwa people were the only people in occupation of the whole area between the Letaba and Olifants Rivers that they are now claiming back.[140]

By this logic, the need for evidence of settlement on any specific farm is largely irrelevant.[141] Thus, a 'tribal' land claim was accepted despite the fact that the area was sparsely populated by ethnically heterogenous homesteads which had a large degree of independence, certainly holding strong rights to land that did not belong to the chief.

The importance of historical methodology in restitution cases has recently been recognised by some officials working in the Limpopo RLCC, who have sought to involve historians not only in conducting research into claims, but training people on how to do the research, including contextualizing land issues.[142] At national level, a recent tender document calls for service providers to conduct research on outstanding land claims, and includes an extensive list of acceptable and necessary evidence to support such research. It also calls for a qualified researcher from the social sciences: but the disciplines actually listed are anthropology and sociology, not history.[143]

But the new emphasis on compiling detailed research reports with reams of evidence still lacks an understanding of the nature of historical sources and what the discipline of history can and cannot achieve. The government has recognised the malleability of some forms of evidence, and that some 'fraudsters' manipulated evidence to make dubious claims. However, they have still failed to recognise the complexity of historical land issues, and the consequent inevitability and extent of overlapping claims. Thus, the government has blamed overlapping and conflicting claims on these 'fraudsters'. The Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act makes it illegal to lodge a claim without proper evidence. But, as a participant at a public hearing on the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Bill pointed

[140] Ibid, Appendix, 'Land Claims by the baMaseke Tribe', section 6.
[141] Ibid, Appendix, 'Land Claims by the baMaseke Tribe', section 9.
[142] MH interview with Miyelani Nkatingi 10 October 2012; personal communication.
[143] Bid No: K7/3/6/3 (CLCC-04) 2014/2015.

out, some people may not have evidence of the dispossession that their family undoubtedly experienced:

> …I just heard that land was taken from us, that's what I'm going to say when I lodge a claim. Now are you going to find us guilty if you find that the information that we are giving you when we lodged claims [is wrong?] it's the information that we had from other people, it's not something that we were exposed to. So we are going to be afraid to lodge claims now… But the land has been taken from us.[144]

Administrative settlements

When land restitution first began historical validity research reports were required and were used as evidence in a court settlement of the claim. But this was enormously time consuming. In the first five years of land restitution, to 1999, only 41 claims had been settled, a rate at which it would take 'a few *thousand* years' to settle all the claims.[145] The government had a target to redistribute 30 per cent of land in the country, and had a tight deadline to do this in. Restitution was imagined to be a critical tool in redistributing land. These considerations led the government to change the process of land restitution, so that claims could be settled administratively, out of court. Those opposing claims could take their cases to court, but otherwise, if all parties were in agreement, a claim could be settled without extensive research. This allowed the commission to settle thousands of claims very quickly: by March 2000, just before the turn to administrative settlements, 3,916 claims had been settled, a year later 12,094 claims had been settled, a year later, 29,887.[146] Clearly thousands of farmers were willing to negotiate and sell their farms to the government.

Rather than resolving claims through research into their validity, the mode of the commission has been to negotiate with potential claimants and landowners and reach some kind of compromise.[147] During these negotiations, claims were often grouped together and consolidated into larger claims. This practice was vulnerable to corruption, has led to

[144] Audience member, Public Hearing of the Land Rights Amendment Bill, Moses Mabatha Civic Centre, 19 November 2013.
[145] R. Hall, 'Reconciling the Past, Present and Future: The Parameters and Practice of Land restitution in South Africa' in Walker et al (eds.) *Land, Memory,* p. 27.
[146] Annual Report of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, 2001 – 2002, p. 12.
[147] This is widely known. MH confidential interview Polokwane.

conflict, and has severely undermined land restitution's aim to provide redress and justice. In a case of 'more haste, less speed':

> Very often… the Commission did not bother to wrap up a single piece of land, they just transfer it [the farm] to the first file they opened with this farm's name on it, and then you find afterwards that many more claimants actually claimed.[148]

In this context re-opening restitution was a worrying prospect for some officials, 'because we may find that the whole restitution project since we started it has been done wrongly. We've given the wrong people very ideal pieces of land.'[149] Rather than speeding up land reform, settling claims administratively without due attention to historical validity causes delays during negotiation, and delays caused by conflict.

Government and Traditional Authorities

I have looked at how the context in post-apartheid South Africa was primed for large tribal or community claims, and how inadequate research supports them. Another part of the explanation for the prevalence of tribal claims in particular is a shift in government's attitudes to chiefs in post-apartheid South Africa.[150] Some also see the government's attitude towards chiefs as a continuity of older Union and apartheid laws dividing the country up into zones defined as either 'customary' or 'modern'.[151]

This trend has taken on new significance since the 2014 Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Bill, which re-opened land claims. The rhetoric around re-opening land claims has been explicitly pro-chieftaincy in tone, with President Jacob Zuma encouraging chiefs to claim 'on behalf of their people'. [152] Land rights researchers, Nomboniso Gasa and Nolundi Luwaya, 'suspect that the new act was passed purely to placate angry traditional leaders

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[148] MH interview with Theo de Jager Tzaneen,, 24 April 2012.
[149] MH confidential interview, Polowkane, 2011.
[150] Claasens and Cousins, *Land, Power and Custom: Controversies generated by South Africa's Communal Land Rights Act,* Cape Town: UCT Press, 2008*;* B. Oomen, *Chiefs in South Africa: Law, Power and Culture in the Post-Apartheid Era',* Oxford: James Currey, 2005; L. Ntsebeza, 'The more things change, the more they remain the same: Rural Land Tenure and Democracy in the Former Bantustans' in F. Hendricks, L. Ntsebeza and K. Helliker, *The Promise of Land: Undoing a Century of Dispossession in South Africa,* Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013. See http://www.customcontested.co.za/.
[151] A. Claasens, 'Denying Ownership and Equal Citizenship: Continuities in the State's Use of Law and 'Custom', 1912 – 2013' *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 40 (4) 2014, p. 761.
[152] N. Mkhize, 'New Land restitution process set to be messy' in Business Day Live, July 15, 2014. http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2014/07/15/new-land-restitution-process-set-to-be-messy. Accessed on 15 July 2014.

after the failure to pass the Traditional Courts Bill', which would have given chiefs unprecedented rights over land.[153]

At the public hearing on the Land Restitution Amendment Bill of 2013, held in Sekhukhune district in November 2013, Zwelivelile Mandela, speaking 'as a traditional leader' himself, told the audience that:

> … the first people in our land of our forefathers to be stripped of their land were *mahosi* [chiefs] … there is evidence showing that the first prisoners to Robben Island were *mahosi*…. These were gallant soldiers and sons of our land that fought for our forefathers' land for a period of 100 years.[154]

Another parliamentarian admonished the audience for asking for title deeds, because they were not part of 'our culture … I want to say to you people, yes, we want our land, but our chiefs, they must be our eyes, in our land'.[155] Similar arguments were made at other hearings, with Chief Zwelivelile Mandela interjecting when members of the public made critical comments about chiefs from the floor during the public hearing at Ulundi.[156] In Nelspruit, where members of the public complained about the uneven distribution of funds within trust committees and suggested 'chiefs should make their own claims like other citizens and not launch their claims on behalf of their communities', 'people were urged to respect their chiefs, as they are the 'custodians of culture'.[157]

This theme continued at a parliamentary hearing on the Amendment Bill in February 2014, when the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform and the Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights argued that concerns about land being returned to traditional leaders 'reflected "colonial" viewpoints'. 'Land had been removed from traditional leaders as custodians of the land, so their position could not be discounted, and history could not be

[153] Ibid.
[154] Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandela, Public Hearing on the 2013 Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Bill, Moses Mabatha Civic Centre, Sekhukhune District, Limpopo, 19 November 2013.
[155] ANC Member of Parliament, name unknown, Public Hearing on the 2013 Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Bill, Moses Mabatha Civic Centre, Sekhukhune District, Limpopo, 19 November 2013.
[156] D. Skosana, 'Community views on the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Bill, Report 1' unpublished report commissioned by the Centre for Law and Society, November 2013, p. 9.
[157] Ibid, p.16.

re-written'.[158] One of the very first claims lodged in 2014 was by the Zulu king, King Goodwill Zwelinthini, and other traditional leaders, for an area of land stretching beyond Kwa-Zulu Natal to parts of the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga. They are apparently happy to accept financial compensation, which will amount to billions of rands.[159]

But it is important not to exaggerate the ascendency of chiefs and ignore the role of senior government officials and people with business interests linked to land. [160] Not all large and expensive settled claims have been claims by chiefs. The Mala Mala settlement is arguably the most controversial of all land claim settlements. In mid-2013 the Mpumalanga land claims commission decided to transfer Mala Mala to the Mhlanganisweni (renamed N'wandlamhlarhi) community for R1 billion, tying up a huge proportion of the Commission's annual budget. To put this in context, the year before, 'R1.6-billion was used nationally to buy land to settle 549 claims'.[161] Zuma presided over the celebrations.[162] The rhetoric around custom allows powerful people to claim vast areas of land, on which significant economic enterprises exist, and under which minerals may lie, but it is not only traditional authorities which are benefiting.

Furthermore, the government's support for tribal authorities today does not explain the nature of the land claims being lodged, and the extent of rhetoric around 'rightful chiefs'. At the end of apartheid, there were many unpopular chiefs in the area, who had been placed there by the apartheid government. In the process of creating Bantu authorities and homelands many leaders lost their authority. Not just their 'authority' over land (many of these leaders, such as Go'no'no had moved many times in their career), but their ability to lead people. On the eve of democracy, there were many people who hated the present ruling traditional authorities, who wanted democracy, but who, like Delius and James have

[158] 'Land restitution Amendment Bill: Minister Rural Development & Commission for Restitution of Land Rights responses to public submissions', 3 February 2014, available at http://www.pmg.org.za, retrieved on 19 February 2014.
[159] Sapa, 'Zulu leaders to make multi-billion rand land claim' *Timeslive,* 6 July 2014, http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2014/07/06/zulu-leaders-to-make-multi-billion-rand-land-claim. Accessed 8 July 2014.
[160] See also P. Delius, M. Hay and M. Reddy 'Bengwenyama' for an example of how Land restitution was used instrumentally by a mining company to get control of a platinum rich farm.
[161] P. Joubert and S. Hoffstater, 'Government to pay R1 billion for Mala Mala Game Reserve' *Timeslive,* 4 August 2013, http://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2013/08/04/government-to-pay-r1-billion-for-mala-mala-game-reserve.
[162] Sapa, 'Zuma hands over Mala Mala' 9 Janaury 2014, http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Politics/Zuma-hands-over-Mala-Mala-20140109.

pointed out, did not necessarily hate the institution of chieftaincy. Some 'tribal' claims to land, and to authority, are protests against incumbent chiefs who are seen as illegitimate by some, using a similar rhetoric that the government has been using to keep them in power. The Mokgolobotho claim is an example of this – a protest and land dispute initially led by the Civics became a claim to ancient tribal territory and an accusation that Mohlaba was a collaborator and foreigner. Another example of this is a submission to the Premier of Limpopo by 'Gaza Tihosi' of the 'Gaza Kingdom'. The submission is made up of twenty four points listing an imagined history of the chiefs, grievances under apartheid, and disappointment with the new regime. The idea of 'legitimacy' is linked not just to indigeneity, but also to struggle credentials. In this formulation, legitimate chiefs resisted colonialism and fought for democracy:

> Our forebears served under Gaza Empire with distinction and without any reservation. It is our ancestors who resisted colonialism under the able leadership of the Nguni dynasty of Soshangane, Mzila and Nghungunyani… Our forefathers sacrificed their limbs and lives on the alter of the democracy that is only enjoyed by a few in this country.[163]

The submission condemns 'collaborators and corrupt characters' who were given power under Bantu Authorities. At the end of apartheid, goes the submission, people expected that inequalities would disappear, there would be redress, 'all traditional communities' would receive equal treatment, 'dummy leadership' would not be allowed to continue to 'usurp authority'.[164] But this did not happen. Rather, 'there were and are those who were voted by homeland parliaments instead of communities (and not born) to be traditional leaders.'[165] In this final remark the contradiction between the idea of democracy and the idea that true traditional leaders are born not made, stands out starkly. Similarly, the Gaza Tihosi's claim that they are the rightful leaders is based on the assertion that the 'dynasties' of the rightful rulers dated back to the seventeenth century.

Despite the intellectual incompatability between privileging indigeneity and birth-right on the one hand, and democratic credentials – being 'voted in' – on the other, this formulation of what constitutes 'legitimacy' is nonetheless prevalent. It was used by Zwelivelile Mandela at the public hearing for the Land Restitution Amendment Bill held in Sekhukhune district, in

[163] http://gazankulurepublic.blogspot.com/2012/02/history.html, accessed 8 July 2014.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.

the quote cited above ('there is evidence showing that the first prisoners to Robben Island were *mahosi*….). [166] This seems to be an important, if schizophrenic, feature of twenty-first century South African politics.

Indigeneity

While the Gaza Tihosi may represent themselves as part of an ancient kingdom, other groups in the area do not see Shangaan-Tsonga as having legitimate claims to land in South Africa, because they are viewed as immigrants. [167] An example was given to me by Abigail Moffett, a PhD student at UCT working on a site in the 'Phalaborwa' area. She heard different versions of the history of the area, and a 'Shangaan' informant told her that 'Shangaan people had been here before the others and also that their history in present times had been sidelined for the Sotho version'.[168] Nevertheless, the entire area is under four Phalaborwa 'tribal' land claims[169], which are in the process of being settled.

