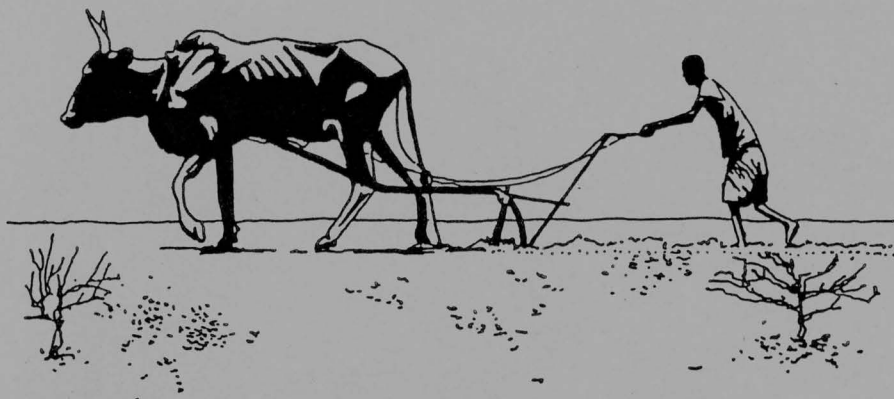


# NO BLADE OF GRASS:

Rural production and state intervention  
in Transkei, 1925-1960.

Terence C. Moll



CAMBRIDGE AFRICAN OCCASIONAL PAPERS 6



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The African Studies Centre was founded in July 1965 to facilitate interdisciplinary research and teaching on modern African Studies in Cambridge. The Centre publishes the Cambridge African Monograph Series and the Cambridge African Occasional Papers. The aim of these series is to make available occasional research reports, seminar papers, conference proceedings and bibliographies relating to African Studies.

Terence Moll is a Ph.D. candidate in the Faculty of Economics working on structural change and sectoral productivity differentials in the South African economy since 1945. The African Studies Centre is pleased to be able to publish his work on the Transkei as part of a wider programme of publications and public lectures, which it has been undertaking since October 1986 in order to promote wider awareness of issues in Southern Africa.

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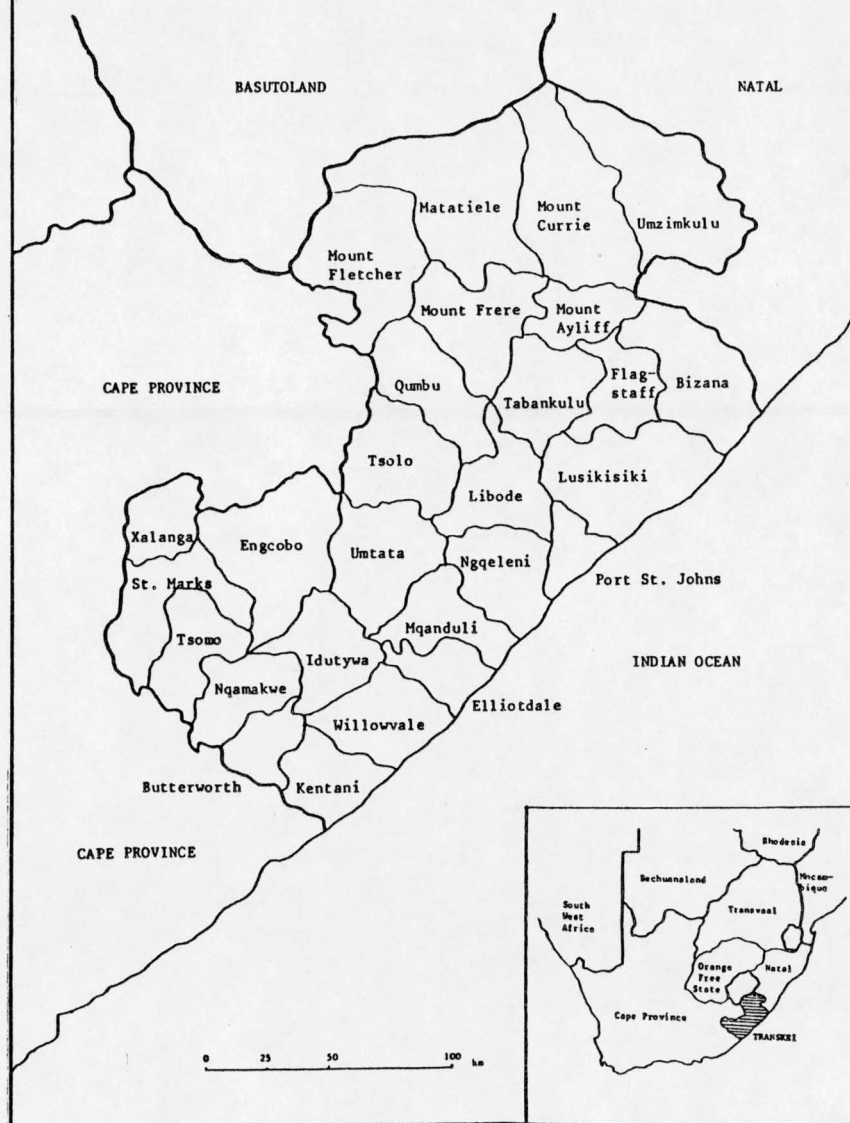


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# TRANSKEI c. 1936

MAGISTERIAL DISTRICTS



Map 1. Districts of Transkei, c. 1936.

# INTRODUCTION

There was this chap, I remember him very well. He was a man of about 40, and he said, 'For fifteen years I've been bringing my money back and buying a cow each year. I've got my bicycle and one heifer left, the rest died off'. He was married, but no milk at home though [...] He took off for Cape Town with his family, to look for a job, he had nothing left here, his land was all washed away [...] (J.A. Norton, former Chief Agricultural Officer of Transkei, interview, 2/1/83).

This quote refers to a migrant worker in an eroded area of Western Transkei in the late 1940s. It illustrates a central issue in South African politics at the time: rural degradation in the African reserves and household responses to it, and the concern of government officials about rural economic decline, combined with an underlying fear of consequent African urbanisation and the associated decline in traditional forms of social control.

The African reserves were 'functional' to South African capitalism in the first half of the twentieth century. In early years, subsistence production in the reserves provided some use-values for consumption by African migrant workers and their families, an economic factor stressed by early left-wing theorists of apartheid (cf. Curtis, 1984). This served to keep down urban wages and facilitated rapid capital accumulation and economic growth. The reserves played another crucial role, however. In general, the class forms (relations of power and dominance between strata and classes) of pre-capitalist African societies were deliberately and fairly successfully preserved by the policies and practices of the South African state, but in such a way that the real *loci* of political power moved to the South African administration (Moll, 1983, ch. 6). This was reinforced by the lack of homogenisation of rural production conditions and only partial proletarianisation via the migrant labour system. The net result was that producing households were divided and disorganised, tending to resort to traditional power structures or individual effort rather than collective protest against political oppression in the form both of the local

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dominant classes and the South African state.

From the point of view of the state, then, the reserves were a means of African political control. They served as a mechanism for keeping African families out of 'white' areas, disciplining migrant workers, and hampering trade union and urban political and community organisation. This politically 'functional' role was only effective as long as households were earning incomes from the land. As this income fell, conflicts of interests between rural groups declined, forms of ideological control (eg. the legitimacy of the chieftaincy) collapsed, and political struggles uniting households were fought out increasingly against the state. Most importantly, however, agricultural decline in the reserves led Africans to seek their economic future in the urban areas of 'white' South Africa. Muller shows a steady increase in households permanently migrating from Transkei to South African urban centres in the twentieth century, with a particularly rapid rise between 1931 and 1946 (1985: 9, and Table 7), an observation supported by several contemporary accounts (e.g. Hellman, 1949: 239-241; Horrell, 1954: 6-9). This 'supply-side' explanation is a crucial complement to the more 'demand-oriented' explanations (economic growth, industrial development, shortage of labour during the War years) of pre-1948 African urbanisation.

Conditions in urban areas of South Africa allowed far more scope for African political organisation. The separation from the means of production and subjection to capitalist control and discipline inherent in mining or manufacturing work brought workers together on a common basis, and when collectively subject to poor social conditions, made capital and state very clear opponents. Likewise, the different urban economic position of African women allowed far more 'space' for their political involvement, both in women's organisations and in combination with men (Lodge, 1983, ch. 6). In such circumstances, new forms of political resistance emerged, with issues of wages, passes, housing, transport and urban services firmly on the agenda (Lodge, 1983, ch.1; Stadler, 1983, 1987; Lewis, 1976).

This paper focusses on economic decline, household survival strategies and the state response in 'Transkei' during the critically important 1925-1960 period. Transkei is the foremost African reserve situated on the Eastern seaboard of South Africa and has been governed as a unit since 1903 (see map 1). It has long been a 'model' reserve in South Africa, with policies being

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Transkei' (replacing the former administrative term, 'Transkeian Territories') is used here purely for analytical convenience and implies no recognition of the region as a political entity.

tested there before being applied to other African areas. The Transkei story thus provides useful insights into state policy towards Africans, especially regarding the post-1948 transition to apartheid and the new forms of state economic intervention and political control which emerged in this period.



# ECONOMIC CHANGE IN TRANSKEI, 1925-1960

## INTRODUCTION

From the later 1800s, the region now termed 'Transkei' was steadily incorporated into the South African economic and social system. Various surplus-extracting forces were imposed on rural households through contact with capitalism and the Cape colonial government - these included taxes, land limitations, forced labour migration, wars and trade, complemented by influenza, natural calamities and high population growth rates outstripping the growth of agricultural output (Bundy, 1979: 203, 242-3; James, 1982, ch. 4; Beinart, 1982, chs. 1-2). Households responded to the need for cash income by selling produce or stock, or by providing members to work as wage-labourers in 'white' areas.

By the early twentieth century, the people of rural Transkei were settled in permanent homesteads - isolated units of production, based largely on kinship relations - scattered over the countryside. They survived by engaging in agricultural activities (most importantly, maize production and keeping cattle and sheep), although they also relied on occasional stints of low-wage migrant labour to earn cash, obtain incomes during droughts and help maintain agricultural investment (Cooper, 1981: 298ff; Beinart, 1979: 19, 182). They can be termed a 'peasantry', attempting via selective participation in the outside economy to resist its absolute domination and retain control over productive activities (Roseberry, 1983: 81-84; cf. Boesen, 1979: 157- 8).

There is considerable evidence that this somewhat fragile equilibrium was rudely disrupted by a general economic crisis which hit the reserves in about the early 1930s.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of the crisis was a long-term decline in land and stock productivity, leading households into increased reliance on wage-labour and encouraging urbanisation. The challenges and threats posed by these trends were to lead to a restructuring of the relationship between cities and reserves over the next 20 years - and to the reserves becoming a very explicit means of *controlling* Africans and diluting urban political resistance in the 1950s.

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<sup>1</sup> The physical aspects of this crisis had an uneven impact on the reserves. The Ciskei and Western Transkei were suffering severe erosion in some areas by the 1920s, for example, while eastern Transkei and Zululand were far better off.



## SOIL EROSION

The major link between the environmental and social aspects of the crisis was soil erosion. It has been estimated that almost 400,000 hectares of Transkei are very suitable for crop production, around nine per cent of the surface area. Much of the rest of the land is fairly steep and irregular, with a broken topography giving it an extremely high soil erosion potential. Over 60 per cent of the land area slopes more than 15 per cent, and most is prone to erosion. It is covered by 'duplex' soils whose topsoil is sandy and permeable, while the subsoil is clayey, dense and impermeable. The soil is thus subject to waterlogging in wet weather, dries out in dry weather, and, being light, loses fertility if not well treated. (Hawkins Associates, 1980, chs. 2-4).