A perspective has emerged that to determine the rightful claim to land one must determine who was there first. For example, when the Makuleke graves in the Kruger National Park revealed that only 10% of the remains were 'Tsonga', what the official I spoke to made of this was that:

> The people who actually benefited from that claim are not the ones who should have benefitted… The problem is with regard to the timelines. When you try to date those bones you find that the bones of the Ndebeles are maybe around early 1900, the bones for Vendas probably earlier to 1820/1840. The Malulekes, they're Tsongas, they came later. You start finding them around 1914/1920 something ….So they are benefitting but it is more of a flaw. Because it cuts off people who were supposed to be the ones benefiting.[170]

The implications of the shift towards indigeneity are troubling. In his article on the topic, Kuper argues that:

> the conventional lines of argument currently used to justify "indigenous" land claims rely on obsolete anthropological notions and on a romantic and false ethnographic vision. Fostering

[166] Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandela, Public Hearing on the 2013 Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Bill, Moses Mabatha Civic Centre, Sekhukhune District, Limpopo, 19 November 2013.
[167] Interview with Richard Mulaudzi; this is a commonly held and widely reiterated view.
[168] Personal communication with Abigail Moffet.
[169] For separate 'tribes' within the larger Phalaborwa tribe.
[170] MH confidential interview, Polokwane, 2011.

> essentialist ideologies of culture and identity, they may have dangerous political consequences.[171]

A major problem with the notion of indigeneity and 'first people's' rights is that it leads to what would in Europe be described as right-wing beliefs:

> The initial assumption is that descendants of the original inhabitants of a country should have privileged rights, perhaps even exclusive rights, to its resources. Conversely, immigrants are simply guests and should behave accordingly.[172]

These are disturbing trends in a country struggling with xenophobic violence and enduring ethnic tension.

Conclusion

The privileging of large community claims has come about for a number of reasons. In a context of poverty and high rates of illiteracy, many poor people heard about, and could only access, land restitution through chiefs and brokers. After years of chiefs and other brokers competing for land, resources and recognition during the Bantustan era and before, the situation was primed for large tribal and community claims. Officials were underequipped to deal with the enormity of the task of restitution, and failed to take history seriously in determining the merits of land claims. The ahistorical statements of chiefs and potential beneficiaries of expensive land claims were used as proof. In recent years, the government has encouraged tribal claims and made use of a problematic rhetoric that chiefs are 'custodians of the land'.

Furthermore, linking 'belonging' and ownership of land to tribal identity has done nothing to quell the ethnic tensions created during homeland consolidation. In Mopani district this has fed into a notion that Shangaan people cannot claim customary rights to land, while Sotho chiefs and Venda chiefs can. This is based on a popular idea that 'Shangaan' people began arriving in the area in the twentieth century, or at the earliest, the 19th century. This is clearly contrary to the actual history of the area, which shows that migration of people from the east was an ancient reality.

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[171] A. Kuper, 'The Return of the Native', *Current Anthropology,* 44 (3), 2003, p. 395.
[172] Ibid, p. 390.

Chapter Seven:

Land Reform and Agriculture, 1994 - 2015

At the end of Apartheid, agriculture in South Africa was highly polarised. At the one end of the scale were white farmers who held large areas of land and farmed at different levels of efficiency and productivity, at the other end were sub-subsistence farmers in the reserves, with very limited access to land. In general, the subsidies white farmers received from the state were far greater than the subsidies received by Africans in homelands. In the 1980s and early 1990s, both white and black agriculture was in crisis. White commercial agriculture was expensive to the state, farmers were in debt, and they were not producing efficiently.[1] African agriculture in the homelands was also expensive to the state, and food security was nowhere near being met.[2]

Policy advisors such as Binswanger and Deininger, an influential duo from the World Bank, believed that prior to massive state intervention not only in agriculture but land distribution, black peasant farmers using family labour were amongst the most competitive and efficient farmers in South Africa. In their account, the 1913 Land Act resulted in African peasants losing access to land, while state support propped up inefficient white farmers and made it impossible for more efficient black farmers to compete.[3] Policymakers assumed that with the reduction of state support to inefficient white farmers, and the provision of land to black South Africans, this would be reversed and 'land reform would bring into existence large numbers of competitive black landowners farming on a much smaller scale than white farmers'.[4]

In 1992, the Committee of Inquiry into the Marketing Act made various recommendations to do away with old marketing controls. This was supported by the ANC, who said that

[1] J. Kirsten and J. van Zyl, 'The contemporary agricultural policy environment: undoing the legacy of the past' in J. van Zyl (ed.) *Agricultural Land Reform in South Africa: Policies, Markets and Mechanisms,* Cape Town: Oxford University Press*,* 1996' S. Schirmer, 'Policy Visions and Historical Realities: Land Reform in the Context of Recent Agricultural Developments' *African Studies,* 59 (1) 2000, pp. 144 – 151.
[2] D. Cooper, 'Agriculture in the bantustans: Towards development policies' in M. de Klerk (ed.) *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa,* Cape Town: IDASA, 1991; Schirmer, 'Policy Visions', p. 152.
[3] H.P. Binswanger and K. Deininger, 'South African Land Policy: The Legacy of History and Current Options', *World Development,* 21 (9), pp. 1460 – 1462.
[4] Schirmer, 'Policy Visions', p. 143.

'marketing boards had been inequitable, had encouraged monopolies and inefficiency, and had reinforced discriminatory land legislation'.[5] In line with international trends in the early 1990s, the new ANC government made the decision to liberalise the agricultural sector, getting rid not only of the marketing boards but also other forms of support and subsidies that had helped farmers stay on the land. This also involved cutting funding to expensive and inefficient Bantustan irrigation schemes. Agriculture was liberalised to a greater extent than even the World Bank had recommended.[6]

Meanwhile, the ANC needed to do something about the unequal distribution of land which had become symbolic of the injustices of apartheid. In the early 1990s land activists, including communities which had protested against black spot removal, and NGOs, launched a 'Back to the Land' campaign putting pressure on the NP to begin land reform and reminding the ANC of its commitment to the 'land question'.[7] They called not just for redress, but made an unquestioned 'connection between land rights and enhanced livelihoods or economic growth.'[8] Binswanger and Deininger drew on international experience to argue that 'South Africa seems to have two options: rapid and massive redistribution of land to black and colored [sic] groups... or decades of peasant insurrection, possibly civil war, combined with capital flight and economic decline.'[9] Thus, South Africa embarked on a programme of land restitution to redress past wrongs, quell anger in the rural areas, and reduce rural poverty.

In the initial thinking around land reform however, policymakers recognised that land restitution was inappropriate to deal with the land needs of all Africans in rural areas.[10] Two other programmes of land reform were introduced: land redistribution and tenure reform. The first programme under land redistribution was the Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG). Under SLAG, beneficiaries could claim R15,000 per individual to go towards a

[5] South African Institute for Race Relations, *Annual Survey 1993/1994*, p. 242.
[6] S. Schirmer, 'Policy Visions and Historical Realities: land Reform in the Context of Recent Agricultural Developments' in *African Studies* 59 (1) 2000, p. 148.
[7] C. Walker, *Landmarked: Land Claims and Land restitution in South Africa,* Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2008, pp. 56 - 64; D. James, *Gaining Ground? 'Rights' and 'property' in South African Land Reform,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007, p. 8.
[8] Walker, *Landmarked*, p. 41.
[9] Binswanger and Deininger, 'South African Land Policy', p. 1466.
[10] Department of Land Affairs, White Paper on South African Land Policy, pp. 55 – 56.

stand, a house, or a farm. To purchase a farm, it would be necessary for hundreds of beneficiaries to group their grants together.

But in Mopani district the economic and social transformation that this should have generated did not occur. People did not return to the land and become peasant farmers. The farms that were transferred to restitution or SLAG beneficiaries as running concerns failed.[11] In many instances farm buildings and houses were vandalised, equipment and infrastructure stolen, expensive mango trees cut down and used for firewood. Communities and Communal Property Associations have been torn by strife and are unable to operate effectively. Thousands of farmworkers have lost their jobs or experience an unstable income.[12] Where commercial farms have continued production, returns are generally low, for farmworkers and shareholders alike.[13]

Rather than flattening the agricultural landscape, liberalisation of agriculture served to polarise it even more. By the early 2000s, restructuring of the agricultural sector had the effect of reducing the number of large scale commercial farming units, from 57,980 in 1993 to 45,818 in 2002, with average farm size increasing at the same time.[14] Meanwhile, gross farming income increased, from R19.620180 billion in 1993 to R53.329052 billion in 2002. The ratio between debt and gross farming income (GFI) decreased, from 78 per cent to 57.9

[11] S. Mgidlana, 'Deputy Minister visits land reform projects in Limpopo' accessed on http://www.ruraldevelopment.gov.za/DLA-Internet/content/news/LandReform_Limpopo-05112010.jsp; D. Hilton-Barber, *Footprints: On the trail of those who shaped Tzaneen's history,* Johannesburg: Porcupine Press, pp. 257 – 268; B. Hilton-Barber, 'As the tea grows cold' *Mail and Guardian,* 10 August 2005, http://mg.co.za/article/2005-08-10-as-the-tea-grows-cold (accessed 24 April 2015); For a polemic account of the failures of land reform see P. du Toit, *The Great South African Land Scandal,* Centurion: Legacy Publications, 2004.

[12] M. Sakuneka, 'Citrus workers on strike for no pay', Sowetan, 4 August 2009, http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/sowetan/archive/2009/08/04/citrus-workers-on-strike-for-no-pay; MH and RM interview with Alfred Letsadi, Murlebrook farms, 27 September 2011; Johannes Magoro, Mogoboya location, 26 September, 2011.

[13] Ibid, D, Ramay and M. M. Michèle Beullier, 'Agrarian System in Sekororo Limpopo Province South Africa', 2005, p. 32, http://www.waternetonline.ihe.nl/challengeprogram/IR06%20Agrarian%20system%20Sekororo.pdf, accessed April 2015; A. Belete and I. Mariga, 'Madiba Trust Farm, Limpopo: a redistribution project exhibiting 'classic' group problems and elite capture' in M. Aliber, M. Baiphethi, R de Satge. J. Denison, T. Hart, P. Jacobs and W. van Averbeke, with R. Alcock, M. Antwi, A. Belete, B. Cousins, L. Field, I. Mariga, P. Masika, S. Materechera, D. Mayson, N. Monde and B. Tapela, *Strategies to support South African smallholders as a contribution to government's second economy strategy, Research Report 41, vol. 2*, Cape Town: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, School of Government, Faculty of Economic Management Sciences, University of Cape Town, 2009, pp. 183 – 187.

[14] Census of Commercial Agriculture 2007, p. 10, http://www.nda.agric.za/docs/statsinfo/Censcoagric2007.pdf.

per cent in the same period. The number of commercial farmers dropped again over the next 5 years, to 39,982, the gross farming income increased to R79.543813 billion and the ratio of debt to GFI decreased to 46.6 per cent.[15] On the one hand this signified that some farms were succeeding in becoming super-efficient, able to compete in competitive world markets. These tended to be highly capitalised agri-businesses, such as ZZ2, one of the country's largest tomato farms located in Mopani district, which could buy out failing farmers.[16] On the other hand, thousands of smaller scale, inefficient and marginal farms failed or were bought out.[17]

The visible failure of land reform with regard to its initial aims has led to scholarly and public debates about what went wrong. A number of scholars argued that land claimant communities were inappropriate vehicles for economic development, because 'communities' that were scattered and since reunited have lost coherence, because they are characterised by hierarchies and conflicting interests, and because the needs and desires of different individuals within communities were sometimes at odds with the development plans that officials, the CPA and NGO workers had in store for them.[18] The issue of community cohesion and the effectiveness of CPAs come up in case studies of land reform projects as a key constraint in land reform projects.[19] This is something I consider in the section on restitution below. Schirmer has also argued that liberalising agriculture was a policy mistake, based on a poor understanding of the history of agriculture in South Africa. He showed that given the constraints to agriculture in South Africa, state support was essential for agricultural development, even in the 1980s which many analysts characterise as a time of freer markets. By liberalising agriculture to the extent that it did, the

[15] Ibid.
[16] For more about ZZ2 see L. Changioun, *A Farm Called ZZ2: The Bertie van Zyl Story,* Polokwane: Review Printers, 2005.
[17] J. van Zyl, N. Vink, J.F Kirsten, 'South African Agriculture in Transition: The 1990s', Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, University of Pretoria, Working paper 2000-06; Schirmer, 'Policy Visions', p. 151.
[18] M. Brown, J. Erasmus, R. Kingwill, C. Murray and M. Roodt, 'Land restitution in South Africa: An Independent Evaluation' Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management, 1997, pp. 52 – 56; James, *Gaining Ground,* pp. 73 – 74, D. James, '"After Years in the Wilderness": The Discourse of Land Claims in the New South Africa', Journal of Peasant Studies, 27, 3, 2000.
[19] Cardno Agrisystems Limited, 'Research Support to the Limpopo Centre for LED: Understanding the Economics of Land Reform in Limpopo and Developing a Best Practice Mdel for Post-Settlemetn Land restitution' 4 August 2008, pp. 16 – 17, 67, 76, 78.

government unintentionally ensured that agriculture became far more risky, too risky in fact for emerging farmers.

The liberalisation of agriculture has widely been seen as an underlying cause of the financial challenges that face farmers at every scale. Farmers have been exposed to international competition, unfavourable terms of trade, an unstable market, and are vulnerable to rising input costs and external factors such as the oil price and exchange rate. [20]

The Centre for Development and Enterprise suggested that, given the macro-economic policy of the ANC, which was in line with 'changes in the global economic order':

> The hard truth is that this sector offers few opportunities for addressing unemployment, poverty, or inequality on a significant scale, and provides an economic future for fewer and fewer people. There is – according to the country's largest bank in the agricultural sector – no longer any room for even the average commercial farmer. White South Africans are moving out of farming because it is hard to make a reasonable living. We must be very careful not to set up poorer black South Africans for failure.[21]

They also pointed out that bureaucratic delays in buying land had an adverse effect on farming operations, and that most rural people did not in fact want to farm, but wanted better access to services.[22] Furthermore, it was questionable whether the state had the capacity to implement an ambitious land reform programme, and that 'Land reform should match policy with capacity and budgetary reality.'[23]

Land reform scholars, many of whom were land activists in the 1990s, saw liberalisation as a key systemic reason for why smallholder farmers have not emerged in greater numbers since the end of apartheid, and they argued that this needed to change.[24] They also criticised the continuing focus on large-scale commercial agriculture and have blamed this on the 'neo-liberal' economic framework of the ANC government. True agrarian reform,

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[20] Amy Goldblatt, 'Agriculture: Facts and Trends in South Africa', World Wildlife Forum, pp. 5. http://awsassets.wwf.org.za/downloads/facts_brochure_mockup_04_b.pdf.

[21] A. Bernstein (ed.) *Land Reform in South Africa, a 21st Century Perspective,* Johannesburg: The Centre for Development and Enterprise, 2005, p. 18.

[22] Ibid, pp. 14, 17 -18.

[23] Ibid, p. 19.

[24] R. Hall, 'Conclusions and Recommendations' in R. Hall (ed.) *Another Countryside? Policy Options for Land and Agrarian Reform in South Africa,* Cape Town: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, School of Government, University of the Western Cape, pp. 245 – 263; S. Greenberg, 'Political stabilisation and market extension: The post-apartheid restructuring of agriculture and its impact on food security', *Interfund: Development Update,* 4 (2), 2003, pp. 95 – 121.

they argue needs far more radical action and an interventionist state, as outlined by Cousins recently: the target for redistributing land should be increased to 60 – 80 per cent, subdivision of large farms should be allowed, water rights should be reallocated to land reform beneficiaries, irrigation infrastructure must be increased, infrastructure and support services improved, the extension service and 'technologies they recommend must be reoriented to servicing the farming systems practiced by smallholders', and veterinary services should be extended to communal herds.[25] Researchers associated with PLAAS have put their support behind the revitalisation of smallholder irrigation schemes.[26]

One of the predominant explanations given by the Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights and Department of Rural Development and Land Reform for the failure of land reform to bring economic development has been the 'lack of business skills' of beneficiaries, 'lack of finance' and poor post-settlement support.[27] Thus, with regard to land restitution, the government introduced various programmes to try to provide training and financial support to beneficiaries, and shifted towards a model of forming strategic partnerships between CPAs and white farmers or consultants, and an insistence on business plans.[28] To deal with insufficient post-settlement support the government has spent money on 'recapitalising' failing or failed commercial farms. After allowing the old Bantustan irrigation schemes to decay, the government began the revitalisation of smallholder irrigation schemes, and began encouraging co-operatives in communal areas. To address the 'lack of interest' in farming, programmes have been developed to specifically target 'problem' groups, such as the youth.

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[25] B. Cousins, '"Through a Glass Darkly": Towards Agrarian Reform in South Africa' in B. Cousins and C. Walker, *Land Divided, Land Restored: Land Reform in South Africa for the 21st Century,* Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2015, pp. 267 – 268; M. Aliber, M. Baiphethi, R de Satge. J. Denison, T. Hart, P. Jacobs and W. van Averbeke, with R. Alcock, M. Antwi, A. Belete, B. Cousins, L. Field, I. Mariga, P. Masika, S. Materechera, D. Mayson, N. Monde and B. Tapela, *Strategies to support South African smallholders as a contribution to government's second economy strategy, Research Report 41, vol. 1*, Cape Town: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, School of Government, Faculty of Economic Management Sciences, University of Cape Town, 2009, p. 14.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Some examples: Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) Annual Report, 2001 – 2002, p. 8; CRLR Annual Report, 2002 – 2003, p. 7; Department of Land Affairs, 'Strategic Plan 2005 – 2010: Sustainable Land and Agrarian Reform, A contribution to Vision 2014', p. 10; Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights, Annual Report 2005 – 2006, p. 8; Department of Land Affairs Annual Report 2008 – 2009, p. 6; Also, MH interviews with officials from the Limpopo Land Claims Commission.

[28] Cardno Agrisystems Limited, 'Research Support to the Limpopo Centre for LED: Understanding the Economics of Land Reform in Limpopo and Developing a Best Practice Mdel for Post-Settlement Land restitution' 4 August 2008.

However, these policy shifts do not address many of the underlying constraints to farming that make it risky for smallholders, or challenging for large-scale commercial farmers; a list of problems to which post-apartheid realities have only added. Instead, arguments that Africans are not entrepreneurial enough when it comes to farming, that they lack marketing know-how, business skill and management ability, and that this, above other factors, is what is preventing greater agricultural production, are echoes from the past, it was assumed that if only Africans were taught, they would succeed as profitable farmers. Arguments that suggest that, given the right set of policies, smallholder farming could bring in a reliable income, livelihood, or improve food security, are still based on a set of assumptions about the history of South African agriculture that are too simplistic and fail to appreciate the significance and scale of constraints to smallholder farming that cannot simply be attributed to 'neo-liberalism'. Arguments that the failures in land reform can be blamed on 'lack of interest', fail to differentiate a vast rural population with different income levels, aspirations, needs and abilities, and what specific constraints they face. In what follows I look at the performance of land restitution farms and smallholder irrigation schemes in Mopani district (following through on the history of irrigation schemes and restitution of the previous chapters), as well as some of the farmers who are presently engaged in agriculture, and discuss some of the constraints they have faced.

Land Restitution Farms

In Mopani district, as elsewhere, the first ten years of land restitution saw some very high profile farm failures.[29] To try to prevent this from recurring, the Commission in the Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) made efforts to engage with white farmers and the agricultural unions, such as the Agri-Letaba Union and Agri-SA, from the early 2000s. [30] This was something Mokono felt was necessary, in light of the need for post-settlement support:

> The fact of the matter is there are people who've been farming on some of these farms for years. They've got the skills, they've got the knowledge, they've got the finance, they're really

[29] Hilton-Barber, *Footprints,* pp. 257 – 268; Hilton-Barber, 'As the tea grows cold'.
[30] Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights Annual Report, 2003, p. 40.

> embedded in that… they've got the technology. Now you come and buy him out that man, if he's a good man he may want to say, okay, let's sit and talk… [31]

From around 2004 the Land Claims Commission began to encourage strategic partnerships involving white farmers/farming consultants and claimants.[32] In 2006 the Commission 'agreed with both Agri-SA and the Transvaal Agricultural Union (TAU) that our co-operation with them must be reduced to a memorandum of agreement (MOA) and thus a commitment that their members, the current landowners, will support the restitution process.'[33]

However, some of these strategic partnerships and mentoring programmes have since failed, with some farmers saying they will never get involved again.[34] This has led to another shift in rhetoric. According to a recent newspaper report, Gugile Nkwinti, Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, said that 'the current situation was untenable and black people had been "bending over backwards" to accommodate commercial farmers, without any reciprocity.'[35] But blaming white farmers is as unhelpful as viewing beneficiaries as the problem. Here I want to consider in more detail the constraints that have faced restitution farms, and what the settlements have meant for land reform beneficiaries.

As I showed in the previous chapter, complex land claims took a long time to settle, and many remain unsettled. Negotiating a compromise between different claimants whose claims overlap or conflict is a slow process, slower still when multiple landowners are involved.[36] The length of time it took from gazetting a claim, to settling it, to transferring a farm, had an adverse effect on farming operations.[37] While a farm was under claim, the owner could not sell or otherwise make changes to the farm without getting permission

[31] MH interview with Mashile Mokono, 23 August 2011.
[32] B. Derman, E. Lahiff, E. Sjaastad, (2010) 'Strategic Questions about Strategic Partners: Challenges and Pitfalls in South Africa's New Model of Land restitution' in C. Walker, A. Bohlin, R. Hall and T. Kepe, (eds.) *Land, Memory, Reconstruction, and Justice: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa,* Athens: Ohio University Press, p. 307.
[33] Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights Annual Report 2005 – 2006, p. 6.
[34] Confidential interviews.
[35] P. Vecchiatto, 'Restituted land 'has produced tycoons', Business Day Live, June 25, 2014,
[36] M. Brown, J. Erasmus, R. Kingwill, C. Murray and M. Roodt, 'Land restitution in South Africa: An Independent Evaluation' Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management, 1997, p. 22 – 24; 2000, Nkuzi Annual Report, p. 5; 2004, Nkuzi Annual Report, p. 5.
[37] Centre for Development and Enterprise, p. 17.

from the Regional Land Claims Commissioner.[38] One farmer recalled that in the Letsitele Valley:

> There were guys that waited more than a year for their money, there was no money to pay them. And sitting in their farms, you can't move away, you're actually a prisoner on your own property, you can't make contingency plans, you can't buy another property until the government finally pays you, because there are many instances where they at the absolutely last minute withdrew… and then they [the farmer] goes bankrupt… The moment your farm is gazetted the banks stop being interested in financing you, you don't get credit. Where in the past your property was the guarantee that they used… now all of a sudden there's a land claim on the property and the bank doesn't know what the government is going to pay for it, and the bank says that the security you've offered is not acceptable anymore.[39]

During transfer, farmers certainly had no reason to invest in a farm that no longer belonged to them. By the time a farm was transferred, in many cases it been run-down for some years.

Similarly, without certainty about the future it did not make economic sense for farmers with their land under claim to pay for farm improvements or maintenance, as they would possibly never see the benefits of that expenditure. This has been particularly damaging for the horticultural industry, which is important in Mopani district, because farmers have to replace fruit trees after a certain number of years when they have passed their peak. For example, banana plantations are 'all under claim' according to de Jager, and banana farmers need to plant new trees every 12 years:

> The oldest land claims are 12 years old now. So the average banana farmer would renew 1/12th of his banana plantation every year. Now why will you spend a quarter of a million rand on bananas each year if you don't know you're going to get its fruit?[40]

According to de Jager, some banana farmers are going abroad, especially to Mozambique.[41]

In some cases, farms were purchased by the government as a stop-gap to deal with these challenges, as Mokono explained:

> [conflicting claims] had a negative impact on the landowners, and the landowner hopes very quickly that you may find who is the rightful person… For as long as you don't find a resolution here, 'I sit there with a hammer on my head, or a guillotine'… and that's been a major bone of contention. [The commission starts researching the claims] and then in the process someone

[38] Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994, Section 11 (7)(aA).
[39] MH confidential interview with farmer, 2012.
[40] MH interview with Theo de Jager, 24 April 2012.
[41] Ibid.

> comes there and says 'look guys I know you're busy trying to find who's who but I just want to sell, I just want to get out.' Sometimes we agree to that, we buy it in the name of government, but in the meantime… you buy an active running production farm and what happens? The government is owner. The government is not a good owner… of property and business land. They ain't! [42]

Meanwhile, white farm owners who, often unwillingly, remained on their farm were targets for theft and other forms of crime. Properties were vandalised possibly by frustrated claimants who experienced no change in their situation after years of waiting, or by criminals who took advantage of the management vacuum left on farms in the process of transfer. (Although as Mokono pointed out with regard to claimants 'stealing' – how can it be called theft when it belongs to you?)[43] Nkuzi Development Association raised these issues in an annual report, saying that the 'main cause' for communities being unable to farm on land they consider theirs is that:

> The RLCC…organises settlement ceremonies when no settlement agreement has been signed and farmers in other instances not yet paid. When claims get settled and beneficiaries are prevented from moving into [sic] the farm the infrastructure gets vandalised.[44]

Not only does infrastructure get vandalised and implements get stolen, very often the government fails to buy the necessary farm implements and packing sheds along with the land. When equipment was stolen, it was rarely replaced. Thus CPAs taking over farms have found they do not have the necessary implements and inputs to farm; if they do manage to farm, they then need to pay other farmers to use the packing shed.[45] Secondary value-adding industries – for example an atchar factory connected to the Murlebrook farm – are also not included in the sale, but this is where many farmers make a significant amount of money.[46]

[42] MH interview with Mashile Mokono, Polokwane, 23 August 2011.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Nkuzi Development Association Annual Report, 2005, p. 7.
[45] MH interview with farmers, Letsitele Valley.
[46] Ibid.

One of the most problematic aspects of land restitution, which a number of scholars have written about, is the inappropriateness of CPAs as vehicles of development.[47] In 1996, as land reform policy was being formulated, Delius made the point that:

> the currently pervasive rhetoric of 'community' can shroud the countryside in a dense conceptual fog. The diverse and shifting cleavages, conflicts and identities within local level society… provide ample warning against the expectation that organic communities lie latent in villages, waiting like Sleeping Beauty for development's kiss.[48]

Nevertheless, as shown in the previous chapter, many land claims have been community claims. Rather than giving individuals title to land, land has gone to CPAs. CPAs were expected to be naturally egalitarian and democratic, it was imagined that leaders elected by the community would have community interests at heart. They were thus given the 'tasks of development, social services and resolution of disputes'.[49] But communities are hierarchical and have cleavages of age, gender and class: people have different interests and may want to use the land differently. In fact, some people within claimant groups want different forms of restitution entirely. In the Mokgolobotho case many people expected to get money from the land claim, not land, but 'in 2011 they told us that we didn't claim the money we claimed the land… It's painful because even my parents, they died [thinking] that they will get money from their land.'[50]

Furthermore, as Delius noted with regard to communities in 1996, and which has frequently proven to be the case in the outcomes of land restitution, 'established networks of patronage and power are often able to monopolise or block new resources, whatever their intended destination.'[51] In the Mokgolobotho claim, one CPA committee member allegedly used funds to buy a luxury car for himself and invested in an entertainment complex on one of the restituted farms.[52] This has led to serious tension between the Mokgolobotho 'community' members and their leadership.

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[47] Brown et al, 'Land restitution in South Africa', pp. 52 – 56; James, *Gaining Ground,* pp. 73 – 74.
[48] P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, p. 224.
[49] D. Fay and D. James, 'Giving Back Land or Righting Wrongs? Comparative Issues in the Study of Land restitution' in C. Walker, A. Bohlin, R. Hall and T. Kepe, (eds.) *Land, Memory, Reconstruction, and Justice: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa,* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010, p. 50.
[50] RM confidential interview with community member, May 2012.
[51] P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, p. 224.
[52] Personal communication.

Furthermore, the process of decision making in a community does not suit the management needs of farming operations. To manage a farm well, decisions need to be made quickly. Making a decision within a CPA however is time consuming because of a need for consensus. One farmer spoke about what it was like from the perspective of a mentor:

> It is very hard to engage the beneficiaries of a land claim, as a mentor or a joint venture partner. I've tried it six times, I will never do it again. It is sheer hell to get to any decisions. In the one group I acted as a mentor I had to attend these meetings to explain to them what we should do next, and we must decide, should we plant maize or soya beans… I must sit in these meetings for 9 weeks, because half of them support the maize idea and half wants to plant soya. And after 9 weeks they decided on soya and the season was over….[53]

When government is also involved in the negotiations between claimants and farmers, there is potential for another level of disagreement and delay.