Soil erosion was perceived as a severe problem in Transkei by the 1930s, with many reports of increased sheet erosion, declining soil cover and the denudation of forests, and widespread gully erosion in this period. Pastures were becoming increasingly scarce and overgrazed, sheet erosion was ruining heavily-grazed areas of formerly luscious sweetveld in storms, water run-off was increasing and hence droughts were becoming ever more serious.<sup>2</sup>

The 'conventional' approach to soil erosion treats the environmental issue as the problem, and seeks a *technical* solution for it (Baker, 1985, 9ff). Soil erosion is regarded as the result of incorrect or reckless decisions made by individual production units: for example, ploughing steep land, herding sheep and cattle along the same paths, allowing sheep to outgraze palatable grasses, or overexploitation of forests. These problems are tackled via prescriptions like environmental education, fencing, anti-erosion works and legislation (eg. to limit cattle numbers), which rarely work as planned. Failure is ascribed to ignorance, tradition and economically perverse farming behaviour.

At a broader level, though, soil erosion can be evaluated in the context of struggles between classes and groups over access to and control over resources. Blaikie (1981, 1985) argues that the connection between the destruction of nature and the oppression of the dominated classes in peasant societies such as the African Reserves should be understood in terms of the exploitation of the latter directly (migrant labour) or indirectly (taxes, trade, measures of political control) by external social forces. These induce '[...] a more desperate, less finely-tuned use of the environment' (Blaikie, 1981: 63), whereby direct producers are forced into using poor cultivation techniques to

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<sup>2</sup> Physical aspects of Transkei soil erosion are discussed by McKenzie (1984); also Fox and Back (1937), Mears (1947), Davidson (1949).



survive in the short run - overexploitation of crop lands, overstocking pastures, rapid use of forest resources. These do not allow the fertility of the soil to be reproduced, and under certain circumstances lead to degradation and/or soil erosion (ibid, 69).

Transkei's recent economic history illustrates these tendencies very clearly. By the 1900s, Transkei peasant existence was based on fixed residence and reasonably permanent allocations of arable land. Under conditions of limited land area (partly due to restriction of African land ownership to the reserves) and rising population, land pressure escalated. Population figures were, of course, influenced by the urban policies of the Smuts-Hertzog regimes: the population (including absentees) of the reserves rose from 2.7 million in 1919 to 3.3 million in 1934 and over four million in the early 1950s (Tomlinson Commission, 1954, 7.19: 100) - though the land area of the reserves had risen by then. Confined to limited resources in Transkei and earning low wages, faced with demands for surplus and the imperatives of survival, African households were forced to overexploit the land, which had the long-run effect of undermining the fertility of the soil and lowering cereal and pastoral output.

One such survival response by rural producers was to cultivate marginal land - on steep slopes, very near rivers, on stony patches and in other areas subject to erosion. This was often noted in Transkei Betterment reports in the 1940s (UTA A, 1 1/K). The De Wet Nel Committee remarked,

It is obvious that every acre that can possibly be ploughed has been used. Cases are not unknown where Natives have attempted to plough so-called arable land on the sides of hills that are so steep that the oxen and the plough have fallen into the valley below (1954: 133- 4).

For Transkei, Jokl claimed that between 1931 and 1943 60,000 additional hectares of land had been taken under cultivation (1943: 6), a figure equal to about 10 per cent of the area cultivated in 1930.<sup>3</sup>

By 1943, around 700,000 hectares were being cultivated, much of it highly unsuitable for crop production and prone to rapid sheet-erosion within a few years of being first cleared (De Wet Nel Committee, op cit).

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<sup>3</sup> This issue is also discussed by Bundy (1979: 117ff), Davidson (1949: 82), Mears (1947: 133).

In pre-colonial times, the fertility of agricultural land had been maintained by continually clearing new lands and allowing old allotments to lie fallow for a number of years and acquire a grass ley. In the twentieth century an increasingly common strategy was not to take old arable allotments out of use, but to cultivate them until their yield was negligible and soil fertility was reduced almost to zero ('Memorandum' on Stabilisation Planning in Transkei, 1957; CMTT 1158, 64/B IX: 4-5; 'Memorandum' on Land Usage and Necessity for Control over Farming Operations in Transkei, 21/11/46; UTA A, 1 1/K).

By the early 1900s, a food-production crisis was imminent in Transkei, due to important labour inputs into agriculture being lost to the migrant labour system, high population growth rates, lack of state farming support, environmental deterioration and so on. The crisis was postponed for some years largely by increasing the absolute land-area under cultivation, and holding more stock. This increasingly precarious relation between population, ecology, maize harvest and livestock production came to a head in the early 1930s when land and stock productivity began a marked decline, from which they were never to recover.

The Great Depression led to a fall in mining and secondary industry employment of Transkeians, lower real wages and less money back home in the rural areas, and hence a lessened ability to purchase the financial inputs necessary to maintain agricultural activities. It greatly worsened the suffering induced by poor seasons in 1931 and 1932 and the 1932-33 drought which ruined the 1933 maize harvest. In Transkei the harvest was estimated at about 37 per cent of a 'normal' - but rarely achieved since - harvest of 2.5 million (200lb, or 90kg) bags (*UTTGC Proceedings*, 1933, Appendix). Other estimates were lower, and in some districts almost nothing was reaped (*District Record Books*, Qumbu, Idutywa). According to Kenyon,

The year 1933 was one of death and hardship almost unprecedented in the history of the Territories. There had been a long period of economic stress and a succession of poor seasons followed by severe drought which lasted for nearly the whole year. Many were brought face to face with starvation ... (1939: 101).

The following year's crop was better, but poor rains and locusts in 1935 were followed by disaster in 1936:

The harvest of 1936 will go down in history as one of the poorest

experienced in the Native Territories of the Union (*NAD Report 1935-1936*, UG41/37: 37).

Transkei agricultural productivity never seems to have recovered from this disastrous period - physically, in terms of soil being blown away or washed away in rains of later years, and socially, due to skills and resources being lost.<sup>4</sup> This hypothesis is supported by an examination of pastoral and crop production data.

## PASTORAL PRODUCTION

For the reserves as a whole, Simkins estimates the value of pastoral production at around two thirds of the value of total agricultural production between the 1920s and 1960s (1981: 260). Livestock holdings were the most important capital asset in Transkei agriculture. For the reserves and Transkei, figures on total cattle and sheep holdings are reproduced in Table 1. The *Tomlinson Commission Report* notes that over the period 1918-1930, cattle numbers in the reserves rose by 132 per cent, sheep figures rose by 55 per cent, and likewise equines and goats, such that total Large Stock Units<sup>5</sup> (LSU) rose 92 per cent. Reserve livestock numbers were probably at an all-time peak in about 1931 or 1932, though stock censuses were not taken in these years. In the following eight years, the reserve land areas rose by almost 30 per cent but the livestock population slowly fell, including a radical drop shortly before 1934 for all areas and a net drop in sheep numbers in the 1933 drought of almost 900,000 in Transkei, or 25 per cent of the flock. Over the next 15 years, the reserves increased in size by 10 per cent and stock numbers again fell slightly overall, most clearly noticeable in a 250,000 net fall in Transkei cattle numbers in the 12 years after 1940. (See Tomlinson Commission, 1954, 7.19: 100, 103-6.)

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<sup>4</sup> White South African farmers faced similar problems of soil erosion, drought and lack of finance, especially in the 1930s, but overcame them due to ample land, a cheap labour supply, and massive state financial, skills, research and marketing assistance (Lipton, 1977; Keegan, 1986: 641-644).

<sup>5</sup> One LSU = one cow = one horse = five sheep = five goats (Tomlinson Commission, 1954, 7.19: 120).

**Table 1:**                    *Stock Figures: African Reserves and Transkei 1918-1952*  
                                  (x 1000)

Year	African Reserves			Transkei	
	Cattle	Sheep	LSU	Cattle	Sheep
1918	1 554	3 016	2 892	-	-
1919	-	-	-	572	-
1920	-	-	-	661	-
1921	2 179	3 006	3 606	733	-
1922	-	-	-	847	-
1923	2 501	3 150	3 953	952	2 085
1924	2 722	3 289	4 209	1 065	2 188
1925	2 847	3 367	4 335	1 126	2 338
1926	3 067	3 708	4 673	1 235	2 499
1927	3 207	4 115	4 972	1 331	2 780
1928	3 322	4 238	5 146	1 403	-
1929	3 464	4 412	5 362	1 459	2 975
1930	3 613	4 675	5 554	1 535	3 185
1931	-	-	-	1 611	-
1932	-	-	-	1 568	-
1933	-	-	-	1 555	3 490
1934	3 206	3 207	4 725	1 484	2 613
1935	3 320	3 213	4 844	1 462	2 478
1936	3 366	3 600	4 998	1 575	2 439
1937	3 358	3 662	4 986	1 586	2 390
1938	3 443	3 535	5 062	1 554	-
1939	3 606	3 655	5 240	1 586	-
1940	-	-	-	1 646	2 493
1941	-	-	-	1 664	2 642
1942	-	-	-	1 580	2 543
1943	-	-	-	1 498	2 776
1944	-	-	-	1 503	2 587
1945	-	-	-	1 521	2 437
1946	3 337	3 374	4 892	1 476	2 195
1947	3 237	3 645	4 886	1 444	2 309
1948	3 321	3 875	5 065	1 487	2 540
1949	3 395	3 755	5 141	1 516	2 434
1950	3 099	3 358	4 730	1 360	2 194
1951	3 106	3 662	4 799	1 345	-
1952	3 080	3 456	4 714	1 398	-

*Sources:* Data for African Reserves: Tomlinson Commission, 1954, 7.19: 100. Transkei cattle: UTTGC dipping registers, in *Proceedings* each year since 1920. Transkei sheep: De Wet Nel Committee, 1954: 31. LSU figures include goats and horses.

*Note:* Figures for Transkei are from dipping returns on 1 January each year; comparable details are not given in Tomlinson. The total area of the African reserves rose 40 per cent 1934-1948; that of Transkei only slightly.

The main method of rural investment by part-migrant worker households in Transkei was the purchase of stock from both inside and outside Transkei, using migrant remittances. It seems reasonable to assume that such investment (and particularly, the numbers of cattle imported into Transkei) rose slowly on the average after 1918, despite lower migrancy levels during the Great Depression, due to falling cattle prices from the 1910s to the 1930s, and the national post-1933 economic boom (see Beinart, 1982: 80, 145). Under this assumption, it is noteworthy that in Transkei, for example, average cattle herd growth rates of 8.8 per cent per annum between 1920 and 1930 fell to -0.6 per cent per annum over the next 20 years, and other figures show similar trends, despite rising land-areas in some cases.<sup>6</sup> Further, Rutman indicates that total Transkei stock numbers continued falling in the 1950s and 1960s (1972: 144). It thus appears that after around 1931, further inputs from urban centres became suddenly less 'profitable' when invested in stock, although still necessary for the reproduction of rural households (De Wet Nel Committee, 1954: 104, 124).

The important point is that the productivity of the soil and its ability to sustain a large animal population were gradually being undercut in this period. The supply and quality of grass were both declining, lowering pastoral productivity (output per animal - wool, milk, draught power etc)<sup>7</sup> and causing much higher stock mortality rates, and declining calving rates.<sup>8</sup> All records

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<sup>6</sup> Beinart plots similar trends for Pondoland districts (1982: 173-4).

<sup>7</sup> This point was stressed by former agricultural officials and African farmers (L. Hagen, interview, 25/10/82; S. Gidmasana, interview 13/2/82, and others). As one of the latter put it, 'When I was young our cattle were fat and gave much milk. Today they are thin and dry - I can push them over with my hand!' (group discussion, Upper Culumka, 3/1/83).