A farmer involved in the Mokgolobotho land claim for example tried to come to an arrangement with the Mokgolobotho CPA to lease the farm back for five years to help with the transition to new ownership, particularly in the light of what happened at Murlebrook. He already had a lease for one year, in order to allow him to take the harvest he had invested in and which the government was not paying for. He and his partner drew up a business plan which 'the community' was happy with, which involved targeting people from the community who wanted to farm, and sending them to an agricultural college in Nelspruit. But the project never received approval from the Department of Agriculture (DoA) who, the farmer believed, thought that 'all farmers are *skelem* that wants to rip their people off'.[54] The DoA 'actively tried to keep the farmers and the claimants apart', 'they were secretive about who's the claimants, where you can contact them'.[55] After starting their first year's lease, the farmers again got hold of the DoA and CPA in January to find out if they wanted to continue with the partnership venture, and if not, they needed to let them know which farm implements they wanted, as these had not been purchased along with the farm. By May, the cut-off date by which the farmers wanted a response, they had not heard anything, and the lease ended in August. In August the farmers were approached by the Mokgolobotho CPA, but this was too late. Not only had the farmers made other plans, but

[53] MH confidential interview with farmer, 2012.
[54] Interview with farmer, Letsitele Valley, 1 May 2012.
[55] Ibid.

fruit farming is an 'ongoing process': in June, the trees need to be fertilized for the next year's crop, even before the current year's crop has been harvested. Immediately after harvest, which starts in June and ends in September the trees need to be sprayed. In February leaf and soil samples are taken for the next year's fertilizer.

During this period of confusion over management, firebreaks were not maintained and a huge fire broke out that destroyed part of the orchard. Thus, before the Mokgolobotho CPA had even taken over full management of the farm, it was in bad condition, they did not have any implements, the packhouse connected to the farm did not belong to them, and expensive fruit trees had been destroyed. It was in this context that the Mokgolobotho CPA entered into a strategic partnership arrangement with Capespan, (a large agribusiness marketing fruit globally) in 2007.[56] Capespan had a 49 per cent share in the farm and the Mokgolobotho community 51 per cent. Capespan took over the management and administration of the farm.

The government assisted the Mokgolobotho CPA and Capespan with a grant of around R6 million to recapitalize the farm. Capespan used the grant to remove old fruit trees, some as old as 47 years, and replace them with new trees, and to repair the irrigation infrastructure.[57] Tensions soon arose. Underlying these tensions was a suspicion about where the R6 million grant was going to, and how profits were being spent. The CPA wanted to know why they had not received dividends despite having a 51 per cent share in the profits, but Capespan insisted that they were not making a profit.[58] Tensions reached a head when Capespan eventually pulled out of the partnership, citing too much interference from the DoA, and unforthcoming grant money for revitalising the farm, resulting in a loss to them of around R7 million.[59] Meanwhile, some individuals from Mokgolobotho CPA wanted to 'expose' Capespan for stealing money.[60]

In this case, the CPA was managing a fairly straightforward claim involving two farms. The way in which very large and overlapping claims have been dealt with has exacerbated what

[56] Kayamandi Development Services, 'Tzaneen Local Municipality, Local Economic Development Strategy Review', draft document, 2007, p. 51, accessed at http://led.co.za/sites/default/files/cabinet/orgname-raw/document/2011/local_economic_development_stratergy_review.pdf.
[57] Sandile Mgidlana, 'Deputy Minister visits land reform projects in Limpopo'.
[58] MH confidential interview.
[59] Personal communication.
[60] Personal communication.

would already have been a challenging scenario. The practice of merging claims and forming composite CPAs, as discussed in the previous chapter, has placed an even greater burden on an already fragile institution. Theo de Jager, who was a mentor and/or strategic partner for a number of CPAs pointed out:

> many of the officials who started off the in commission was land activists [sic], the same people who went out to tell people that they could claim. Then afterwards when they saw they would have four claims on the same farms, 6 claims on the same claims, they decided to merge them. … After those people got the land all hell broke loose. Brothers fight each other on farms, over who should have which rights. How much more different communities from different language groups?[61]

The pervasive conflict between different traditional authorities over land also has an impact on the ability of the Commission to provide forms of restitution other than a transfer of land. For example, Ximange was a chief who was removed from the farm Northampton and resettled under chief Hlaneki. The Ximange community put in a land claim for Northhampton, but in the intervening years the farm had been settled by other people. Thus, the farm could not be purchased for the Ximange community. Instead, the Commission proposed to build a clinic and other facilities that would benefit the community where they were presently settled. Chief Hlaneki however refused to allow that, unless the clinic was specifically called Hlaneki Clinic.

In this context, Hebinck and Cousins observe that 'land reform beneficiaries become disenchanted with the land reform process and/or that resource use does not follow the expert-designed business models, often leading to a particular entanglement of practices and new resource use patterns.'[62] On some land reform farms, people have settled as residents and use their plots of land to practice subsistence or small scale farming, and make use of natural resources. This is often despite there being plans on the farm to

[61] MH interview with Theo de Jager, 24 May 2012.
[62] P. Hebinck and B. Cousins, (eds.) *In the Shadow of Policy: Everyday Practices in South African Land and Agrarian Reform* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013, p. 17; See also F. Marais, 'Consultants, business plans and land reform practices' in Ibid.

develop it commercially. Aliber and others see this as an example of claimants and other rural poor being able to achieve their aspirations to access land. [63]

Some of the outcomes of the Mokgolobotho land claim could be seen in this light. On one of the farms the Mokgolobotho CPA owned, land was unused. Some individuals within the CPA committee began to sell stands to people who wanted to settle there. People began to move onto the farm and some have built homes and established small vegetable gardens and stands of maize. Most of the farm was dense bush, from where residents were able to collect wood and wild foods. However, there were no services on the farm, no electricity, water, or adequate roads, and the hillside stands were not levelled.

But was this what community members wanted? When the community was protesting about the fact that they had not received any money from the land claim, the Land Claims Commissioner pointed out that, aside from the orchards, there was plenty of unused land which community members could begin cultivating. But community members had been told that they would receive money, this was what they wanted and what they expected. Some of the community members I spoke to were not in need of land. They had large gardens where they grew vegetables, had access to extra dryland in other parts of the rural location, and used communal land to get firewood and gather wild foods. They did not need or want to travel the distance to the farm to use the land there. Communities sometimes enter into partnerships to manage farms and businesses in the expectation that they will benefit in terms of receiving dividends. But as in the Mokgolobotho case, these can be disappointing or non-existent. One community member expressed disdain at the prospects of getting anything out of the Mokgolobotho claim: 'There is no money there. It was better if [they] can buy each and everyone coca-cola to say this [is what we have] from Mokgolobotho land claim, so that we can forget and leave them.'[64]

[63] See M. Aliber, T. Maluleke, T. Manenzhe, G. Paradza, B. Cousins, *Land Reform and Livelihoods: Trajectories of change in northern Limpopo Province, South Africa.* Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2013.
[64] RM confidential interview with community member, May 2012; for more on disappointing dividends:

Irrigation schemes

When the ANC took power they cut funding and support to many old irrigation schemes because they were not economically efficient.[65] Old management agencies were dismantled and local government was given more responsibility for supporting these schemes. Some people working in the DoA were redeployed to other departments, such as the Department of Health.[66] Schemes collapsed, and by 2000, most of the 171 irrigation schemes in Limpopo were 'moribund'.[67]

As the government was cutting support to these schemes, a number of policymakers and scholars viewed irrigation schemes as having the potential to increase agricultural production, create employment and address food security in rural areas.[68] In 1998 the government shifted towards 'Management Transfer' and rehabilitation of these schemes. Thabina Irrigation Scheme in Mopani district was chosen to be the pilot project.[69] The gravity fed system, consisting of a main dam, two storage dams, a weir and a canal was refurbished and upgraded with four pumps (two diesel and two electric). In 2003, researchers from the University of Pretoria and Cirad (a French agricultural research centre) undertook a study to assess the performance of the scheme and the rehabilitation programme. They found that farming systems were diversified and that 'some farmers appear to be really intensive, market oriented and successful'.[70] Commercially-oriented pensioners in particular were the most successful farmers, achieving an average profit of R3,092 per year, and they played an important role as 'demonstrators, trainers and leaders' for other farmers.[71] The Water Users Association established a contractual relationship with NTK (a large agricultural supplier) to provide them with seeds, small implements and other inputs which would be sold at a reasonable price on the scheme, so that farmers would not

[65] S. Perret, 'Water Policies and Smallholding Irrigation Schemes in South Africa: a history and new institutional challenges' Working paper 2002-19, Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, University of Pretoria, p. 7.
[66] Personal communication.
[67] W. van Averbeke, J. Denison and P.N.S Mnkeni, 'Smallholder irrigation schemes in South Africa: A review of knowledge generated by the Water Research Commission', *Water SA* 37 (5) p. 798. Perret, p. 7.
[68] Ibid.
[69] S. Perret, M. Lavigne, N. Stirer, S. Yokwe, K.S. Dikgale, 'The Thabina irrigation scheme in a context of rehabilitation and management transfer: Prospective analysis and local empowerment' Report for University of Pretoria/CIRAD, December 2003.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid, pp. 6, 33.

have to incur transport costs. However, there was a lot of bad news too. Around 40 per cent of the land was unused, and profits were low: the average profit per year was R675 per ha, and most people working on the scheme had less than 2 ha. Operational costs were R177 per ha per year.[72] All but three of the 149 plotholders had plots of less than 2ha, giving them an annual income of R1,350.[73] Despite huge capital expenditure on pumps and upgrading the scheme, water supply remained a serious issue.

From the farmers' perspective, water shortage was 'the main concern in Thabina, by far'.[74] Section D of the scheme in particular suffered from a lack of water, being furthest from the supply. There were a number of reasons for the water supply problem. Electricity was cut off to the electric pumps because of non-payment of bills.[75] The electric pumps and the pumping stations were then badly vandalised, with copper wire being stolen from the machines.[76] These had not been fixed or replaced yet when the study was conducted, because of the high costs involved. Pumps also suffered from breakdowns and by 2004 only one pump was working.[77] Farmers did not apply the 'short furrow technique' which apparently would have been more efficient. Some farmers did not follow water use rules, and took more than their fair share of water by irrigating at night, blocking the canal with stones to speed up water flowing onto their plots. Some farmers took more than one day to irrigate their fields because of the uneven land surface. These practices all had a knock-on effect on farmers downstream.

'Erratic climate conditions' were a problem, and the 'drastic and long drought' in Limpopo in 2003 'sharpened the farmer's sensitivity' to the topic.[78] Finally, the Thabina dam, which initially had been intended for use by the irrigation scheme, was turned to domestic use by the local community. Part of the canal ran through a built up area, and local residents used water for washing clothes, gardening, and even for a plant nursery, among other things.[79] Veldwisch further identified technical problems with the layout of the scheme (including a

[72] Ibid, p. 6.
[73] Ibid, p. 23.
[74] Ibid, p. 21.
[75] Ibid, p. 21.
[76] Ibid, p. 15.
[77] G.J Veldwisch, 'Local Governance Issues after Irrigation Management Transfer' in Perret, Farolfi and R. Hassan, *Water Governance for Sustainable Development: Approaches and Lessons from Developing and Transitional Countries,* London: Earthscan, 2006, p. 5 (of draft).
[78] Ibid, p. 21.
[79] Ibid, p. 15.

low intake from the river and high rates of leakages in the main canal) as a major reason for poor functioning of the scheme.[80]

Aside from water shortage issues, the farm shop was robbed, farmers complained of crop theft, lack of funds, inadequacy and cost of implements, and lack of fencing. Marketing was not a problem for commercial farmers, although it was for subsistence farmers.[81] Perret et al did not go into the issue of farm labour on the irrigation scheme, although it is clear that labourers got paid very little, with commercial farmers spending on average R250 per ha per year on labour, and other farmers spending on average R41 per year.[82] Veldwisch focused on the governance aspects of the scheme, and pointed out that there was a 'lack of feeling of ownership of the project', no credit or financial support for farmers, a 'big gap' between the Management Committee and the rest of the farmers, problems around land tenure, and the fact that some people held onto land that they were not using.[83] Thabina was not the only irrigation scheme experiencing problems, by 2010, 69 of the 170 irrigation schemes in Limpopo were inactive, and those that were active, like Thabina, were not necessarily 'fully operational'.[84]

When I visited the scheme in 2011 and 2012, the DoA had recently begun a new project there, and had installed 3 centre pivots, irrigating 21 ha each, at the cost of about R10.5 million.[85] The plan was to farm these lands in groups, under the management of Leonard Rikotso and a farmer called Willem de Beer. Members of the Thabina scheme who hold PTOs (Permit to Occupy, which certifies that they are leaseholders) would become 'shareholders' in these farms. The Limpopo government promised R4 million to start up production in January, but because of financial problems in the Limpopo government, the funding did not materialise and the scheme did not start. In the meantime, the fields that were cleared (63 ha) in preparation, were slowly turning back to bush. One of the pumps feeding one of the central pivots had already burst when I visited in February 2012.[86]

[80] Veldwisch, 'Local Governance' p. 9.
[81] Perret et al, 'Thabina irrigation scheme' p. 22.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Veldwisch, 'Loacl Governance' p. 11.
[84] Van Averbeke et al, 'Smallholder irrigation schemes' p. 799.
[85] MH interview with Leonard Rikotso 10 February 2012.
[86] Ibid.

Only 76 ha of the 251 ha scheme were in production, because of a lack of water due to damaged pumps and canal. According to a farmer there, the technical problems are obvious – 'the canal is too small and the project is too big. Kgoshi Mohlaba has extended the scheme, why is the canal still the same?'[87] The farm shop was no longer functioning and farmers had to get their fertilizer and other inputs from the NTK in Tzaneen.[88]

The effects of the lack of water on the plotholders themselves are obvious – the majority were unable to farm. The effect on labourers also needs to be taken into account. When farmers are unable to farm, if their crops fail or they do not make enough money, they are unable to pay their labourers. According to one of the most successful commercial farmers on the scheme, he is unable to pay the minimum wage for farmer labourers (which he said was R650 in December 2011).This is not surprising given the very low profits that farmers make. The profit a farmer might make is also entirely dependent on a number of unpredictable factors, including, at the most basic level, water supply and market prices. And of course, 'if there is a drought workers must be laid off'.[89] Thus, labourers on smallholder irrigation schemes have no job security. Despite this, there are many who want to work on the scheme. 'Some of them are from outside our country, those people are suffering, so they have to come and work even if the money is a little bit small'.[90] Local women also work as labourers on the scheme, presumably because they have no other source of income. The 50 women who were usually employed by the scheme at this time of year to clear weeds from the farms were unemployed – there was no money to hire them. As I left the scheme I passed various people using the irrigation canals – women washed clothes, while a man washed his car (a relatively new 4x4).

Thabina is in one of the higher rainfall parts of the district, with an average rainfall of 790mm a year (although inter-annual variations are 'drastic' at 20-30 per cent).[91] It is also, by the standards of irrigation schemes in general, very successful in that many farmers were commercially oriented rather than subsistence oriented, and they made a profit.[92] Other schemes have performed less well, one notable example being the Macena project at

[87] MH interview with farmer at Thabina irrigation scheme, 14 December 2011.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Perret et al, 'Thabina irrigation scheme' p. 14.
[92] Ibid.

Muyexe.[93] This project is notable because of the huge financial support it received from the government when the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) was launched by Zuma in 2009. Muyexe was the pilot for this programme because it was considered to be 'the poorest village in South Africa', with poor infrastructure, limited access to water and no electricity. Before the CRDP was launched, the roads to Muyexe were so bad that taxis would not enter the area and people had to use donkey carts for transport.[94] Under the CRDP a new irrigation pump was provided for the Macena project, and a tractor was promised (and paid for). However, the pump motor was damaged, none of those working on the scheme was able to fix it and 'the person who knows how to fix it has had his services discontinued by the rural development department'.[95] The tractor promised in 2009 had still not been delivered by 2011.[96] When I visited Muyexe in October 2012 there were about 36 women involved in the scheme, they made around R1,000 a year and also took home tomatoes for their families. They did not receive money every month from the project. Water supply was bad, partly due to drought, partly to poor service delivery. Water supply is a wider problem in Muyexe, not specific to the scheme. In 2009 Nkuzi reported that 18 boreholes had been drilled but were not operational. Nsami Dam which could provide water for the village was dry due to severe drought, and when it filled up to 70 per cent capacity, pipes had still not been built to connect the dam to the village.[97] 40 households had been provided with JOJO tanks (water storage tanks) to harvest rainwater, but there was very little rainwater. Ultimately, the water shortage meant that people were not able to cultivate garden plots, and the Macena project was also adversely affected.[98] In 2011 there was still limited water supply, there were only six boreholes in the area and only two of which were fully functioning; 'two were operational, but their water outlets were corroded as a result of the high salt content of the water…the fifth borehole has also stopped working. The sixth

[93] For another case study of problems in small scale farming schemes in the Nkuna (Mohlaba) Tribal Authority area, see also T. Hart, 'African vegetables and food security for poor agrarian households in Limpopo Province: effective but neglected indigenous knowledge under threat', Aliber et al, *Strategies to Support South African smallholders, vol. 2,* pp. 163 – 166.
[94] 'Comprehensive Rural Development: A Case Study of Greater Giyani Municipality with Specific Reference to Muyexe Village, p. 10; http://www.rimisp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Paper_Tim_Maake-8.pdf, accessed on 23 June 2014.
[95] 'Muyexe Develops but Canaan is still miles away', 12 August 2011, http://www.zoutnet.co.za/details/12-08-2011/muyexe_develops_but_canaan_is_still_miles_away/9375
[96] Ibid.
[97] Nkuzi Development Association 2009 Annual Report, p. 20.
[98] Ibid, p. 19.

borehole is not operational because it was placed in an area where there is no underground water.'[99] In 2013 Mpowele Swathe of the Democratic Alliance called attention to the failure of the Muyexe project: 'When the DA visited Muyexe yesterday (Monday), some residents complained that despite promises made by Zuma, they still did not have access to piped water, roads still have not been tarred, unemployment and poverty remains high'.[100]

More general explanations for the problems with irrigation schemes do not focus on these issues. Perret discusses institutional challenges with regard to water sharing and management, shortages of labour, and inappropriate land tenure arrangements.[101] Cousins lists tenure arrangements and marketing problems, in that too many farmers are farming the same vegetables, and so are vulnerable to gluts.[102] Researchers involved in producing work for the Water Research Commission identified 'poor maintenance of infrastructure and equipment; high energy costs where pumping was involved; lack of institutional support in terms of credit; marketing and draught power; lack of extension and farmer training; conflict; and weak local organization'.[103] In 2010 extension staff on 164 of the 302 smallholder irrigation schemes in existence were asked to list what they felt were the primary constraints they faced. The results were: poor management (50 per cent), infrastructural problems (15 per cent), water inadequacies (13 per cent), conflict (12 per cent) and theft (7 per cent).[104] The involvement of farmers on a scheme depended on their stage of life and changes in income levels.[105] Van Averbeke et al also look at elements of the broader context within which schemes have failed; a steady decline in black homestead production since 1950, and the liberalisation of agriculture since the 1990s which has allowed large white commercial farms 'shored up by state support during much of the 20th century' to outcompete smallholders.[106] Finally, an 'absence of people' on irrigation schemes was given as a reason for why they perform poorly.

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[99] Sowetan reporter, 'Village to get clean water' *Sowetan Live,* May 19, 2011.
[100] SAPA 'Zuma's Muyexe Project a failure: DA', 25 June, 2013, http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/zuma-s-muyexe-project-a-failure-da-1.1537480#.U6gHYpSSy8A accessed on 21 June 2014.
[101] Perret, 'Water Policies'.
[102] B. Cousins, 'Smallholder Irrigation Schemes, Agrarian Reform and "Accumulation from Above nad from Below" in South Africa', *Journal of Agrarian Change,* 13 (1), 2013, p. 134 – 135.
[103] Van Averbeke, Denison and Mnkeni, 'Smallholder Irrigation Schemes', p. 801.
[104] Ibid, p. 799.
[105] Van Averbeke et al, 'Smallholder Irrigation Schemes', p. 800.
[106] Ibid, p. 801.

These general studies tend to look at the institutional arrangements within the schemes themselves, the problem of the farmers involved, and the broader economic context of liberalisation which makes it hard for smallholders to compete. The solutions they propose relate to changes in land tenure, institutional arrangements, and farmer training. None of these can address the ever-present challenges of farming, such as unreliable weather and rainfall, disease and pests, or new ones such as crime and vandalism. They also do not change the reality that incomes from smallscale farming are lower and less reliable than income from employment, or even grants.

Interest in farming?

'Lack of interest in farming' is frequently given as a key reason for why agricultural production in communal areas, and amongst black South Africans is so poor. Policymakers and scholars recognize that this is partly because of the limited profits made in smallscale farming.[107] Schirmer argues that many poor people are not willing to take the risks associated with agriculture.[108] Medupi Shabangu, who worked for Nkuzi, the Land Claims Commission and Agriseta, and grew up in a rural area, also pointed out that people decide whether or not to cultivate based on the early rainfall of the season.[109] Many people will not cultivate if it they do not believe it has rained enough. At the Thabina Irrigation Scheme, only 12 per cent of plotholders in Ward D, which had the greatest problems with water supply, were commercial farmers, while 65 per cent and 60 per cent of plotholders in wards A and B respectively were commercial farmers. Thus, 'It looks as if insurance of [water] supply plays a key role in strategy and farming style', wrote Perret et al.[110] This supports Schirmer's argument that risk aversion contributes to a household's decision not to cultivate. Water supply as noted before is only one element that affects the success of a crop and any profits that might accrue. Pests, disease, other weather events such as hail or strong winds, floods, crop theft, logistics and transport to market, petrol costs, and, finally, market price, are just some of the other factors which are unpredictable and contribute to

[107] M. Swarts and M. Aliber, 'The "youth and agriculture" problem: implications for rangeland development', *African Journal of Range and Forage Science,* 30 (1&2), 2013, p. 25.
[108] Schirmer, 'Policy Visions', pp. 143 – 144.
[109] Private conversation with Medupi Shabangu.
[110] Perret et al, 'Thabina irrigation scheme' p. 24.

the risk taken by farmers. Nevertheless, there are many people who continue to farm despite the risks and the low returns. Households engaged in agriculture tend to be very poor.

Fig. 11. Percentage of households engaged in agriculture per income category, 2011[111]

Income category of households	% engaged in agriculture
No income	84%
R1-R4800	17.2%
R4801 – R38400	28%
R38401 – R307200	18%

48.1 per cent of households in the district earn between R4,801 to R38,400 per year (between R400 and R3,200 per month). But the amount of people in that income category as a whole who are engaged in agriculture is just 17.2 per cent. Agriculture is most important to those with no income at all: 84 per cent of households with no income engage in agriculture, and these households make up 36.2 per cent of agricultural households in the district. In 2011 between 12.5 per cent and 15.9 per cent of households in municipalities in Mopani district reported no income at all. Between 66.3 per cent (baPhalaborwa municipality) and 85.8 per cent (Greater Letaba Municipality) earn less than R38 200 annually, that is, less than R3200 a month for households which average 3.6 people. So this means there are a lot of households for whom agriculture and other natural resources are crucial.

National statistics show that in 2011 between 28.9 per cent (baPhalaborwa) and 75.6 per cent of households (Greater Giyani) use wood for cooking, and between 20.8 per cent (baPhalaborwa) and 60.1 per cent (Greater Giyani) use wood for heating. A 2003 study

[111] Own calculations from Statistics by municipality, 2011, available at Stats SA: http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=993&id=greater-letaba-municipality; http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=993&id=greater-tzaneen-municipality; http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=993&id=ba-phalaborwa-municipality; http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=993&id=greater-giyani-municipality; http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=993&id=maruleng-municipality. Accessed July 2014.

showed that in three particularly poor, remote villages in the Mametja area of Maruleng district, between 94 per cent and 100 per cent of households used fuelwood.[112]

Colophospermum mopane wood in particular is popular for use not only in cooking and heating, but in building structures such as huts, maize granaries, animal kraals, fences and utensils.[113] Based on interviews with residents of the villages, the study found that between 72 per cent and 92 per cent of households depend on Mopane wood for constructing traditional structures.[114] Mopane wood in particular is preferred in building because of its strength and durability, and in cooking because it produces long lasting coals and a high quality of fire. [115] People also make use of a large variety of wild foods, building materials, medicinal plants, and grass for livestock. The direct-use value of these materials is significant to rural households. One study estimated the total value of resources used in three villages in Mametja's location, at 2003 prices. At Finale it was R3,576 per household per annum, or R497 per capita per annum. At Mabins, the poorest of the three villages, it was R5,019 and R697 respectively, and at Willows, R3,959 and R564.[116] Wild herbs (39 per cent), fruit (25.9 per cent), fuelwood (14.8 per cent) and edible insects (14.3 per cent) made up most of this value.[117]

The type of agriculture that households engage in varies between municipalities as the graphs below show. The significant variation between municipalities could be explained by access to markets, and better services. For example, water supply near the previously 'white' towns of Tzaneen and Phalaborwa, or because there is more land for grazing in the outlying communal areas. It is worth a further, systematic study of farming in these areas to explain the differences.

[112] W. Twine, D. Moshe, T. Netchiluvhi and V. Siphugu, 'Consumption and Direct-use Values of Savanna Bio-resources used by Rural Households in Mametja, a Semi-arid Area of Limpopo Province, South Africa, *South African Journal of Science,* 99, 2003, p. 469.
[113] R. A. Makhado,, M.J Potgieter and D.C.J Wessels, '*Colophospermum mopane* Wood Utilisation in the Northeast of the Limpopo Province, South Africa' *Ethnobotanical Leaflets,* 13, 2009, pp. 921-45
[114] Makhado et al, *Colophospermum mopane* pp. 927.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Twine, et al, 'Consumption and Direct-use Values', p. 470.
[117] Ibid.

Fig. 12. Percentage of Agricultural Households by Type of Activity[118]

Activity	Greater Tzaneen	Greater Giyani	Ba-Phalaborwa	Maruleng	Greater Letaba
Animals only	35.3	60.7	31.4	65.7	47.6
Mixed farming	13.8	16.7	12.6	17	20.7
Crops	47.7	19.5	52.6	14.9	28.5
Other	3.3	3.1	3.4	2.4	3.2

Fig. 13. Percentage of Agricultural Households in Specific Activity[119]

Activity	Greater Tzaneen	Greater Giyani	Ba-Phalaborwa	Maruleng	Greater Letaba
Livestock	18.1	35.9	16.3	25.3	26.8
Poultry	24.8	29.1	21.8	44.1	30.6
Vegetable	23.7	14	36.1	9.1	8.9
Other crops	27.7	14.8	18.9	15.1	27.7
Other	5.8	6.2	6.9	6.1	6

According to an extension officer, women in particular are interested in forming groups to establish poultry projects and vegetable gardens. It is mostly older women who argue that 'money comes from the soil'.[120] Similarly, keeping livestock is still viewed as a good way of acquiring and holding onto wealth, or at least providing a sense of security in some parts of South Africa.[121] According to Dacious Maropeng, an interviewee who is involved in herding cattle for his grandmother, cattle in the communal area of Modjadjiskloof sold for R5,000

[118] From statistics available by municipality, Stats SA; http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=964.
[119] Ibid.
[120] MH interview with Jane Baloyi, Berlyn Farm, 9 February 2012.
[121] W. Beinart and K. Brown, *African Local Knowledge and Livestock Health: Diseases and Treatments in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013.

per head, and looking after cattle is a good job for many people, young and old, male or female, at R400 a month.[122] While there is still a strong sense from talking to people that elderly women are the predominant farmers, provincial statistics suggest that there is a fairly equal gender balance in the types of farming practiced in Limpopo.