<sup>8</sup> A similar though less vivid case has been made along these lines for Swaziland in the post-1960s period (Fowler, 1981).

show high and rising death rates from natural causes for stock after 1930 - a year Mears terms the Transkei cattle 'saturation' point (1947: 175). The average cattle herd death rate between 1936 and 1951 was about 9.2 per cent per annum, compared to 4.9 per cent during the 1920s (calculated from detailed figures given by the De Wet Nel Committee, 1954: 30). A phenomenal *net* 16 per cent of the Transkei cattle herd died in 1949, equivalent to 236 000 animals. Jokl claimed in 1943 that cattle mortality, given the age structure of the Transkei herd, should be three per cent per annum from natural causes; instead it had amounted to 10 per cent per annum or an average of 150,000 animals since 1936, and he said it frequently rose to 18 per cent (1943: 6).

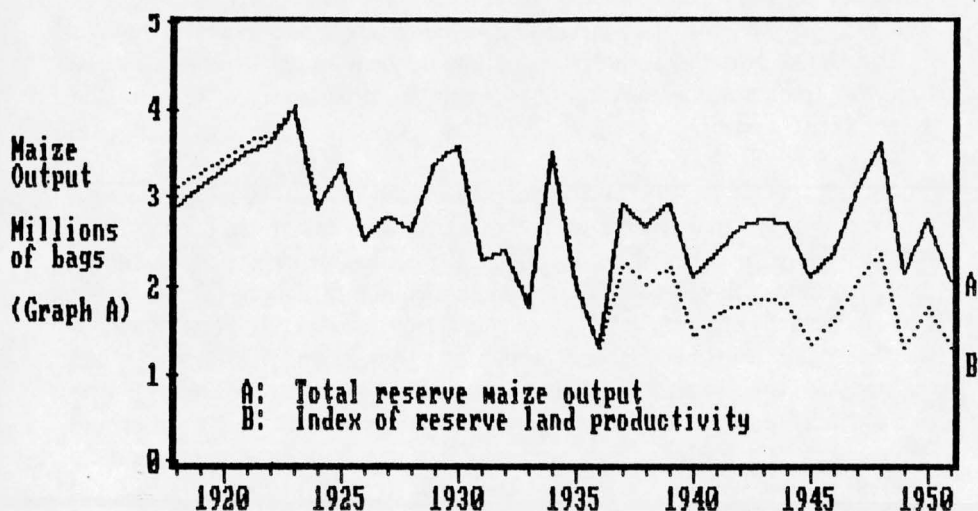
Likewise, the percentage of animals dying in the spring (September-October) drought each year rose markedly after 1934 - Beinart notes for Pondoland that whereas until 1930 cattle figures each year were highest in January (after the spring calving), after 1934 they were invariably higher in August, before the worst of the drought (1982: 173). As a result, oxen could not be used for ploughing until they had gained strength from the rains and new grass in late spring which sometimes postponed ploughing until December and reduced maize output. Rutman notes that by the 1950s, cattle in Transkei were down to an average weight of only 400 pounds from the optimum weight of around 600 pounds which had often been achieved in the 1920s. This implied a negligible milk yield and an inability to plough deeply and efficiently (1972: 147; cf. Beinart, 1982: 82).

For the reserves as a whole, in 1918 there were some 7.8 acres of land per LSU, a figure which had fallen to 4.2 acres per LSU by 1930, but gradually *rose* thereafter, to seven acres per LSU in 1953. Investment was still taking place in stock, such that stock numbers would rise considerably in good years, eg. 1938-39, 1947-48, but such 'temporary overstocking' of poor veld would soon be eliminated via stock deaths the following winter and spring, or the next drought period.

## MAIZE PRODUCTION

In terms of crop output, data are far weaker than for livestock. Maize was the main crop cultivated in the African reserves and Transkei, but Agricultural Censuses did not deal adequately with this crop and certain crucial years are left out (most importantly, 1931-33). Some details of maize production are given in the *Tomlinson Commission Report* for the reserves as a whole, and are reproduced as Graph 1. The figures are based on district-by-district





**Graph 1: Maize Production in the African Reserves, 1917/18 - 1950/51**

*Sources:* Graph a: NAD Report 1951-52 (UG37/55: 29), also figures for maize production quoted in the Tomlinson Commission Report (1954, 7.19: 183). Graph b: my calculations, based on Graph a.

*Note:* Graph a is the NAD estimate of African maize production in the reserves. Output figures are highly approximate; there are no official census figures for the years 1919-20, 1922, 1930-33, 1940-45. Graph b adjusts Graph a according to an index of land area from Tomlinson, to allow for land added to the reserves over this period and is an approximate index of output per constant African area (assuming the proportion of cultivated area remained constant, and that land added to the reserves did not differ much in quality). This graph is drawn to a base of 1927 = 100, following Tomlinson Commission figures (1954, 7.19: 100).

estimates, are highly questionable (Beinart, 1982: 101-2, 175; Lipton, 1977: 73-4) and may include changes in the methods of estimation (cf. Simkins, 1981: 257-8), but there appears to have been some consistency in estimation from year to year. Increases in the size of the reserves due to land purchases by the Union government are brought into account using an index derived from the Tomlinson Commission, to estimate the productivity of reserve land as a whole (Graph b).

Based on these very approximate calculations, two conclusions seem probable. Firstly, total reserve maize output shows a falling trend after 1919, though it may have begun rising in the 1970s, due in large part to rapidly rising recent state investment in homeland agriculture (Knight and Lenta, 1980: 160-1). Secondly, bearing in mind that new land in relatively good condition was being added to the reserves (Tomlinson Commission, UG61/55: 74), and that the land area cultivated within the reserves was rising (see above), it is likely that average output per hectare of land cultivated fell rapidly throughout the period under analysis. This tendency is particularly noticeable after the 1930-36 period - despite the national economic recovery of the late 1930s and 1940s, when migrant earnings, remittances and rural investment rose, cereal output levels remained on a declining trend. Finally, it is very clear that locally-produced food output per head of population was falling rapidly throughout this period (cf. Simkins, 1981: 263), compounding the poverty problem for households lacking migrant workers.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted, however, that these figures are very crude averages; some producers were farming fairly successfully and raising their annual output, while others were producing virtually nothing (cf. Beinart, 1982: 102).

There appear to be no more reliable statistics available on maize output in Transkei. The scanty evidence in *UTTGC Proceedings* and Agricultural Census returns (UTA A, various boxes) implies that Transkei followed the trends described above; it was of course the largest African reserve. Unfortunately it seems no detailed micro-level research on crop output and productivity over time was carried out in Transkei in the first half of this century.

This picture of stagnation and decline in Transkei agriculture in the 1925-1955 period is reinforced by additional research covering the more recent

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<sup>9</sup> By the 1930s there is evidence that food availability and quality were declining in Transkei, leading to increased starvation and health problems, and rising infant mortality rates (Webster, 1986; Fox and Back, 1937).



period.<sup>10</sup> Rutman (1968) and Southall (1982: 219ff) describe the disastrous record of Transkei agriculture between 1950 and 1980. Southall notes that the agricultural output of Transkei hardly rose between 1940 and 1970, despite steadily rising agricultural inputs, and in 1972 Transkei produced around 2.5 (200lb, or 90kg) bags of maize per cultivated hectare. This is no improvement compared to estimates by Mears of 2.1 to three bags per hectare in 1939-42 (non-drought years) (1947: 153), and Tomlinson Commission for the early 1950s of 2.4 bags per hectare (which Lipton argues is systematically underestimated and should be closer to 4.2 bags (1977: 74)).<sup>11</sup> It is also supported by micro-level employment and income studies in Transkei in the 1980s. Moll (1984: 15-23) found little agricultural accumulation and wage-labour in parts of the Qumbu district, with better incomes earned from 'informal sector' activities, and the same can be deduced from the studies surveyed by Muller (1986: 25-29), despite the presence of a handful of rich farmers in each area, usually with state links.

## HOUSEHOLD RESPONSES TO AGRICULTURAL DECLINE

The long-term stagnation of Transkei agriculture described above was experienced in very different ways by groups and households at different levels of Transkei society. Recent research has stressed the differentiated social and economic nature of rural society, the most important class/strata relations being those between men and women, older and younger men, and between chiefs and headmen and the people.<sup>12</sup> These were continually remoulded under

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<sup>10</sup> A similar argument to that above for the Reserves as a whole has been documented by Simkins (1981: 259-265). He argues that the inhabitants of the reserves were unable to provide for their subsistence requirements from agriculture by 1918 (1981: 264), but locates a watershed decline in agricultural production per head after 1948, the main differences from the above argument being, a) he works with total agricultural output or output per person figures, not land productivity (it is uncertain whether he takes the increasing size of the reserves into account, and he ignores the increase in land area cultivated and rising pastoral investment and hence the rising costs of agricultural output), thus the 1918-1954 period, which he terms one of 'fragile productivity maintenance' is more one of (very) fragile output maintenance and steadily *falling* productivity; and b) while he notes the increasing relative importance of pastoral activities to households throughout this period (ibid, 260), he overlooks the poorer physical condition of animals and hence their declining productivity (279- 80).

<sup>11</sup> By contrast, maize farmers in 'white' South Africa were reaping seven bags per hectare in the 1950s (Lipton, 1977: 73) and around 20 bags by 1972 (Southall, 1982: 220).

<sup>12</sup> For samples of such work, see Beinart (1982), Bozzoli (1983), James (1982, chs. 4-5), Moll (1983, ch. 1), Muller (1986).

the impact of capitalism and migrant labour and the South African state. While seemingly disparate and describing sundry groups in opposition to each other, there was a considerable convergence of the dominant poles of each 'vector' of exploitation. The dominant political group within each Transkei location (the basic administrative unit averaging 47 square miles in area, headed by a headman), for example, tended to be rich, old and male. Wealthy male-dominated households accumulated stock and land rights; they had more women to provide labour power (eg. via polygamy); they could afford education and their children would often find better migrant jobs; furthermore, their links to the local political system were usually close.

Processes of economic differentiation can be traced in twentieth century rural Transkei as new sources of surplus - more advanced technology, migrant remittances, state emoluments - were made available to the dominant rural elements, a process often underestimated by observers (e.g. Beinart and Bundy, 1980: 295). Drawing on data from various contemporary sources, household differentiation has been analysed in terms of holdings of the main productive assets, stock and cropland (Moll, 1983, ch. 4). This research suggests that in the 1930-1950 period, around half of all Transkei households owned no or a negligible number of animals, whilst only about 10 per cent of households owned enough stock to be able to carry out a reasonably self-sufficient 'middle peasant' existence. Likewise, agricultural land was held unevenly with estimates of at least one third of households landless by the 1940s, while the average arable plot size was falling. The most important factor determining household survival had become access to migrant jobs and remittances.

In 1923, 50,000 Transkeian men went to work on the mines, and close to 80,000 in 1936 (Fox and Back, 1937: 421). In the latter year, according to the population census, there were 140,000 men, mainly workers or would-be workers, absent from their homes in Transkei (Mears, 1947: 279). This suggests that at any time, at least every second household on the average had migrants in the urban centres. By 1941, migrant earnings were contributing around two thirds of the consumption requirements of the average Transkei family, based on generous assumptions about African agricultural output (Witwatersrand Mine Native Wages Commission, UG21/44, Appendix J). In that year, around 50 per cent of total mine earnings was remitted back to Transkei, providing an average of 10 pounds per family unit. However, this income was very unevenly distributed between households (Mears, 1947: 281-82). Households without migrants or stock were the poorest of all and their access to the means of production was the most tenuous; they barely survived on such elements of the 'redistributive' economy as still existed (especially the many households headed by widows), from low-pay work on local council

road-gangs and domestic service (Beinart, 1982: 149-50), or would resort to moving to the cities, female migration etc.