To what extent has the government assisted in securing these livelihood activities? The withdrawal of state support not only to large agricultural projects but to other elements of the extension service has had a negative impact on female small scale farmers and livestock owners. After apartheid the government stopped support for livestock health measures such as regular cattle dipping. The reason they did so was partly to save money given that African-owned livestock was considered 'uneconomic because so small a proportion was sold on the market', but also because of a trend to 'give livestock owners more responsibility'.[123] As with water management on irrigation schemes, livestock owners were expected to form their own dipping committees. But, as Beinart and Brown have shown, the loss of state support has meant that the onus is on livestock owners to protect cattle from, and treat them for, tick infestations. Controlling ticks is an important part of preventing livestock disease, as ticks are a vector for many diseases. In the absence of cattle dips, livestock owners are often obliged to treat cattle with expensive pour-on treatments or, if they cannot afford these, to buy unidentifiable, unnamed treatments on the informal market, use cheap disinfectants such as jeyes fluid, or use traditional remedies such as solutions made with aloe leaves.[124] The lack of support for cattle owners is very surprising given that most land in South Africa is natural grazing land.[125]

As I showed in previous chapters, the homeland departments of agriculture supported some women's agricultural activities and the agricultural projects they introduced, while inefficient, provided employment for many people. When the government cut support to farming projects many workers lost their jobs, and most of the workers were women. Of the 1,398 permanent employees on farming schemes in Ritavi and Giyani wards in 1985, 1076

[122] MH interview with Dacious Maropeng, Irene, 23 January 2013.
[123] Beinart and Brown, *African Local Knowledge,* p. 47.
[124] Ibid, chapter 2.
[125] R. Cowling, 'Options for rural land use in Southern Africa: An ecological perspective' in M. de Klerk, *A Harvest of Discontent,* Cape Town: Idasa, 1991.

were women. Of the 1,855 occassional employees, 1,430 were women.[126] Losing their jobs was a major blow to these workers. Women protested outside the Berlyn farm gates when they were laid off, singing 'we are working by force even if we are not getting paid', and 'this is our farm'.[127] The farm was leased out sometime in the 2000s, and the women were 'snatched up' by the new (white) farmers.[128] However, since a land claim on the farm was gazetted, farming operations have ceased. Women working in community gardens or programmes such as the Care Group, lost access to subsidised farming inputs. As with cattle owners, the state was essentially supporting agricultural activities that were not profitable and did not cover the costs involved.

In terms of land reform programmes such as redistribution and restitution, one of the concerns is that the interests of livestock owners and women in particular have been sidelined, partly because large-scale commercial farming operations or other commercial activities take preference in development plans. One official I spoke to suggested that one of the reasons land reform farms failed so often was that 'the first preference always falls to men', and men tend to be interested in harvesting what is there, rather than on production.[129] But what kind of land use is in women's interests? Looking at a village in the Nkuna (Mohlaba) Traditional Authority area, Hart made the point that, in the context of consistent problems with the local smallholder irrigation scheme, female cultivators focused on growing indigenous African vegetables on household garden plots.[130] These vegetables were more drought resistant than 'exotic' vegetables, and proved an important addition to household food stores. Some women sold the vegetables locally at a very low profit margin. Hart makes the point that, were there greater competition in the sale of these products as cash crops, these elderly women may be side-lined as in other parts of Africa. [131] Aside from the importance of home gardens, there is a very old pattern of women going to work on nearby white farms for the stable income it brings, as well as the fruit or vegetables they were able to sell.

[126] Fig. 8, chapter 5.
[127] MH interview with Jane Baloyi, extension officer, Berlyn farm, 9 February 2012.
[128] Ibid.
[129] MH confidential interview, 2012.
[130] T. Hart, 'African vegetables', pp. 164, 167.
[131] Ibid, pp. 174 – 176.

Commercial agriculture was the main employer in the area, particularly of women. But according to Theo de Jager, agriculture in Mopani district has dropped by 37 per cent between 2000 and 2008, and at least 32,000 jobs have been lost. Employment in commercial agriculture has been in decline since the 1970s due to a number of factors apart from land restitution, including mechanisation and minimum wage rates.[132] However, wages on commercial farms have increased. On many farms which have been transferred to CPAs, workers have lost their jobs, and farm workers often express anxiety around land restitution.[133]

Another of the failures of the government was not to deal with tenure reform in such a way as to make land tenure more secure for people in rural areas, particularly women. Rather, the government has made moves to increase the powers of chiefs particularly with regard to land.[134]

In the meantime, crime became a major constraint to cultivation and livestock keeping. In 2010 it was estimated that theft of borehole equipment had cost the Mopani District Municipality R10 million since 2006.[135] The cost in terms of income lost for farmers ought also to be considered. Between 2006 and 2010, at least 128 boreholes had been vandalised in the district. [136] Transformers, electric cables, water pumps, diesel and petrol engines were also stolen or vandalised. Certainly, not all irrigation equipment was replaced, or it took years to replace, particularly on small schemes. In Hart's study borehole equipment provided to a village by the Gazankulu and Mopani governments was stolen in 1991 and 2004 respectively, and otherwise rarely functioned. He makes the point that 'the

[132] T. Simbi and M. Aliber, 'Agricultural Employment Crisis in South Africa' TIPS working paper 13_2000; N. Vink and J. Kirsten, 'A Descriptive Analysis of Employment Trends in South African Agriculture' Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, University of Pretoria, 2001_8; M. Wegerif, B. Russell and I. Grundling, *Still Searching for Security: The reality of farm dweller evictions in South Africa,* Polokwane: Nkuzi Development Association, 2005; D. Atkinson, *Going for Broke: The fate of farm workers in arid South Africa,* Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007.
[133] MH interview with Frans van Zyl, 1 May 2012; MH and RM interview with Alfred Letsadi, Murlebrook farms, 27 September 2011; Johannes Magoro, Mogoboya location, 26 September, 2011.
[134] A. Claasens, 'Land, Law and Custom, 1913 – 2014: What is at stake today?' in Walker and Cousins (eds.), *Land Divided, Land Restored,* pp. 68 – 85.
[135] Alex Matlala, 'Council loses equipment worth R10m' *Sowetan Live,* Oct 20, 2010.
[136] Ibid.

predilection for community projects that involve readily stolen borehole pumps must be recognised for the stalemate that it is.'[137]

According to de Jager the livestock industry in Mopani district has been in dramatic decline because of crime. The sheep industry has 'closed down', 'you won't find sheep around here anymore'.[138] Beinart and Brown found that 'theft was cited as the most common factor in the demise of… older systems of pastoralism'.[139] Pastoralism had been important in maintaining livestock health.

Violent crime also deterred older and younger women from cultivating in distant, isolated fields. Josephine Shikwambana said she stopped farming in 1994 because 'gangsters' were raping and murdering women in the fields.[140] A different story was that a woman had been targeted for murder by a family member, who wanted to use her body parts for muti.[141] On a visit to Thabina irrigation scheme I was told of incidences of rape that had occurred at the scheme, and I was strongly warned not to walk around the scheme on my own. When I wanted to walk about a kilometer out of Dan Village to the site of the old Care Group farming scheme which had served a group of female smallholders, my female companions refused to go, saying we would certainly be raped if we went into the bush. The irrigation pump, water storage containers and marketing shed that had serviced the Care Group scheme had all been dismantled and stolen years previously.

Water supply remains a key constraint not only to agriculture but to health and sanitation. In 2011 about 18 per cent of people in the district as a whole were reliant on water sources which are unreliable during times of drought, that is, springs, rainwater tanks, dams and stagnant water, rivers and streams. In 2011 it was reported that 'about 300,000 of the 1.3 million population of the district depend on water brought in trucks by the municipality for their household needs, while others pay exorbitant prices from those who have boreholes in their yards.'[142] Chronic water shortages affect large parts of Mopani district, particularly the

[137] T. Hart, 'African vegetables and food security for poor agrarian households in Limpopo Province: effective but neglected indigenous knowledge under threat.' *Strategies to Support South African Smallholders as a Contribution to Government's Second Economy Strategy,* vol.2, PLAAS, 2009, p. 178.
[138] MH interview with Theo de Jager, 24 April 2012.
[139] Beinart and Brown, *African Local Knowledge,* p. 134.
[140] MH and RM interview with Josephine Shikwambana, Dan Village, 25 September 2011.
[141] Conversation with Ripfumelo Mushwana, 27 April 2012.
[142] Kingdom Mabuza and Alex Matlala, 'Water project for villages drags on', *Sowetan Live,* Mar 24, 2011.

former homeland areas. Water scarcity regularly makes the news. In 2009 a severe water shortage during a drought, and the lack of sanitation, raised fears of a cholera outbreak that could affect over 800,000 residents.[143] In 2011 all municipalities in the Mopani District were declared disaster areas after the Nsami and Middle Letaba Dams ran dry, although this had been a problem since 2008.[144] In 2013 it was reported that residents of sections of Kgapane township in the Modjadjiskloof area had been without water for 8 years, without explanation, and that the Greater Letaba municipality also 'failed to dispatch water tankers to supply them with water.'[145] In 2012 'Angry residents of Mountain View in Giyani…gave the Mopani district municipality three days to provide water for them or 'they would make the municipality ungovernable' – people were particularly angry about being supplied with 'contaminated water' from water tankers.[146] Meanwhile, residents of Sephokubye village, Greater Letaba Municipality, were 'forced to share drinking water with animals', after the government failed to supply water pipes seven years after holes were dug for them.[147] At Muyexe in 2009, infrastructure was in place for water but there was no water reticulation, and people had to purchase water from those who owned boreholes.[148] Water cost R1 per 25 litres, which locals considered expensive for the unemployed and those reliant on government grants.[149]

Millions of rands have been spent on water projects but the roll out of water reticulation services has been very slow. In 2010 Mopani District Municipality launched a R90 million project to draw water from the Nandoni Dam to supply villages around Giyani and Modjadjiskloof which were suffering from chronic water shortages.[150] A R24 million project in the Sekororo area took six years before it was completed.[151] One of the reasons for the delay in rolling out these programmes was conflict over which government department or authority would be in charge of the project, and the finances involved. A R54 million project

[143] Alex Matlala, 'Dry dams raise fear of cholera outbreak' *Sowetan Live,* Sep 2, 2009.
[144] Mabuza and Matlala, 'Water project for villages drags on'.
[145] Frank Maponya, 'Residents with no water for 8 years' *Sowetan Live*, Jun 8, 2012.
[146] Benson Ntlemo, 'Protesters want clean water' *Sowetan Live*, May 30, 2012.
[147] Frank Maponya, 'Years with no water' *Sowetan Live,* Jan 18, 2012.
[148] 'Comprehensive Rural Development: A Case Study of Greater Giyani Municipality with Specific Reference to Muyexe Village, p. 11; http://www.rimisp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Paper_Tim_Maake-8.pdf, accessed on 23 June 2014.
[149] Nkuzi Development Association 2009 Annual Report, p. 21.
[150] Alex Matlala, 'Mopani to get water at last' *Sowetan Live*, Oct 28. 2010.
[151] Alex Matlala, 'R24m water project done' *Sowetan Live,* May 11, 2011.

for example was stalled two years after being launched because the Mopani District municipality wanted to take over the project and the funds involved from national government.[152]

Poor environmental management is another factor affecting water availability. The decline of the extension service and the end of unpopular betterment and planning regulations has had a negative impact on water supply. According to an extension officer near Sekororo location (against the Drakensberg mountains), water supply downstream to the irrigation schemes has declined in recent years, which he ascribes to cutting trees and ploughing on the mountain slopes[153].

Poor environmental management also affects the sustainability of other wild resources that are critical to the livelihoods of rural people.[154] For example, the authorities no longer regulate the use of wood, leading to the reduction of woodland around villages. Thus women, who have the task of collecting wood, need to travel further to access it, which takes more time out of their day (between one and five hours). Makhado et al point out that this 'limits women's involvement in other socio-economic activities' and causes back and leg pains. [155] Furthermore, a reluctance to travel these long distances could lead rural people to use other tree species, which emit more carbon and smoke. This could affect the health of fuelwood users, who tend to be women and girls doing the cooking for example.[156] Twine et al argue with regard to fuelwood use that:

> The development opportunity cost of unsustainable resource use… needs also to be taken into account in policy and initiatives that aim to achieve sustainable rural development… The results of our survey suggest that rural poverty is linked to 'environmental impoverishment'. Addressing the problem of unsustainable harvesting of the natural resources on which local communities rely, therefore, is a vital component of tackling rural poverty in South Africa.[157]

[152] Mabuza and Matlala, 'Water project for villages drags on' Mar 24, 2011.
[153] MH interview with extension officer, October 2012.
[154] Makhado et al, '*Colophospermum mopane*', p. 922.
[155] Ibid, p. 926.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Twine et al, 'Consumption and Direct-use Values', p. 472.

From October 2014 drought hit parts of Mopani and Vhembe districts, and as of January 2015, 2,000 cattle had died, a disaster for locals, many of whom rely on cattle in the absence of employment.[158] Professor Edward Nesamvuni of the Centre for Rural Community Studies at the University of Limpopo suggested that this was because 'government had prioritised residential areas over grazing land', and competing land use was 'not regulated by national government and district and local municipalities.'[159]

While cattle owners struggled to feed their cattle, the government aid which they can expect for drought relief is currently useless – because drought aid is only provided after the disaster. Claims for drought aid from 2001 were still being processed. Cattle owners were selling their cattle at 10 per cent of their usual value. As Tshineo Mathidi, the Limpopo president of the Emergent Red Meat Producers Association said, 'It is discouraging for aspirant meat producers as they don't have resources to enter the industry because their cattle have died'.[160] Due to global climate change, extreme weather events such as drought are expected to become a greater problem in South Africa in future years.[161]

Aspirant Farmers

During my research I met a number of individuals who had experience in farming at various levels and wanted to begin farming commercially.

Tsakane Ndeble, was a manager of Murlebrook farm (one of the Mamathola farms) when I interviewed her in 2011 and 2012. In the past she had farmed on her father's three ha plot, which had been left to her and her brother when he passed away. With no money for irrigation or inputs, it was precarious, dry-land farming. She farmed cabbage, tomato and her father had also planted mango trees. In 2003 she took part in the female farmer of the year competition, and made contacts that led her to gain more experience and training. At the same time, she also began to look for other paying work that would enable her to pay

[158] C. Makana, 'Drought Cripples Limpopo Farmers', *The Star,* Jan 7, 2013, http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/limpopo/drought-cripples-limpopo-farmers-1.1448228#.VORXz_mUeh4.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] For how climate change is affecting livelihoods in South Africa: L. Joubert, *Boiling Point: People in a change climate,* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008.

her employees – two or three people. Her family had been supportive in helping to pay their wages when the farm was not bringing in an income, but Tsakane wanted to become self-sufficient. She got various jobs as a contractor, but in her spare time still worked on her small farm, and eventually decided to put in irrigation. She requested help from the DoA, and they provided her with pipes and an old water pump but did not provide her with the specific water line she required. As of 2011 she still had not received it. The land is still in use, but rather than cash crop farming, they are planting seasonal crops including maize.

On the one hand, Tsakane could be seen as a beneficiary of land reform. She draws some income from her job as manager of Murlebrook – the Mamathola restitution farm now under administration. But on the other hand, she is an example of someone who is aspirations to farm independently as a commercial farmer have found little outlet. Tsakane has a potential business partner, with experience in cash crops and chickens, and they are searching for a 300 ha farm. But this is difficult because of land claims – which since their re-opening will only get more numerous and disruptive. Tsakane finds this frustrating, emphasising that 'a land claimant and a farmer is not the same thing.'[162] Tsakane is in fact part of the Mhinga community, which received land through restitution, but has not had access to these resources. The Murlebrook farm she manages is under administration, and, according to her:

> The department doesn't want to give land, they want you to work there until their plans work out. Their plan is now bringing in an investor. Giving land back to the community didn't work, the strategy partner didn't work. Now they've just got workers on the farm. Now they're thinking of an investor.

Samuel[163] who I wrote about in chapter 5, was born in one of the locations that sit at the foothills of the Drakensberg. Too poor to go to school, Samuel got a job with a local white farmer at a young age. Over decades this relationship developed and Samuel was also able to run a store at the same time as working on the farm. He started a family and his children grew up on the farm. In the early 1990s the white farmer passed away and his children sold the farm. Samuel had no option but to 'go back' to the communal areas. He settled under a different chief to the one he was born under, and got permission to run his cattle on the

[162] MH interview with Tsakane Murlebrook farms, 23 August 2011.
[163] Not his real name, this informant wanted to speak with anonymity as he fears reprisals for criticising the ANC led government, and still hopes to be assisted by government.

location, get access to an irrigated plot, and begin farming in the neglected orchards. Soon after he arrived he began to run into trouble. In 1993 drought hit the district. There was not enough water for everyone in the irrigation scheme, and so he lost his crops and his cattle were not allowed to drink the water. Samuel lost 22 of his cattle, to thirst and to the plastic bags and poisons littering the communal area, which the cattle ate in the absence of grazing. A conflictual relationship developed between himself and the chief, as he wanted to use more water than he was allowed, and others were 'jealous'.

Some years later the children of the white farmer he had worked for asked him to manage a farm they had just bought, and he moved there with his family, severing ties in the communal area. His son by now was grown up, and had spent his life more interested in farming than in school. In 1992 he planned to write matric but the family's fortunes had been destroyed by the drought and, with no money, he could not get further schooling. The family ran the new farm for a number of years until the owners approached them about buying the land, which Samuel and his son were keen to do. They applied to the DoA for assistance in buying the farm but were told this was not possible because of a land claim on the farm. Samuel and his son purchased the farm anyway, with a loan from the Land Bank which covered the cost of the land but not of production or implements. Slowly they sunk into debt, they got extra jobs to make an income, and the farm was repossessed and sold to a church group unconcerned about the land claim. They were fortunate not to be evicted from the farm, and they still live in their house. The son provides labour to the church group to allow his family to remain living on the farm, and they are allowed a small plot to grow vegetables. Thus, in the context of massive redistribution and a mandate to increase the number of black commercial farmers, an experienced farming family now lives destitute, essentially as labour tenants on a farm they once owned, with little security of tenure in the context of land claims.

Samuel and Tsakane have a lot in common with Saul and Mack Rammalo, the exceptional producers at Mamathola's location, and all other black farmers who wanted land to farm as commercial farmers, but could not in the context of the extension of reserves and bantustans. While the state is purchasing huge areas of land for Africans, the way that black people in Mopani district can access it is either through 'communities' (sometimes imagined communities), or tribes in massive land claims where, unless they are in a small elite group,

they are unlikely to benefit. Or, as smallholder farmers on irrigation schemes, which bring in an extremely low income and where plot-holders have to work as a group and co-operate if the scheme is to function – and it rarely does.

2009 onwards: Blaming the Poor

Minister Lulu Xingwana's 'use it or lose it' speech could be seen as another key turning point in the discourse around land reform and why it has failed. She said that despite enormous support from the government and the previous owner, the farm near Hammanskraal that she visited was in a terrible condition due to the failures of the claimants themselves: 'despite all these support systems… the beneficiaries are not passionate about farming.'[164] 'They also stole property bought by the government and sold it to other commercial farmers around Hammanskraal…We cannot afford to have crooks working for us. We need productivity and results'.[165]

Despite the realities of the many constraints to farming, including unreliable water supply and crime, there has been an increasing tendency to blame the beneficiaries themselves, in fact, to blame the poor in general, for their failure to become thriving small-scale farmers and members of co-operatives.

Some expressions are racist: Africans' 'lack of ability to manage', and 'tendency to swipe cash,' according to one farmer. According to another:

> Their perception of farming is… completely wrong. They thought that farming was an 8 to 5 business where you lock the door when you leave, and what happens over the weekend on the farm has got nothing to do with them. Where the plants get water from, it's somebody else problem it's not their problem. So it was quite a culture shock when they took these farms over.[166]

[164] Sapa, 'Use it or lose it', *news24* 13 March 2009 http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Use-it-or-lose-it-20090313.
[165] Basa Mushi, 'No Crooks – Just Results!' *Daily Sun,* 16 March 2009, http://152.111.1.87/argief/berigte/dailysun/2009/03/16/DJ/27/farmlaunch.html, accessed 8 January 2015.
[166] MH confidential interview with farmer.

The lazy 'undeserving poor' draw the ire of officials and others who attempt to 'help them to help themselves' but are disappointed in the results.[167] 'Whether nor not' youths participate in agriculture they are 'portrayed as wayward, lazy, and vulnerable to crime and substance abuse.'[168] At the Mopani World Food Day conference, held in a communal area outside of Phalaborwa, an audience of black South Africans were told by a disapproving middle-aged black female government official, 'We are a grant society. … We can't continue like that…In South Africa we think that "government owes us something", you don't ask, "what is it that I can do for this government?"'[169] The audience were unfavourably compared to hard working Indians and others in developing countries where family farms and co-operatives were, according to the speaker, seen everywhere. These hard-working 'others' were doing a better job in South Africa too:

> you know our Indian brothers who are here in South Africa. They are not here to sleep. Including our brothers from Somalia from Zimbabwe, they're not here to sleep. There may be those who have criminal mentality… but [the rest] are here for business.[170]

In contrast, the business skills of locals were derided in a finger-wagging presentation, where the criticism was not simply about entrepreneurial instinct, passion, or interest in farming, it was about locals' lack of skills and ability, even their motives:

> When people started forming a co-operative, they were trying to look around to see if they can get a grant from the government. There's no sense of ownership amongst the members. I was asking one co-operative member, how much have you paid to become a member? You know what she told me? She paid only R20, a membership fee of R20. Are we talking business or are we talking a spaza shop? Even if we are talking a spaza shop, you cannot buy a spaza shop by a mere R20. When you ask them further, how much is your yearly subscription fee? They know nothing. Why? Because the formation of those co-operatives were wrong. Somebody somewhere was having money, he wanted to use that money, wanted to utilize that money, but he thought of grouping people to become a co-operative so that the money can be out of his pocket… But we forget the purpose of the formation of co-operative, why are we doing co-

[167] See for example D. James, 'Citizenship and land in South Africa: From rights to responsibilities' *Critique of Anthropology* 33 (1), 2013, 26 – 46.
[168] Swarts and Aliber, 'The "youth and agriculture" problem', p. 25.
[169] Keynote address at Mopani World Food Day Conference, 11 October 2012.
[170] Ibid.

> operatives, why are we registering co-operatives, why are we grouping our people to form co-operatives. We are forgetting about that.[171]

What people are forgetting, according to the speaker, is that co-operatives are about creating businesses to pull people out of poverty.

Elderly women – the most prominent members of farming groups, the most active in small scale agriculture – have themselves been blamed for the poor performance of agriculture in the area. On the Madiba Trust Farm, a previously white owned farm purchased by the government and sold to shareholders (community members) in around 2001/2002, production was low compared to other commercial farms in the area. One study funded by the French Government, European Union, World Vision and a range of other international development organisations offered three reasons for this poor production: 'no background in farming', limited financial means, and 'a lack of labour force. The major part of the group is composed old women [sic]. The few young men remaining are not enough to insure alone all the hard labour on the farm'.[172] A number of reports looking at the performance of irrigation schemes 'usually depicted plot-holders as old, poor, mostly female uneducated people, incapable of dealing with the sophisticated management requirements of irrigated farming and victims of their dependency on the state and its agencies'.[173] At the Mopani World Food day conference in 2012 (the UN Food and Agricultural Organisations' 'Year of the Co-operative') a speaker mocked the female farmers on the Macena project, an irrigation scheme that has been running since the 1990s:

> Let me give you the example of Muyexe. Everybody is pumping money into Macena co-operative, why? Because it has been identified by the president's excellency and everybody wants to be seen as if he or she is doing something, whereas we are neglecting the other co-operatives. Go and look at what is happening, when you look at the books you will be shocked. Because the treasurer of that co-operative, she doesn't even know how to write and how to read. That is the treasurer. Are we running a co-operative? No, we are not. [174]

[171] Presentation at Mopani World Food Day Conference, 11 October 2012.
[172] D, Ramay and M. M. Michèle Beullier, 'Agrarian System in Sekororo Limpopo Province South Africa', 2005, p. 32. http://www.waternetonline.ihe.nl/challengeprogram/IR06%20Agrarian%20system%20Sekororo.pdf, accessed April 2015.
[173] Van Averbeke, et al, 'Smallholder irrigation schemes', p. 801.
[174] Presentation at Mopani World Food Day Conference, 11 October 2012.

Shabangu gave me the example of a co-operative to which only women belonged, averaging fifty years of age. The co-operative had been running for 30 years. At some stage, the co-operative got a loan of R1.3 million, but the members were not aware of what the money was for. The money was spent, some of it going to consultancy fees, the loan was not paid back, and the co-operative is now at risk of liquidation. Young people, Shabangu told me, would have asked more questions about the money.[175]

In an ironic twist, rural black South Africans are now encouraged in public meetings to be more like the boers.[176] White farmers who had 'taken' the land in 1913 have been presented as successful farmers who the audience should emulate. At the public meeting on the new restitution of land rights bill in 2013, the audience was told:

> the land that was taken from us as far back as 1913 has changed hands from one generation to the other because they chose to take the land, work the land, develop the land, and change from one generation to the other…[177]

At the World Food Day conference, the audience were told that:

> If you're a farmer, every day you must be on the farm, you can't be in a tie. Khaki boots, by die plaas, jy's a boer. A boer meneer! … so that we are able to be proud of you as South Africans to say, definitely we are the food basket of Southern Africa.[178]

At this meeting, Bertie van Zyl, the patriarch of the enormous ZZ2 tomato farms, was held up as an example of what a good farmer is.

Meanwhile, despite all of the constraints to agriculture, and the experiences of the failure of restitution farms, rural 'communities' are encouraged to choose land, not money, in restitution claims. This was the clear message at the public hearing for the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Bill, held in Sekhukhune district in November 2013. In a speech in which rural people were accused of being over-reliant on social grants and of 'eating money', the speaker turned to the choice claimants had over whether to take money or land:

[175] Medupi Shabangu, conversation, 24 November 2011.
[176] James 'Citizenship' , p. 39.
[177] Public Hearing on 2013 Restitution Amendment Bill, Sekhukhune District, Limpopo.
[178] Keynote address at Mopani World Food Day Conference, 11 October 2012.

> The example people are giving us is that if you get [money] you will disappear from the radar for a while whilst you are still eating and spending the money in the area around… where you are staying. The only time we will see you is when that money is finished and you will be joining the queue for grants, wanting money from government. You will say we need money from the state, when you have finished your money and also sold your land. Some people are saying if you have land you will stand a better chance of investing on your land, improving your land… but calling on the state to walk hand in hand with them to help them develop the… land, to be productive.[179]

At the South African Local Government Conference on 24 March 2015, Zuma intimated that 'people complained about their poverty, yet they walked on the land which could produce food and not go hungry. "Plant a seed and have food come out" he said.'[180]

Conclusion

Giving land back to communities and liberalising the agricultural sector did not result in the emergence of an African peasantry post 1994. Rather than looking seriously at the history of agriculture in South Africa, which shows that the assumptions underlying these policies were problematic, policy makers, advisors and important scholars still hold onto an idea that in the past, an African peasantry existed which was more efficient than white farmers. Failing to recongise the many constraints to smallholder farming, these actors instead blamed neo-liberalism, enduring capitalism, a failure to undertake radical agrarian reform, and beneficiaries lack of farming, management and business skills, for the poor performance of land reform. Rather than taking lessons from the failure of policy in the last twenty years, the government continues to place blame in the wrong places. In recent years, the government has shifted from blaming the poor performance of agriculture on land dispossession and past agricultural policies, to the 'lazy poor'.

Failure of restitution farms is also rooted in the failure of policmakers to appreciate the depth and complexity of potential claims to land. This led to massive delays in the settlement of claims, which impacted on the farming operations being transferred from white farmers to Communal Property Associations. A failure to recognise that 'communities' are inappropriate vehicles for development and for managing large commercial farms, also led to the failure of restituted farms.