## CONCLUSION

Given stagnating or declining agricultural output and rapidly rising reserve populations, it is clear the importance of agricultural sources of income to most Transkei-based households fell steadily over the 1920-1950 period. From being an intermittent necessity to poor households in the 1920s, migrant labour and remittances had become the major source of livelihood for most households by the 1950s. Part of the reason for this is the uneven distribution of the impact of overall agricultural stagnation. Richer households had the resources to maintain a proportion of their herd during droughts in which poor households would lose all their animals, for example. They also had the political leverage to monopolise the best agricultural (and often grazing) land (T.A. Moll, interview, 5/1/83; V.M.P. Leibbrandt, interview, 1/12/82), leaving marginal land to poor households - where it would be degraded all the sooner, a tendency common to developing countries (Blaikie, 1985: 124-9, 133).

Knight and Lenta suggest that constant or declining agricultural output in the African reserves could perhaps be interpreted as economic progress, where workers were being transferred to higher-productivity activities elsewhere in the economy (1980: 193-197). In these terms, the majority of Transkei households by the middle of the twentieth century were not peasants suffering from too little land and agricultural facilities - they are best viewed as increasingly a rurally-situated proletariat. The economic problems they faced were above all lack of access to urban areas, services, and income-generating opportunities, and low urban wages - a situation partly caused by state segregation policies, and maintained by force and via preserving cultural beliefs and power relations of pre-capitalist society. Hence, as agricultural output per household fell, issues of urban residential rights and access to urban jobs became increasingly important to poor rural families.

Beinart and Bundy (1987: 29-30) stress, however, that households did not see themselves in such stark economic terms.<sup>13</sup> They viewed their positions in Transkei society through a series of cultural, educational and religious understandings, and were enmeshed in a complex of local power relations. Subjective beliefs and individual circumstances would help determine, for

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<sup>13</sup> This is an implicit assumption of Innes and O'Meara (1976), who fail to consider the cultural and ideological determinants of rural class formation.

example, whether they regarded themselves as rural workers and wanted to move to urban areas of 'White' South Africa, or as peasants temporarily down on their luck but hoping to accumulate cattle and eventually stop migrating. One of the most important economic factors sustaining the latter belief were rights of access to land and rights to hold cattle, and these were preserved by the South African state into the 1950s and 1960s, even where their value was almost negligible. The degree of rural differentiation, however, helps explain the limited nature of resistance to state intervention in this period.

# STATE INTERVENTION AND RURAL RESISTANCE

## INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation and the threat of declining African agricultural productivity came to be viewed as a problem throughout British colonial Africa in the 1930s and 1940s (Anderson, 1984; also studies in Anderson and Grove (eds.), 1987). Lord Hailey's magisterial *African Survey* (1938) devoted Chapter 16 to the 'major problem' of soil erosion and remedies to it attempted in African colonial territories in the 1930s (1077 ff). It was usually perceived as caused by objective physical factors: erratic and intense rainfall, overstocking and non-marketing of cattle, rudimentary technology and low agricultural productivity, scattered homesteads, and so on (cf. Beinart, 1984). In retrospect it appears colonial views were mistaken in their assessment of the urgency of the need for conservation to avert ecological and agricultural collapse. Many African regions regarded as near collapse in the 1930s and 1940s hold many times their former population today, while agricultural productivity has stabilised in many cases, albeit at a fairly low level (Bell, 1987). These views were very influential within the British colonial administration, however, partly because in some areas environmental deterioration had very clearly led to falling agricultural productivity.

It was argued above that Transkei and Ciskei are examples of the latter in South Africa. Efforts to counter soil erosion<sup>1</sup> and modify prevailing land-use practices came early in them, largely because Eastern Cape peasants had been subject to overpopulation and outside economic pressures earlier than

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<sup>1</sup> Links and parallels between anti-erosion efforts in Southern Africa have been described by Beinart (1984); also Phimister (1986), Anderson (1984), and Iliffe (1979, ch. 1). The language and concepts used tend to overlap (e.g. Betterment and Rehabilitation), and very similar ideas about overstocking and measures to counter it were widespread, with close parallels for example between the Report of a Committee on Overstocking in the Transkeian Territories (1941), and a 1941 Overstocking Report presented to the Kenyan Government (Government of Kenya, 1941). The most influential forum of debate in the 1930s appears to have been the Royal African Society, itself strongly influenced by the US 'Dust Bowl' erosion disaster of the 1930s (see Stebbing, 1938; Champion, 1939). Within South Africa, soil erosion on white farms was publicised in the report of the Drought Commission of 1923 (Union of South Africa, UG49/23, 1923), which concluded that worsening droughts were due to erosion and the declining ability of soil to absorb rainwater, rather than less rainfall. Various legislative efforts were made to control such erosion, again under American influence.

elsewhere. It seems that Transkei experiences were used as 'models' for Southern Africa and also influenced the British Colonial Office in London.

Four stages of state economic intervention in rural Transkei can be identified in the 1900-1960 period. They move from an early ground-level administrative concern about soil erosion and the poverty seen as associated with it, through to a series of efforts designed to restructure and improve agricultural conditions with the overall aim of reducing the tendency towards African urbanisation induced by rural decline and urban prosperity in the second half of the 1930s. These were to be carried out with the active participation of households affected - an aim which was never achieved. Instead, the final phase identified here involved *forcible* large-scale reorganisation of production relations in the reserves by the apartheid state after 1954.

## THE NATIVE AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT IN TRANSKEI

Transkei was administered by the Native Affairs Department (NAD), with 26 districts, each subdivided into about 30 African 'locations' (now termed 'administrative areas'), administered by magistrates and presided over by the Chief Magistrate of the Transkeian Territories (CMTT). His was an administrative rather than legal post, in charge of all state activities inside Transkei except the Post Office and the police (Kenyon, 1939: 19). The Chief Magistracy was based in Umtata in 1903, and until the late 1940s the Chief Magistrate was directly responsible for Transkei to the Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) in Pretoria.

The Native Affairs Department was the state department responsible for economic and political conditions in the reserves. For these areas it functioned as a 'State within a State' (Tomlinson Commission, 1954, 6.17: 60), dealing, *i.a.* with Agricultural Development, Engineering, Public Works, Justice, Local Government, Labour, Social Welfare, Education and Taxation (Mears, 1947: 413-416) - 'The powers given to the Native Affairs Department are very much greater than those normally held by Government Departments' (Social and Economic Planning Council, UG32/46: 63). Rule by Proclamation of the Governor-General-in-Council was almost unfettered, established for Transkei by the South Africa Act of 1909.

The Native Affairs Department was decentralised, with local officials having considerable power and some leeway in their activities; the population over which it ruled had very little *formal* say. This led to field officials being



able to act somewhat independently of the central government (see Beinart, 1979: 230-1). District administrators had close contact with popular opinion and a thorough knowledge of local conditions - they were aware far sooner than the Pretoria Head Office of the economic decline of the reserves, for example. Policy formulation took this dynamic into account, especially prior to 1948, prescriptions passing up NAD ranks until they perhaps became official policy (cf. Beinart and Bundy, 1980: 297).

The major forum in which economic and political issues affecting Transkei were discussed was the United Transkeian Territories General Council (UTTGC). It was established in 1931 with three (largely elected) African members from each district, and chaired by the Chief Magistrate, with magistrates as non-voting members. It met in Umtata for two to three weeks each autumn, when it discussed how to allocate and spend its budget (£150,000 - £200,000 per annum between 1930 and 1950, raised largely from land taxes) on stock dipping, education, agricultural schools and farms, agricultural demonstrators, fences and soil erosion work, roads, health, pensions etc. This work was carried out by its own staff. It would also discuss government policy towards Transkei and make recommendations through the Secretary for Native Affairs.<sup>2</sup>

## THE BEGINNINGS OF TRANSKEI SOIL CONSERVATION, 1925-1935

Until the 1930s, direct state intervention in the rural Transkei economy was limited. Many regulations about the dipping of cattle and sheep, East Coast Fever, protecting forests, and eradicating noxious weeds and veld fires were in force, and a few agricultural extension workers tried to raise agricultural output and introduce better livestock strains. These, however, were *constraints* on the activities of production units rather than purposeful interventions designed to reorganise aspects of pastoral and crop production processes.

Official statements of concern about soil erosion, the need to destock the land and low agricultural productivity in Transkei go back to the early 1900s, and appear in many magistrate's reports for those years and in the report of a Transkeian Territories General Council Select Committee on Soil-Erosion and Tree-Planting in 1926 (TTGC, *Proceedings*, 1926: 40-41). Magistrates argued

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<sup>2</sup> For a description of the administration of Transkei before 1955, see Southall (1982: 88-98); for contemporary sources, Rogers (1934), Brownlee (1937), Kenyon (1939), Mears (1947).

soil erosion was due to destruction of trees and shrubs, over-extensive ploughing and - especially - overstocking via animals being concentrated in kraals and eating or destroying all vegetation in particular areas:

unless the evils of overstocking are remedied, it will be impossible to cope with the soil erosion problem [...] Native customs and habits all tend to overstocking (TTGC, *Proceedings*, 1930, Appendix: i).

It was argued that stock holdings be reduced, contour ploughing be encouraged, trees be planted and so on, and various UTTGC anti-erosion works were put into action between 1926 and 1935, but with little effect. By 1933 the magistrates recommended government levies on all stock, strict limits on stock numbers, and strict management of common grazing areas, to be carried out by force if necessary (UTTGC, *Proceedings*, 1934, Appendix). African UTTGC members concurred on the seriousness of the erosion problem, but blamed it on landlessness and economic necessity rather than overstocking. They repeatedly opposed stock taxes and attempts to forcibly limit stock numbers on grounds that they would be 'rejected by the Natives' (UTTGC *Proceedings*, 1931: 54), and anticipated widespread resistance if compulsory control measures were introduced (UTTGC, *Proceedings*, 1934, Appendix: vii).

Throughout this period, representations were made to the Native Affairs Department by magistrates, agricultural officials and the UTTGC, that the central state should play a role in combating erosion in the reserves. It took the Native Economic Commission 1930-1932 to assemble opinions of the officials concerned at a national level.<sup>3</sup> It described the environmental crisis in African areas:

denudation, donga-erosion, deleterious plant succession, destruction of woods, drying up of springs, robbing the soil of its reproductive properties, *in short the creation of desert conditions* (UG22/32: 11; emphasis in the original),

and went on to observe that unless immediate action was taken, 'the very existence of large numbers of Natives in the Reserves will, in the near future,

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<sup>3</sup> W.M. Macmillan was another influential publicist of rural African poverty and agricultural decline. He wrote a series of articles on African reserves, looking particularly at the Herschel District, which appeared in newspapers in the 1920s. This work was collected as Macmillan (1930).



be impossible' (ibid). Its report came out in the 1932-33 drought, when the famine in African areas was being widely publicised (Hall, 1942: 8), and tens of thousands of African families were seen to be moving to the cities. The NAD and the state apparatuses were brought to realise the immensity of the problem presented to them. Some small erosion projects were begun in select reserve districts, but little was done until the founding of the South African Native Trust in 1936 (Tomlinson Commission, 1954, 7.19: 25).

## BETTERMENT, 1936-1944

In 1936, Hertzog's Native Bills were finally passed by the South African Parliament. Apart from their various political provisions towards Africans, they signified that the state was moving towards an active policy of economic interventions in the reserves, to ensure the maintenance of productive capacity there. Immediate efforts were made to control erosion and limit stock - termed 'betterment' - on 'released' lands (made available in then White South Africa for exclusively African occupation and eventual inclusion in African reserves) controlled by the newly-established South African Native Trust. Likewise, various measures to improve the quality of cattle held in the reserves were attempted (Kenyon, 1939: 116). A variety of anti-erosion and conservation measures were planned for some African locations, and £25,000 was given to the UTTGC for livestock improvement and soil erosion works (building contour banks to interrupt water flow, fencing to control stock movements, dams).

In due course there appeared the important Livestock Control and Improvement Proclamation (No. 31 of 1939), applicable to all African areas under the 1913 Natives' Land Act. This was the first legislation on overstocking in the reserves, and has essentially remained in force ever since. The Proclamation worked in four steps:

- 1        The Minister may, after consultation with the persons residing in any land unit, and with any District Council or local Council having jurisdiction thereover, by notice in the *Gazette* declare that land unit a betterment area [...] (paragraph 2).

At this stage there was a strong emphasis that the people should be involved in their own betterment, that through propaganda and debate they should realise the folly of their conservative ways and voluntarily accept the stock culling and pasture conservation advocated by government.

2. The number of cattle units to be carried by the area (usually a location) was to be assessed, stock in the area counted, and culling done within three months by culling officers designated by the Secretary of Native Affairs, on a progressive basis.
3. After three months, every culled animal should be slaughtered or removed from the betterment area. If owners failed to produce stock for counting, failed to cull stock, or introduced stock illegally into betterment areas, they could forfeit such stock to the Trust or face punishment of twenty pounds fine or three months imprisonment.
4. Finally, fencing would be put up to separate arable lands from grazing and to provide fenced paddocks for the latter, so rotational grazing could be practiced.

These provisions were first applied in Transkei in the Tanga Ward, a portion of location 1 (Gcuwa A) in Butterworth district, towards the end of 1939. Meetings were held, a committee of taxpayers was elected to supervise the scheme, and culling and fencing - at a cost of £2,600 - were completed by November 1939 (Roux, 1949: 186-7). Tanga was seen as a model for the rest of Transkei.

A short while later, a Committee on Overstocking in the Transkeian Territories concluded that the 1939 Livestock Improvement Proclamation should be applied to the whole of Transkei forthwith, whether the local inhabitants liked it or not, and legislation to ensure stock culling should be accompanied by rapid fencing of arable, grazing and residential areas (Young Committee, 1941: 9-10). Also significant was the recommendation that 'a regular and systematic reallocation of homestead and arable holdings and grazing areas in all unsurveyed districts be proceeded with without delay' (ibid, 9) - a foretaste of future moves to reorganise units of production from above in order to stabilise the rural reserve population. Fencing was to be erected and paid for by government, and maintained by people of the locations.

The Committee Chairman estimated in his presentation to the UTTGC in April 1942 (*Proceedings*, 1942: 115) that the fencing of locations would cost an average of £3,000, or up to £2.7 million for the whole of Transkei. This financial constraint, combined with a tense urban and rural situation, the guarded opposition of the UTTGC (ibid, 113-116), the wartime absence of half the NAD staff (including engineers and technical personnel) and a drastic shortage of fencing material led to the scheme slowing to a snail's pace (Tomlinson Commission, UG61/55: 74; NAD, 1942: 5). By 1945, six years

after the 1939 Proclamation had been promulgated, 114 betterment areas were formally on the go in Transkei (mostly locations, out of 800 odd in total; *NAD Report, 1944-45*, UG44/46: 7). Of these, culling was only complete in three wards in the Butterworth district (*ibid*, 79). Groups within other locations had managed to avoid culling largely through legal means, claiming they had not been consulted in terms of Paragraph One of the Proclamation, and given widespread unhappiness and several legal battles, the NAD did not forcibly proceed with its culling plans (De Wet Nel Committee, 1954: 48-52; *NAD Report 1945-1947*, UG14/48: 4).

## POST-WAR RESERVE POLICY: THE 'ERA OF RECLAMATION'

The previous period was one in which the state made various ad hoc interventions into reserve production relations. But its weak efforts to stem rural crisis did not face the root of the problem - too many people and too many animals on too little land. Accelerated ecological decline in the 1930s, however, led to urbanisation and political struggle in the cities in the 1940s, and a new era of state involvement in African rural production.

Post-war reserve policy should be viewed in the context of the changing balance of class forces represented within the ruling United Party and its Nationalist opponents. The key issues after the war within the state were the high competing labour requirements of industrial and agrarian capital, the desired level of African urbanisation, means and measures for the control of African labour, and the problem of increasing African political activity.<sup>4</sup> The government's main economic bases of support were large mining and manufacturing capital. It had to satisfy and encourage these elements, make some provision for the labour needs of agriculture, gain the support of white wage-earners, and invoke a systematic plan of exploitation of the popular masses, especially given the forms of urbanisation and political struggle around wages and social conditions which had been occurring during the 1940s. The resulting approach was outlined in the *Report of the Native Laws Commission 1946-1948* (Fagan Commission Report, UG28/48) of March 1948, drawing in large part on various mid-1940s reports of the Social and Economic Planning Council. It recommended a national development policy favouring large industrial and manufacturing capital, aimed at revamping already-existing pass-laws in favour of the cities. Its central suggestions, in paragraph 65, were that the permanent settlement of Africans in urban areas should be accepted as an

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<sup>4</sup> Discussed by Davies *et al.* (1976: 25-26), Beinart and Bundy (1980: 299), Lewis (1976), Stadler (1987, ch. 5).

unalterable fact and that there should be central rather than local regulation of African labour centered in Pretoria, to direct workers to sectors where they were most needed. The corollary of this urban policy was the need to maximise a 'settled' reserve population. This was a consistent theme in NAD policy guidelines and recommendations in the 1940s and indicated a major shift in the scale and type of state policy towards the reserves.

The first official intimation of the new reserves policy was in a 1944 speech by the Minister of Native Affairs. He detailed a plan for the large-scale 'rehabilitation' of the reserves, involving expenditure of several millions of pounds over 12 years: 'The Department is convinced that work on this scale is required to save the country from the imminent threat of the Native Reserves becoming sterile deserts' (NAD, 1945: 1). Further details were given by the Secretary for Native Affairs, D.L. Smit, in a presentation to the Ciskeian General Council on 8-9 January 1945. He stated,

The fact must be faced that deterioration of land, congestion of population and a drift to the towns are still common features of our Reserves ('A New Era of Reclamation', Annexure 'A', 30-36 in *ibid*, 31),

and outlined a 'Twelve Year Plan' of reserves development, to cost 10 million pounds. Planning Committees would be appointed for each of the reserve regions. (Transkei, Ciskei, Western Areas, Northern Areas). They would examine the land, people, stock and rainfall in each location, usually those already declared betterment areas, and investigate possibilities for improving the land (irrigation, soil reclamation, fencing roads and paddocks), stock yields and local employment (*ibid*, 31-2). It was argued that the reserves were eroding due to overstocking, and rapid measures had to be taken to rectify the situation, most importantly to demarcate grazing, residential and arable areas in each locality, concentrate residential sites in rural villages to open up grazing, take badly eroded arable land out of use, and divide grassland into fenced camps for rotational grazing. This was termed reclamation, and would normally follow on betterment (stock reduction) efforts in locations.

On the other hand, it was assumed there was not enough land in the reserves for every African to become 'a full-time peasant farmer' (*ibid*, 34); the reserve population was to be divided into farmers and rural-based wage-earners. The former would have rights to arable and grazing land, would invest in their farms and increase food production in the reserves (*NAD Report 1948-49*, UG51/50: 12), while the latter would settle in rural villages without land or stock and their families would live off wage-earnings. The reserves were

thus viewed as functional to urban industrialisation:

The proposal [to separate farmers from workers] is an important link between the Government's plan for rehabilitation in the Reserves and the large-scale industrial development expected after the war ('A New Era of Reclamation', *op cit*, 34)

- an attempt to counter poverty and low productivity of reserve labour by trying to ensure a settled, permanent but largely rurally-based wage-earning African population (Social and Economic Planning Council, UG32/46: 47-9).

A clear indication of the shift in State attention towards the reserves after the Second World War is evident in Table 2 below, giving details of planned expenditure on soil conservation and reclamation in the reserves.<sup>5</sup> There was a steady increase in such spending when the policy was getting off the ground in the later 1940s. These allocations were in addition to the usual administrative budgets of the various sections of the NAD, and provide a useful indication of the degree to which the state was *purposefully* intervening in the reserves before the advent of Bantu Authorities.

**Table 2:** *NAD Budget Allocations for Stabilisation/Reclamation Work in the Reserves, 1938-1953 (£).*

Year	Allocation	Year	Allocation
1938	90 000	1946	112 000
1939	125 000	1947	200 000
1940	93 000	1948	570 000
1941	63 000	1949	650 000
1942	50 000	1950	690 000
1943	57 000	1951	700 000
1944	75 000	1952	950 000
1945	90 000	1953	1 385 000

*Source:* Tomlinson Commission, 1954, 7.19: 27.

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<sup>5</sup> The Tomlinson Commission has a periodisation of state reserve policy similar to that used here (up to 1936, 1937-45, 1946-53), based purely on monetary expenditure on conservation in the reserves (1954, 7.19: 25-31). The actual amounts spent as given by Roberts and Coleman (n.d.: 12) were close to the estimates, differing from them by no more than £6,461, in 1949.

## PLANNING IN TRANSKEI, 1945-1954

State intervention in this period can best be understood via a detailed examination of the activities of the first and most effective Planning Committee, that for Transkei. The Transkei Planning Committee, consisting of chairman, soil chemist, surveyor, agricultural officer, and engineer, was appointed in May 1945, a month after the UTTGC approved the rehabilitation scheme (UTTGC, 1945: 4). It was to plan on a location-by-location basis; in each district it would co-opt the magistrate or assistant magistrate and an African member. Its guidelines were the above Smit statement and a NAD document, 'Agricultural and Pastoral Rehabilitation Planning Scheme', an extension thereof (Minute s20/1, SNA to CMTT, nd; UTA A 1, 1/A).

The first district tackled was Butterworth, beginning with Mission Location No. 25. Investigations took five months and included three meetings between July and December 1945 in which the scheme was explained to the people. At the first of these on 18 July 1945, the Planning Committee Chairman, H.F. Marsberg, expressed high hopes for the project, and hoped to get residents actively involved:

To make our scheme a success everyone must help. One of the corner stones of the scheme is the co-operation of the people [...] Every man, woman and child must have a place in the scheme for it to function properly ('Address to Headman and People of Butterworth District'; UTA A 1, 1/B).

As this location was to serve as a model for Transkei and other reserves, it was planned with great care - far more than occurred with the early 'betterment' efforts. The final report plus appendices came to 34 detailed pages, for an area of 8,310 acres and population of 2,385 (Plan 1, December 1945; UTA A 2, 1/2/25). Thorough soil-type and vegetation maps were drawn up and detailed uses were assigned for virtually every acre of land in the location. Kraal sites would be rationalised and compensation paid, soil conservation efforts begun, dongas would be filled in, fencing erected, bulls and rams would be purchased to improve stock, forests and woodlots planted, and dams and springs improved. Households which had arable land or stock before rehabilitation kept these rights, the idea being that these would be rationalised in the hands of a few full-time peasant farmers 'at some later stage', which did not materialise (J.A. Norton, interview, 2/1/83).