Irrigation schemes have been revived, without a serious examination of how they performed in the past (poorly) and why this was so. Had policy advisors taken this history

[179] Public Hearing of the Land Rights Amendment Bill, Moses Mabatha Civic Centre, 19 November 2013.
[180] Natasha Marrian, 'Citizens rely too much on state, says Zuma', *Business Day,* 25 March 2015.

seriously, they may have recognised, amongst other things, the significance of water shortage and drought as a constraint to smallholder agriculture, even on irrigation schemes. While spending millions of rands on schemes that target 'communities', smallholder irrigation farmers, youths, and 'entreprenuers' with capital of their own, land reform does not cater to the needs of those who maintain an interest in farming, in particular women, and aspirant commercial farmers.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have provided a history of a particular region over a long period, to show why a deep understanding of history is important in policymaking. As Woolcock et al point out, historical assumptions influence policymaking, but without the critical input of professional historians, that history 'is likely to be naïve, simplistic and implicit, often derived from unconscious assumptions or vague memories; as such it is likely to be highly selective, used to suit predetermined purposes, and to be largely unverified'.[1] Since the 1990s, a set of historical narratives, and other arguments, have guided land reform policy, and how it has been implemented.

Large tribal and communal claims are supported by a vision of the nineteenth century as a time when chiefs with royal blood reigned uncontested over vast territories with clearly defined borders. They are also supported by the idea that Africans were, from time immemorial, or by nature, communal, tribal, traditional, and that a tribe or large community was and is the natural social and political unit to which they belong. The idea that the history of land settlement is neatly layered, and that one can trace, by going far back enough, the 'rightful' tribe or group to whom the land and its resources belonged, supports xenophobic attitudes.

Many imagine, as Tozi Gwanya did, that 'up until the 1960s' or until 1913,

> when able-bodied rural men had to go for employment in the mines and manufacturing industries in order to be able to pay compulsory taxes, the rural economy was self-sufficient. Rural communities used appropriate technologies and produced their own food, without any dependence on migrant remittances, social grants or groceries from the supermarkets.[2]

This naïve historical vision informed the argument that with a 'reversal' of racially discriminatory policies, or radical agrarian reform, or, more recently, a change in attitude of the poor, it is possible for communities to 'once again' be self-sufficient. To think that '[s]ystematic dispossession, reduced land holding, insecure tenure, industrialisation and

[1] M. Woolcock, S. Szreter and V. Rao, 'How and Why History Matters for Development Policy' in C.A Bayly, V. Rao, S. Szreter, M. Woolcock (eds.) *History, Historians and Development Policy: A necessary dialogue,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, pp. 7 – 8.
[2] Commission for Restitution of Land Rights Annual Report, 2002-2003, p. 6.

urbanisation' are the primary and enduring cause of 'the lack of interest in agricultural production in rural areas,' [3] or that successive white governments intentionally destroyed an African peasantry, similarly supports the idea that smallholding will be efficient and profitable with the correct set of policies.

The first five chapters of my thesis showed how little the history of this region resembles these narratives. In the nineteenth century chiefdoms expanded and contracted, fought wars, and were mobile. Ordinary people had the strongest rights to the land they used, they were also mobile, free to choose where to live, guided by concerns such as security or access to better land. They were not bound to a particular chief. Chieftaincies contained people with different ancestries, histories and languages.

In the nineteenth century the northern and eastern lowveld and escarpment was connected to important trade networks linking the east coast to the interior, passing through the metal working and ivory region of Phalaborwa and surrounds. People were engaged in many different economic activities. 'Communities' and homesteads were not entirely self-sufficient. Trade was important for those in hunting and metal-producing regions to survive. Drought and famine were a reality which forced people to be mobile, and made trade and other forms of interaction between groups a necessity. Many chiefs and other powerful people did not have the interests of 'the community' at heart: they collected tribute, controlled trade and sometimes labour, even raided and sold people into slavery, to gain wealth and status. The fact that maintaining a following, not acquiring land, was important to their power, moderated some chiefs' demands. But this was not at all a romantic past of self-sufficient egalitarian communities, to which one might dream of returning.

For the first decades of the twentieth century, with peace and new property systems, chiefs had limited control over the rural population, and the rural population had less reason to seek their protection. Families were mobile, and could access land independently from chiefs. Under the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act the government embarked on a massive land purchase programme which took decades to complete. Land was purchased to extend the locations of chiefs. By allowing only for the purchase of land for 'tribes' under the trusteeship of chiefs, the wishes of aspirant black farmers and in fact any Africans who

[3] Ibid.

wanted access to land independently, were crushed, and their rights to land denied. Thus, rural areas were divided into African communal areas where people had to become subject to a chief, or white farms where tenants had to provide labour (particularly from the 1930s to 1960s) and were then forced to leave (from the 1960s).

Over time, with the 1950 Bantu Authorities Act and the creation of homelands, chiefs gained more power over land. In this way, and over generations, Africans became increasingly constrained in how they could access land. Loss of rights to land was a gradual process, and each generation was affected differently. Many people experienced this constriction of rights to land as a family or individual, not as a community.

Even where farm communities experienced large-scale removal, resettlement or eviction, individual households had some choice in where they would go. Different households living on the same farm may not have followed the same chief or headman, or in fact anyone at all. It was not only men of royal blood and lineage who were considered chiefs. Some leaders, who mobilized groups of people in the context of evictions, land shortage and imposition of unpopular chiefs, became recognised as headmen or chiefs in their own right. Some men represented farm tenant communities, or landowners, on white farms, and acted as intermediaries between landowners and farm populations. They were also known as headmen. The history of land settlement, community and authority is enormously tangled; linking a farm, a community, and a chief together and calling it 'the history of X' is often an exercise of omission and exclusion.

Another important historical trajectory of the twentieth century is that claims to land became important in the struggle for political recognition and access to substantial resources for chiefs and other brokers. With the creation of ethnic homelands, fostering exclusionary notions of tribe and belonging and connecting access to resources with ethnic identity, land became tied to ethnic tensions.

In the twentieth century migrancy and trade continued to be important to rural households. Migrancy was critical in helping families to cope with drought, and preventing famine in rural areas. Agriculture and wild resources such as wood and food have been an important part of the homestead economy throughout the century and remains so today. Certainly up to the 1940s, agriculture was very important for women in particular who bartered maize

for goods they required in local stores and with traders. But even before land shortage became an issue, women were not selling a 'surplus' as peasants do – they were clearly tied into a migrant economy in which they expected, or hoped for, another source of maize and money which would feed the household. In the lowveld, cattle became more important to households as the area was made suitable for cattle keeping with the eradication of tsetse fly.

Agriculture, and sale of produce, was difficult in this region, particularly up to the 1940s. Poor transport links, limited access to markets, the disadvantages of selling as individual small scale producers spread out over a large area, made marketing difficult. Unreliable rainfall, cattle and crop disease, pests such as locusts, wild animals, a heavy work burden, and occasional drought all made agriculture precarious and challenging. But, a key point to make is that in this period, there was still plenty of land in Letaba district which Africans could access.

It seems that from the 1930s, with the 'opening up' of the area with better transport routes, increasing settler population, access to markets, and agricultural extension, there were significant changes in local agriculture. More women started growing exotic vegetables in home gardens, some producers established large orchards and farmed irrigated plots of land. However, there were specific challenges to farming in communal areas with limited money for inputs and improvements. Fields and gardens were not safe from livestock, which regularly destroyed crops.

As the decades progressed, the population grew and land for farming became scarce, the ability of households to farm as much land as they wanted declined. Those few serious farmers were constrained in how much land they could use, and some, such as in Mamathola's location, lost their orchards during forced removals. However, the Department of Native Agriculture supported small scale irrigation schemes, and initiated the Letaba Bantu Farmers' Co-operative (LBFC). During the Bantustan era, existing irrigation schemes received support from the homeland governments, and new ones were established. These schemes were subsidised and costly to support.

Trust regulations and unfair marketing practices such as making African producers market their produce at reduced rates for 'Native Markets' no doubt discouraged farmers on these

schemes. During the Bantustan era farmers tended to be blamed for poor production, and were penalized. This may have caused further ambivalence towards the schemes. However, many other factors had an impact on the performance of the irrigation schemes, and the LBFC. Pests and disease, marketing gluts, transport problems, lack of credit, weather events such as frost and hail, unpredictable rainfall and periodic drought were all enough to make even subsidised farming on irrigation schemes difficult and in some years impossible. Irrigation infrastructure was not enough to cope with some droughts, and sometimes the infrastructure was damaged, which caused further problems in water supply and was costly to fix.

Given the unreliability of smallscale farming on these schemes, many men preferred waged employment. Farmers and labourers on irrigation schemes also sometimes chose to work on neighbouring white farms rather than the scheme, because they would be paid, and sometimes received fresh fruits or vegetables which they could use and sell. This occasional farm labour was very important for household economies, and perhaps more reliable than their own small scale farming. Over time, people lost interest in agriculture not simply because of land shortage and unfair marketing policies, but also because there were other opportunities for making a living. Young people with an education looked forward to having a more comfortable life than their unskilled parents. However, many elderly women continued to cultivate and use wild resources, and this was a critical part of the homestead and reserve economy. Extension officers were valued by many women. Women were the predominant farmers on small scale irrigation schemes, but their needs, such as secure access to these plots, were denied. The most devastating events to affect agriculture in the reserves, including small-scale irrigation schemes, dry land farming, large estate schemes, commercial farms, and livestock farmers, were the severe droughts that hit the district in every decade of the century.

Thus, this history of land settlement and agriculture in Mopani district reveals a number of important things. The history of the implementation of the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act shows that ambitious programmes of land purchase by the state could take a long time, because of the need to negotiate with landowners, and because in the context of competition for the state's financial resources, budgets are limited. One of the greatest injustices of the 1936 Land Act was not simply that 'Africans' as a whole were dispossessed

of land, but because individuals were constrained in how they could access land, and they lost independence. When officials offered chiefs a return of their 'ancient tribal territory' conflicting claims emerged, and this was before the enormous political and social upheavals created during betterment planning, homeland consolidation, and intensified removals from the 1960s. By almost exclusively 'returning' land to chiefs and communities, the wishes of those who want to purchase land individually are undermined.

The history of land settlement reveals that determining the rightful owners of land would at best be difficult, at worst fuel the destructive forces of ethnic tension and xenophobia. A programme of restitution that defined land rights broadly, to include customary tenure, formal title and tenancy, would inevitably result in multiple conflicting claims to land. The historical trajectories of the twentieth century, which saw chiefs compete for land which they were then given unprecendented control over, made large tribal claims likely. Serious historical research to determine the merits of claims, is necessary for the settlement of land claims to be as fair as possible. But also – all rural people have experienced the injustices of South Africa's racially discriminatory land laws. All have had their options regarding how to access land and where, constricted. Land restitution could not address all of these experiences of injustice.

The history of agriculture and irrigation schemes shows that the failure of African agriculture cannot simply be blamed on land dispossession and on laws and policies intended to destroy an African peasantry. The government made some effort to support small scale farming. There were many causes of poor harvests, poor prices, and diminishing interest in small scale agriculture that cannot be reduced to policies. One of the most serious constraints to agriculture has been water scarcity, due to drought, unreliable rainfall and limited infrastructure. Finally, there are many people interested in farming. Rather than treating elderly women as a symptom of the decline or poor performance of agriculture in reserve areas, they should be supported. Similarly, the needs of aspirant commercial farmers need to be understood, and they cannot simply be stereotyped as entrepreneurs who already have capital, or greedy 'elites'.

In chapters six and seven I looked at what happened in Mopani district when land reform policies impacted on these realities. After initial cuts in funding, small scale irrigation

schemes were once again revived and government spent millions of rands per scheme on expensive upgrading of irrigation equipment and infrastructure. To address the 'lack of interest' in agriculture, government officials design programmes to target youths, and, in recent years have begun to berate audiences in poverty stricken rural areas for being uneducated, lazy, innumerate, and lacking in business acumen. In the meantime, those who continue to practice small scale agriculture, such as elderly women, continue to struggle with water scarcity, and crime. Water shortage remains a chronic problem in the rural areas. The natural resources on which the majority of rural people continue to rely, are not being managed. Land restitution has possibly made this more difficult as new entities often struggling with internal conflicts take control of land. Re-opening land restitution will upset this further.

Land restitution was interpreted broadly to accept large claims based on 'customary' land rights. Overlapping and conflicting claims were merged, partly to speed up and attempt to simplify the process of restitution, but also drawing on the idea that if people claim the same land, they must belong to the same community. The Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights was ill equipped to deal with an enormous task, and have regularly outsourced the task of compiling historical validity reports to consultants. The CRLR, and many of these consultants, were unaware of historical methodology and these reports were often problematic and imbued with assumptions. Land restitution has taken a long time, and many claims have still not been settled.

Large commercial farms were transferred to communities on the assumption either that people would return to the land and start farming together, or that they would be able to take over large farming operations. The result was that these farms often failed, partly because claims took so long to settle, with consequences for farming operations in the period of uncertainty over ownership. They also failed because of the inappropriateness of largely imaginary communities to manage complex businesses.

Restitution has thus failed to bring redress. Black people living in rural areas continue to be treated as members of tribes or communities, and not as individuals with a range of aspirations and needs. Ironically, one might say that restitution has been too narrowly defined: it does not address the multitude of experiences of loss of rights to land that

people have experienced over generations. Many people were not able to choose what form of redress they wanted, but were forced to receive restitution as part of a group. The ways in which they can access land continues to be constricted. Those black individuals who want to purchase land for commercial farming have found it enormously difficult to do so. Re-opening restitution has made this even more difficult, as more farms will be under claim, and many will be under competing claims. Restitution also makes it unlikely that individuals will find it easy to get loans from the banks to purchase farms, or otherwise invest in land.

Most worryingly, land restitution has made access to land and resources in rural areas dependent on belonging to the correct tribal/community or ethnic group. More than that, it supports the idea that, as Kuper says, people with the correct ancestors have more of a right to land and resources than those who arrived more recently.[4] Not only does this idea fail to recognize that communities and populations have always been in flux, but it deepens a situation where there are insiders and outsiders based on ethnicity or belonging to a particular group, a situation which Bantu Authorities and homeland consolidation already enflamed. Restitution as it has been implemented and continues to be implemented, is creating a situation where vast parts of the country could be under the authority of different chiefs representing not just tribes but ethnic groups. These claims will be challenged by others using the same narrative of ancient belonging. And the stakes are high: access to economic opportunities in rural areas, including in mining and eco-tourism, not just commercial agriculture, may be dependent on having a claim to land, or being part of a land claim. Rather than providing redress, restitution as it is currently imagined is likely to lead to conflict, anger and disappointment.

[4] A. Kuper, 'The Return of the Native' *Current Anthropology,* 44 (3) 2003.

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