57 locations had been planned by the Transkei Planning Committee by 1954. In 37, the NAD work (mainly fencing and engineering) was finished by



1956, while work stopped due to African opposition in six locations, two each in Mount Ayliffe, Qumbu and Willowvale districts (all planned 1946-47). (Minute 100, CMTT to SNA, 2/8/56; CMTT 1158, 64/B, IX; also Tomlinson Commission, 1954, 7.19: 57). The difficulty with the planning work of the late 1940s, most clearly illustrated by only three locations being planned in 1949 and 1950, was simply its painful slowness. It was felt the environmental situation was coming under control in some planned areas, erosion was being checked and stock improving, but often at the expense of neighbouring locations to which stock from culled locations was moved on a semi-permanent basis (J.A. Norton, interview, 2/1/83), while resistance to state reorganisation of production meant that stock quality and sales and agricultural output were hardly rising.

It was also realised that what had originally been expected to cost 10 million pounds would be far more expensive if the Smit proposals were to be carried out in all the reserves. According to Marsberg in 1946,

The impression is current that in commencing this work the Government little realised the magnitude of the task before it, and while prepared originally to spend some £10,000,000 on the rehabilitation of *all* the Native Areas, it now finds that the cost in these Territories alone will be four or five times this figure ('Rehabilitation Policy in the Transkeian Territories and proposals for speeding up work', to CMTT, 16/4/46; UTA A 1, 1/K: 1).

He remarked that the work at current speed would not be completed 'during the lifetime of the present generation' (ibid), and in 1951 suggested it would take 100 years to complete 'at the current rate of progress' ('Replies to Questionnaire to Socio-Economic Planning Committee', accompanying Minute 1/C, CMTT to Chairman Planning Committee, 25/10/51; UTA A 1, 1/G: 2).

The Chief Magistrate and Secretary of Native Affairs encouraged the Committee to work faster. This was a prime source of African resistance in future years, as where the Committee spent less than a month in an area, few efforts were made to explain the quite radical proposals to the people, apart from chiefs, headmen and sometimes older men in each area. And, whereas the early planned locations often cost £20,000 or more, by the late 1940s economy measures were being put into force (e.g. making the people of locations pay for and erect fencing), which also led to unhappiness.

While the Transkei Planning Committee lasted only nine years and only planned one fifteenth of Transkei, its influence on later developments in the

reserves was considerable. After the first few years it made little effort to ensure popular co-operation for its measures. It viewed itself as performing the entirely technocratic function of saving the land from destruction in an efficient and thorough fashion, and responded little to regular complaints about the degree to which rehabilitation affected social practices and everyday social behaviour via changing herding patterns, sometimes resiting villages far from water sources, or enabling influential local residents to control the best fields and grazing areas (various UTA A files, boxes 1-5). This approach influenced the Tomlinson Commission Report and the De Wet Nel Committee, was publicised at a NAD Conference on Stabilisation in Bantu Areas in January 1955 (CMTT 1156, 64I) and has essentially been in operation ever since, though without the Transkei Planning Committee's meticulous devotion to detail.<sup>6</sup>

## THE POLITICS OF REHABILITATION

Rehabilitation had a mixed impact on the Transkei people. Support for it came from two groups: government functionaries and UTTGC members, and to a lesser extent, the many landless and very poor households - those who had nothing to lose from it, and could perhaps improve their residential sites (J.A. Norton, interview, 2/1/83; group interviews in the Qumbu District, 3-4/1/83; Beinart and Bundy, 1980: 303). By the 1940s the sometime vigorous UTTGC had become a virtual government setup, hence its acceptance of rehabilitation. Most of its members by then were chiefs, headmen and current and former civil servants; for example, Hammond-Tooke has shown that the 1955 Council - which accepted Bantu Authorities! - included 69 out of 81 members in this category, and a broader analysis of District Councillors showed a similar proportion, 88 per cent (1975: 187-8). These elites supported the policy because they hoped to gain from it (Whyte and Hellman, 1955: 2; cf. UTTGC, 1945: 5). For while rehabilitation was posed in purely technical-economic terms, as government taking 'whatever steps may be necessary to save the land while there is still time' (D.L. Smit, quoted in NAD, 1945: 33), it also provided means for the control of the population through chiefs,

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<sup>6</sup> There are family similarities, for example, between the Transkei Planning Committee location reports of the 1950s, those of the Transkei Department of Agriculture in the 1970s (held by the Department in Umtata, but can perhaps be inspected on request), and those for Transvaal reserves described by Yawitch (1981). These include similar approaches to stock holdings, demarcating areas of land for particular uses, the use of fencing and paddocking, concentrating residential sites and so on, and above all, a strong focus on physical environment and geography, rather than social or economic factors and constraints within each area.



headmen, dipping foremen and police (Yawitch, 1981: 31). Close surveillance of the people was ensured by means of concentrating them in rural villages. Political dissent and organisation became difficult and easily detected, and repression of participants far easier (M.K. Guzana, interview, 5/1/83). Local politicians were able to further their control over the means of production, especially communal means of production - control over grazing paddocks, when fenced to allow rotational grazing, dams, boreholes and other newly-created water sources, forests, compensation for the removal of kraals (when it was paid), and so on. It was mainly these groups (dominated by chiefs and headmen) which were consulted about betterment and rehabilitation efforts.

Resistance to rehabilitation can be conceptually viewed as coming from two strata of peasants. In many locations a small number of owners possessed much of the stock. Culling was originally designed by the NAD to be progressive - small owners with less than five to six cattle would not need to cull, while large owners would often have to eliminate much of their stock, and hence their opposition:

Conditions in the Reserves favour a few selected land and stock barons who consider that it is in their interest to oppose any reduction of land and stock (De Wet Nel Committee, 1954: 76).

The situation was made worse for large stock owners because inequality in sheep ownership was extreme (Fox and Back, 1937: 44-45 and Appendix 3, Table C) and sheep were culled more heavily than cattle (*ibid.*, ch. 20, 'Methods of Culling'). As it was put in a 1957 'Memorandum' on Stabilisation Planning in Transkei, the rich 'are really the only ones who stand to lose by stock limitation'<sup>7</sup> (CMTT 1159, 64/B IX: 2).

Their protest tended to be organised via pre-capitalist political forms (often based around lineage relations or the chieftaincy), and had a distinct conservative and bucolic bias. Struggles were fought out in a constrained fashion, often employing formal means like legal procedures and usually mobilising only small - often dominant and always male - groups of the rural population. They relied on appeals to courts of law and NAD headquarters in Pretoria - and with a degree of success, as cattle culling was actually implemented in only a handful of locations in the 1940s. Such struggles were

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<sup>7</sup> In some areas, however, culling was carried out regressively and appears to have been used by the rich to weaken political opposition and extend their control over grazing land (Lodge, 1983: 272). It is uncertain how widespread this practice was.

lost in the long run; despite 'set-backs' (*NAD Report 1945-7*, UG14/1948: 4), the NAD was able to protect itself against challenges in court via the 1949 Livestock Improvement Proclamation (No 116/49), a revised and tighter version of the 1939 Proclamation.

The other group which opposed rehabilitation was peasant migrants - those households with members firmly lodged in both urban and rural production (see De Wet Nel Committee, 1954: 113). For them, rural proletarianisation and the move to rural villages would confirm their identity as wage-labourers and destroy hopes of accumulation and an eventual peasant agricultural existence beyond the reach of state and capital (Beinart and Bundy, 1980: 303). They argued, firstly, that there were too few cattle for rural families to satisfy subsistence needs, and the problem was actually one of too little land (Tabata, 1945: 4, 1974: 68ff), and secondly, that if the African proletariat was paid a 'living wage', reinvestment in cattle in rural areas would be unnecessary and everybody would be better off (see Young Committee, 1941: 2). Holding cattle was viewed as a necessary strategy of survival for most households based on the land, a right they would be reluctant to forego without concrete benefit in circumstances of political oppression (see Mbeki, 1939: 22). As a UTTGC Councillor put it, 'For cattle and land, Natives will die [...]' (H. Makamba, UTGCT *Proceedings* 1942: 117). The image is presented of people desperately clinging to such beneficial elements of the pre-capitalist social formation as still existed - especially rights to stock.

In this period they undertook a variety of individualistic and unorganised forms of resistance to state intervention; contemporary betterment records are replete with complaints about misuse of paddocking and fencing control, fences cut late at night, gates left open, people determinedly using traditional cattle paths, removing or hiding livestock when it came to culling, and so on.<sup>8</sup> Such activities have been termed 'everyday resistance' (Scott, 1986: 6) - they required little planning and coordination, could be carried out by individuals, and avoided direct conflict with authority. Even where weapons were upgraded into boycotting or disrupting meetings, or assaults on government personnel, chiefs and headmen, they rarely took place within organised political structures. They were more a would-be 'retreat' from oppression than a challenge to local or state power - a tendency noted of peasantries elsewhere in Africa (e.g. Hyden, 1980).

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<sup>8</sup> See UTA A, boxes 1-7, especially records on Qumbu and Mount Ayliffe districts. Also Beinart and Bundy (1980: 302), Bundy (1987: 270 f), Copelyn (1974, ch. 2).

In the later 1940s, elements of compulsion were openly introduced into betterment planning, and locations as a whole were reorganised, with people vigorously concentrated into villages, agricultural and grazing land consolidated, and various anti-erosion and other measures introduced. Rehabilitation introduced change - often to no immediate benefit - into the operations of far greater numbers of peasant households than before. This led to the emergence of more organised political resistance - boycotts, sabotage and insurrections (cf. Beinart and Bundy, 1980; Bundy, 1987). Such organisation was usually transitory, though a variety of efforts to organise rural migrant peasants in a progressive direction were made in Transkei, beginning in the mid-1940s, by urban political organisations and returning migrants or students, on an ad hoc basis. The most significant organised anti-rehabilitation effort was directed at the 1945 UTTGC which had accepted rehabilitation. Popular organisations in Transkei, led and co-ordinated by the Transkei Organised Bodies (Secretary: Govan Mbeki), waged a campaign on the issue in the 1946 elections - and in an unprecedented turnout by Transkei voters, over half the incumbents lost their seats (Bundy, 1987: 269). As it was put in the UTTGC a few years later by S.N. Zokwe, addressing the Chief Magistrate,

Your Council adopted the principle of the rehabilitation scheme in 1945 and in consequence few older members were returned as members of the Council during the following year, because the people themselves became hostile and it was clear that they did not accept the scheme (*Proceedings*, 1954: 47).

Such resistance was perceived by the administration as 'agitation', with cattle culling in particular being

used as a fertile field for the spread of malice and incitement to trouble. Agitators have taken the opportunity to use stock reduction as a means of proving all Government Policy detrimental to the interests of the Natives (De Wet Nel Committee, 1954: 50- 1),

and magistrates in many districts were warned of this danger. The All African Congress was singled out for special attention, and I.B. Tabata's pamphlet 'The Rehabilitation Scheme: A New Fraud' (1945) was particularly hated. An inter-magisterial debate on the pamphlet (UTA A 1, 1/D) included a somewhat petulant letter from the Chairman of the Planning Committee to the CMTT, which remarked,

while it is submitted soil erosion is rampant, no constructive

criticism is advanced to improve the position [...] Credit is not given for any benefits introduced while all action not favoured by the people is taken and argued to prove and establish a case for the Government's lack of sincerity which is regarded as a blind to its true motive of suppression (8/2/47).

Militant local groups with something of a populist mass base were formed in Transkei, for example in the districts of Idutywa, Mount Ayliffe, Mount Frere, Qumbu and Tsolo. The Annual NAD Reports from 1948-1952 write 'organised opposition', 'alarming reverses [...] and serious retardation', 'malicious agitators' etc., only to have a 'blanket of silence' imposed by Verwoerd when he became Minister (Bundy, 1987: 274).<sup>9</sup>

On the whole, these rural political movements had conservative structures, aims and modes of operation - the ideological and economic imagery of 'traditionalism' and the pre-capitalist social formation was dominant (e.g. the ideal of the self-contained middle peasant family). In one not atypical example, a young Mpondomise chief in the Qumbu district opposed rehabilitation and fencing on the grounds that it was 'destroying tribal customs and unity' (A.M. Gwele, interview, 13/12/83). Resistance was sporadic, drew on the chief as locus of authority, and failed to build up consistent grassroots support, leading to divisions when he was jailed (for a relatively minor offence), and eventual political failure (Moll, 1983: 113-118).

These movements did succeed in slowing down rehabilitation and in bringing its most hated element, cattle culling, to a halt. The widespread struggles, however, remained small and localised, and tended to be 'defensively rebellious' rather than forward-looking, with little attempt at peasant-proletarian alliances:

Without political leadership from 'external' social groupings, without any class alliance, peasant unrest [...] was unlikely to transcend its 'isolated and sporadic' nature and to pose an effective political threat to the State (Bundy, 1987: 280).

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<sup>9</sup> More detailed discussion of these events may be found in Beinart and Bundy (1980: 301-304), Bundy (1987), Tabata (1974: 89-92), Hirson (1977: 125-128), James (1982, ch. 5) and Moll (1983, ch. 8). They parallel events further north: state efforts to conserve the soil and reorganise African agriculture were opposed and exploited by emerging nationalist movements throughout central and Southern Africa (Anderson, 1986).

In the long run they were doomed to failure as the more vigorous post-1953 reserve policy of the Nationalist Party swept resistance aside by more serious efforts to co-opt local dominant groups and by widespread repression.

## THE NATIONAL PARTY AND THE AFRICAN RESERVES

The Nationalist election victory on 26 May 1948 signified the coming to political power of a new class-alliance, one in which agricultural capital and small industrial capital played a large part, allied with various strata of Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and white wage-earners (O'Meara, 1983, ch. 15). It heralded a period of increasingly systematic repression and exploitation of the popular classes. The social and cultural separation of 'ethnic' groups was legislatively entrenched, black political rights were reduced yet further, and black trade unions and political movements were steadily destroyed. Real black wage levels and living standards fell during the first decade of apartheid, and control over black movement and the distribution of African labour between regions and sectors increased (Hindson, 1987, ch. 4; Lipton, 1986, ch. 2; Moll, 1987).

In this process, state reserve policy played a major part: the African reserves would serve as a useful political safety-valve by siting most African families in the reserves, supporting a policy of minimising urban African rights and providing a source of labour which was easily disciplined, necessary especially for low-wage white farms and mines<sup>10</sup> (James, 1982, ch. 1). In a sense this was nothing new, but it meant the intensification of a policy the United Party had, to an extent, been moving away from, and also implied less attention was paid to the *economic* development of the reserves for the first decade and a half of apartheid, and more to the political preservation of archaic classes within them. The Native Affairs Department emerged as the main means by which this new approach was planned and implemented.

Before 1948 the NAD was characterised by an ideology of paternalism and impartiality (see Social and Economic Planning Council, UG32/46: 64; Dubow, 1986: 9-11, 27-28), with one aim of officials allegedly being 'to make the Natives happy, healthy and contented' (Kenyon, 1939: 94). In the post-

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<sup>10</sup> Various forms of this program were argued within Nationalist circles (Posel, 1985), ranging from those who hoped for complete long-run social and economic racial separation (see Barker, 1953), to those who adopted a more pragmatic approach of minimising non-economic racial contact - the latter effectively winning out (Lazar, 1986). They shared a common fear of African urbanisation and political activity (SABRA, 1952: 5-7; Pansegrouw, 1951).



1950s era it became a vigorous enforcer of the gradually-surfacing apartheid policy, dominated by incoming intellectuals with a strong pro-segregation, often racist ideological bent - in part reflecting their class background from the 'Afrikaner' petty bourgeoisie. And, while the NAD had formerly been 'a bit of a backwater' (J.A. Norton, interview, 2/1/83), it rose to prominence after October 1950 when Verwoerd became Minister, supported by various allies (most importantly, Dr W.W.M. Eiselen, appointed from Professor of Anthropology at Pretoria University to Secretary for Native Affairs in October 1949, with several senior NAD officials being shafted in the process<sup>11</sup>):

Verwoerd made a name for himself, because he made things hum, that's for sure. For better or for worse he certainly put Native Affairs on the map, you can say what you like. Prior to that it had been a sort of Cinderella Department (ibid; cf. Davenport, 1987: 371ff).

The National Party had come to power with ideals and direction firmly in mind, but little real idea of the precise tactics it should adopt (Lewis, 1976: 33; Posel, 1985: 17). As one observer of the early days of apartheid put it, 'The picture I would draw is of muddle-headed administration, *not* the conventional one of deliberate repression' (Macmillan, 1950: 321, emphasis in the original). This vagueness was significant regarding the exact role of the African reserves and African administration, and was reflected in an atmosphere of uncertainty and little change in the NAD from 1948 - 1952 (Tomlinson Commission, UG61/55: 74-77), with pre-1948 policies simply being followed in a half-hearted way.

Two schools of thought can be detected in NAD debates of the late 1940's and early 1950's. The first, associated with the Smit proposals and the Tomlinson Commission of Inquiry into the Socio-Economic Development of the Native Reserves (appointed 1949), aimed at creating a viable full-time rural peasantry in the reserves and a stable rurally-situated migrant proletariat, with intra-reserve industrialisation to absorb excess labour. The second school of thought suggested that a true rural proletariat would be likely to move to 'white' urban areas as had been happening, which was anathema to the ideologues of apartheid. It viewed the reserves far more explicitly as a means of politically controlling the African masses, creating new political structures there and maintaining rights of access to rural resources - and hence the quality of the resources themselves - as long as possible.

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<sup>11</sup> This is graphically described by Hatch (1952: 84-85).



The main Smit-Tomlinson recommendation was that economic farming units (EFUs) should be created:

The number of livestock and the extent of land, dry and under irrigation, which the average Native requires in normal times to ensure for himself and his family [...] *at least a minimum subsistence value becoming a human being*, provided that he and his family mobilise fully as far as possible and desirable, their labour for this purpose and that the land, livestock and produce are *utilised in the most profitable manner* (De Wet Nel Committee, 1954: 144, my emphasis).

These economic units were to provide a comparable income and standard of living to those which could currently be earned on the mines. The Tomlinson Commission recommended a figure of £60 per household unit, which implied that some 49 per cent of reserve peasant families would be viably established in rural villages and own their agricultural land on this basis<sup>12</sup> (UG61/55: 114). The remaining 51 per cent of rural households would be supported by migrant remittances, or work in industries which would be established in the reserves. Hence the 10-year £104,486,000 Tomlinson Commission plan for developing the reserves the money to be spent mostly on agricultural development (33.4 million pounds) and industrial infrastructure (43 million pounds) - both absurdly low estimates (Spooner, 1960: 225; Van der Horst, 1956: 99-103, 109-110).

A central problem with the Tomlinson recommendations was that no politically acceptable policy to separate peasants from rural workers ever emerged. The creation of happy peasants living in mutual solidarity and traditional peace on viable farms would have required a fundamental reorganisation of production relations in the countryside - the expropriation of many households and their being confirmed as proletarian (even if, as it claimed, 'traditional' land rights were only worth £20 per annum to the average peasant household), and undercutting the economic bases of headmanship, chieftdom and the power of elders in locations. This kind of separation from such means of production as remained, combined with extreme economic and political insecurity and rural unrest, could have led to a rapid

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<sup>12</sup> This figure was far too low to permit household incomes competitive with those possible in urban areas. The Commission noted, however, that the minimum figure of around £120 recommended by witnesses would mean that '80 per cent of the present families in the Native areas would have to be removed from the land' (Van der Horst, 1956: 99), which was totally unacceptable.

defeat of the political aims of state policy.

While the state nominally accepted the Tomlinson report (see the government White Paper in the *NAD Report 1954-57*, UG14/59: 61-67), its reserve policy took a different path. It appears to have been decided on by 1953, and over the next two years its elements were gradually revealed. They can be crudely summarised as follows:

- Actively minimising the urban African population, and basing it in the reserves by maximising the 'population carrying capacity' of the reserves, and if necessary, reorganising the rural economy to this end, at the accepted expense of widespread rural poverty.
- Some sort of African self-government on the lines of the Bantu Authorities Act (68/1951), to strengthen dominant conservative internal classes and make them firmly dependent on the central state, and divert emerging African nationalist forces.
- Continued political repression of Africans in 'white' areas, and no political rights for them outside the reserves.
- Carefully controlled flows of African migrant labour from reserves to 'white' urban areas and farms, directed by newly-established labour bureaux.

This policy involved a shift in the reserves planning process. Until mid-1954, planning took place on a limited location-by-location basis, done by one of four regional Planning Committees. This system had not worked, as per the Smit plan, due to popular resistance centering around fencing and the culling of stock, the expense involved, problems of co-ordination and inefficiency, planning being done by outsiders with little understanding of local politics and opposition, and finally, the problem that no means of rapidly dividing the population into a full-time peasantry and a rural proletariat, had been found. This worked only with Africans from white farms and urban areas forcibly resettled into the reserves.

After 1954, planning in the reserves took a new turn - the fourth and most far-reaching phase of state economic intervention. It was summarised by Verwoerd in the South African Senate as follows:

We do not propose to concentrate so intensively on small individual areas of Bantu land that the remainder will be

neglected or that the people in these areas will oppose our efforts to save their land. We propose to stabilise wide areas in the first instance and to build on these foundations later ('Development and Progress in Bantu Communities', delivered to Senate 20/6/55; Department of Native Affairs, Pretoria).

This new policy was announced in NAD Circular 44 of 1954. It cancelled the Planning Committees in various areas, and decreed that instead a new 3-stage system was to be inaugurated, one of Stabilisation, Reclamation and Rehabilitation. Stabilisation would 'hold the status quo and prevent the deterioration of the soil until reclamation can be undertaken' ('Memorandum' on Stabilisation Planning in Transkei, 1957; CMTT 1158, 64/B IX: 2). This would involve siting residential areas, excising ruined lands, protecting water and fuel supplies, and establishing sites for rural villages. It was hoped rural resistance would be avoided thus:

the contentious rocks on which reclamation foundered in the past, viz. stock limitation and fencing, are temporarily completely out of the picture [...] until such time as the people (and the Department) are ready for the further step of reclamation (ibid, 3).

It was argued that the physical and ecological crisis in the reserves was accelerating, past NAD efforts to combat it had not been successful, and a widespread programme to combat soil erosion in the reserves was taken as priority -

the largest portion [of the reserves] has not been touched at all and has been left to deteriorate at such an alarming rate that there will be little worth saving by the time the cumbersome process of rehabilitation is applied to all areas (Minute 48/323, SNA to CMTT, 7/1/55; CMTT 1158, 64/B 1).

Once areas had been stabilised and their inhabitants had accepted stock limitation and fencing, there would come the next stage, Reclamation, designed to restore wasted resources and bring them back to optimum productivity. This would be similar to rehabilitation as defined by the Smit statement, involving mainly physical measures to restore the land. Eventually there would come Rehabilitation, now defined as 'the establishment of a true peasant-farmer class' (ibid), also based around Economic Farming Units. This was never to get off the ground.

According to Circular 44, stabilisation planning was be undertaken by a committee appointed on an ad hoc basis in each district, chaired by the magistrate and including an African member, district agricultural official, engineer etc. The tempo of this new planning increased considerably. In Transkei these committees began being set up late in 1954; they worked much more quickly and in a more decentralised way than the old Transkei Planning Committee, such that 29 locations were planned during their first two years of operation, and around 300 in the next eight years. Again there was talk of getting the cooperation of local inhabitants, but various forms of pressure on magistrates and chiefs were used, and legal objections were swept aside (see *Debates of the Transkei Legislative Assembly*, 1964: 165-9, 177-8). After stabilisation was completed, stock culling would be required within three to four years according to a scale drawn up by the NAD for the local tribal authority. If the people resisted, sanctions would be applied 'if necessary', including reducing educational, transport and other expenditure in the area ('Report on Stabilisation Conference January 1955', Minute 1/423, SNA to CMTT, 14/3/55; CMTT 1156, 64 I).

By 1955 preferred state policy towards the reserves was not to encourage industrialisation there but to *control* them via Bantu Authorities and 'self-government'. The state response to the Tomlinson Commission recommendations on reserve development (*NAD Report 1954-1957*, UG 14/59: 61-67; *HAD* 16/5/56, columns 5295 ff; also *HAD*, 28/3/57, columns 3747 ff), was to cut the expenditure estimates in Tomlinson by almost two-thirds, to £36,600,000 (Nieuwenhuysen, 1964: 9). Spooner remarked at the time that 'The policy now envisaged for the reserves is the entrenchment of tribalism on the one hand, and a half-hearted attempt at industrialisation on the other' (1960: 231). Only by the early 1960s, with plans for Bantustans firmly on the cards, were substantial funds allocated towards homeland development; by then the urban challenges had been met for the time being and more long-term restructuring of the economic and political roles of the reserves was required. The 1961/62 budget allocated far more money for the South African Native Trust and development work in the reserves, and in 1961 a 5-year reserve development plan to cost 57.1 million pounds was unveiled - of which fully 38 million pounds was earmarked for rural villages (Nieuwenhuysen, 1964: 10) but largely to house people removed from 'white' South Africa - labour tenants, 'black spots' and other displaced people (Yawitch, 1981: 30). Decentralisation and border industries were also emphasised, though just as in the case of the Tomlinson Commission, the capital required in areas lacking industrial infrastructure was vastly underestimated (Beinart, 1975: 92).

## POLITICAL EFFECTS OF POST-1954 RESERVES POLICY

The first major effect of the new direction in reserves policy was on rural political organisation. Before the era of Stabilisation, the form taken by state economic intervention in Transkei was that of selective, 'voluntary' location-by-location planning, in which opportunities for inter-locational solidarity and political activity were limited. In the later 1950s, very different conditions of repression and inclusion in the state-organised economic-political process prevailed as planning moved to a much larger scale - almost on a district scale in some cases (e.g. Nqamakwe, the first in Transkei to be completely stabilised, in 1959). This allowed solidarity as between locations undergoing state interference, while local political authorities and especially chiefs involved in the process provided an obvious target of attack.

The resistance of the late 1950s and early 1960s was due to the complete restructuring of rural society rather than simple opposition to Bantu Authorities, chiefs and headmen. In the 1950s, the involvement of chiefs and headmen in Bantu Authorities extended their powers over productive resources within the locations themselves, supported by the central state, and it was here that resistance to Bantu Authorities ultimately originated:

Control over and access to rural resources - especially land and livestock - remained central objectives of those involved in resistance. Equally, the mass of the population continued to display great sensitivity to the nature of local political authority. It was essentially when state intervention restructured the local political hierarchy that organised resistance surfaced (Beinart and Bundy, 1980: 310-1).

Indeed, in the context of Bantu Authorities, influx control and Bantu Education, Stabilisation came to be seen as part of a concerted state assault on the reserves and the rural popular classes. As the 1960 Commission of Inquiry into the Disturbances in Pondoland remarked, 'Although rehabilitation is not connected with Bantu Authorities, the majority of the ordinary Bantu in Eastern Pondoland now associates the two' (Report of the Van Heerden Committee, 1960: 15; also the evidence to the committee, 10, 52-55 etc), and other complaints about Bantu Authorities investigated centered around increased taxes, the misuse of funds by the Paramount Chief Botha Sigcau, bribery, excessive fines levied by tribal courts, and so on (ibid, 15-16, 21-23). Stemming directly from this was the complaint that the authorities were undemocratic, contrary to accepted tribal practices, and imposed from above by the South African state.

Bantu Authorities became an enemy and local politics were polarised as never before. Just as large-scale urban political restructuring was leading to disciplined and organised political campaigns (Lewis, 1976: 40), organised popular resistance flourished in the reserves and began to build up urban links (Copelyn, 1974; Mbeki, 1964, ch. 9; Lodge 1978a, 1978b). This was crushed in the late 1950s and early 1960s by unprecedented state violence.

Two aspects of this resistance are particularly interesting. Firstly, those areas and locations within Transkei which most resisted Bantu Authorities and Stabilisation were those in which household differentiation and polarisation had occurred least - traditionalist areas, most notably Eastern Pondoland and select areas of Eastern Transkei. On the other hand, Western Transkei and Ciskei evinced far less resistance; they had more landless and probably stockless households, due to the system of demarcation of fixed plots<sup>13</sup> (Moll, 1983: 57), a greater dependence on migrant remittances, higher education levels, and more effective proletarianisation, with less of an homogeneous mass basis of resistance to new state policies. Secondly, however, as soon as control over certain aspects of stabilisation and reclamation was transferred to Bantu Authorities in the late 1950s and 1960s, as one of the preliminary steps towards homeland 'self-government' (Nieuwenhuysen, 1964: 8), their single most unpopular aspect, stock culling, ground to a halt, as did many other measures designed to restore the land (J.A. Norton, interview, 2/1/83). While the chiefs and tribal councillors were able to rule with state support and lacking popular legitimacy, they clearly still feared a political backlash if they intervened directly in many people's livelihood.

## THE STORY SINCE 1960

By the late 1950s, plans for Transkei as revised by the ideologues of Apartheid were slowly getting off the ground. 'Self-government' in 1964 and 'independence' in 1976 resulted in due course. A petty bourgeoisie came into local political power, based partly on modified precapitalist structures in the countryside and partly on a new mental-manual division of labour in the occupational structure of the government administration (educational qualifications being especially generously remunerated), supported by vigorous repression. The Transkei administration has expanded vastly since the days when the Chief Magistrate and a small office 'used to run Transkei' (T.A.

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<sup>13</sup> In seven 'surveyed' districts of Transkei and most of Ciskei, arable land has been held on an individual basis since the early 1900s. Rights of succession are clearly defined and subdivision prohibited (though difficult to monitor).



Moll, interview 28/12/82; cf. Brownlee, 1937), and access to state-controlled surplus product has become the main channel of petty bourgeois advancement.<sup>14</sup>

It can be argued that state policy towards Transkei and the other African reserves was remarkably *successful* for many years. After a period of intense opposition in certain areas in the second half of the 1950s, the reserves ultimately proved their political worth. Rural resistance was localised and controlled in the 1960s (Lodge, 1978a; Streek and Wicksteed, 1981), in part because relations of rural oppression and some limited access to the means of production had been preserved for significant numbers of people. The disciplined low-wage African workforce which resulted helped real South African Gross Domestic Product to grow at around 3.1 per cent per annum in the 1950s and an impressive 5.7 per cent per annum in the 1960s - above the United Nations-estimated average of five percent per annum for developing market economies in this period (Department of Statistics, 1974: 18, 30).

More recently, however, the economy has weakened markedly, African unemployment and discontent about poor living conditions have increased (cf. Sutcliffe, 1986), and more fundamentally, the urbanisation of African workers linked to higher incomes and productivity and a changing industrial structure, has proved inevitable in the long run, despite some small reversal in the 1950s and 1960s (Simkins, 1983, ch. 2) - a worldwide process which even the violence and jail sentences of influx control (Savage, 1977: 294-300) could not defeat.

The role of stabilisation in all this is difficult to evaluate. It was implemented rapidly; according to Van Wyk, by 1964 386 out of 887 Transkei locations had been planned, thousands of miles of fencing and contour strips had been built, dams and weirs had been erected at strategic spots, and it was hoped to finish the reclamation of Transkei within 15 or 20 years (1967: 199), while Muller notes that by 1984, betterment plans had been drawn up for two thirds of Transkei's administrative areas (1986: 12-13).

Some critics like Yawitch claim betterment and stabilisation had the effect of impoverishing rural households (see Yawitch, 1981: 94). Based on Transkei experience, this seems unlikely. Stabilisation may have reduced the access of many households to agricultural resources, was used as a means of political control, may have intensified rural inequality, and on its own would be

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<sup>14</sup> See Kitching (1977: 71-73) for a similar argument re Kenya.

unlikely to raise agricultural or pastoral productivity since very little complementary extension advice, credit and loans, marketing and new technologies such as those made available to white farmers were forthcoming (Butler, Rotberg and Adams, 1977: 181-2; Bembridge, 1978: 11-12, 35ff). It probably slowed down the physical deterioration of the land; Van Wyk argues that the soil erosion situation improved noticeably with stabilisation (1967: 202). The current situation of extreme poverty (surveyed by Muller, 1986: 14-22) and widespread low-level resistance in Transkei indicates, however, that processes of environmental degradation and impoverishment are still very much at work, posing yet again, but in a more extreme form the questions about rural economic and environmental decline, African urbanisation and African political organisation which were confronted by the Natives' Economic Commission over 50 years ago.

## CONCLUSION

State intervention into economic activity and rights of use of land and stock in Transkei has been noteworthy since the colonial conquest. The most fundamental policy changes span a period of 35 years, from 1925 to 1960. While recent writings have critically analysed such intervention and its political effects, they have tended to ignore important shifts in environmental, agricultural and administrative policies, and hence overlook vital but subtle aspects of economic change and political organisation in the reserves (cf. Stadler, 1987: 130-135; Lodge, 1983: 261 ff; Yawitch, 1981).<sup>15</sup>

Four stages of intervention were demarcated above for Transkei, and involved progressions over time in several respects. From the State's side, the voluntary content of the operations steadily fell,<sup>16</sup> their magnitude and costs rose, and activities became increasingly subordinated to large-scale political goals. Apartheid reserve policy was the main shift here: it drew on skilled officials and technical knowledge and research on soil erosion, environmental degradation and African pastoralism accumulated over the years, but

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<sup>15</sup> The major exception here is the careful work of Beinart and Bundy (1980, 1987), and Bundy (1987).

<sup>16</sup> According to an acerbic but well-informed critic, 'The [Native Affairs] Department is very fond of advertising its keenness to obtain the co-operation of the rural Natives whenever it has reforms or changes in mind. The extraordinary fact remains that the instances of such co-operation being given over a period of thirty-seven years, and in which innumerable adjustments have been, and are being, made in rural Native life, could be counted on the fingers of one hand' (Walker, 1948: 55).

significantly modified the end-goals and means of NAD activities in the reserves - to the resentment of many of the NAD staff (V.M.P. Leibbrandt, interview, 1/12/82). In terms of 'periodising' reserve economic policy at the level at which it was experienced by large numbers of rural households, the crucial date appears to be 1954.

This approach is consistent with overall economic developments in the reserves. Betterment and Stabilisation slowed down environmental collapse and thus helped maintain the land and stock rights necessary to reinforce peasant ideology, as well as involving considerable social restructuring which strengthened the powers of Bantu Authorities. Rural resistance in turn went through several stages, linked to state intervention in rural households' economic activities, but was ultimately constrained by peasant differentiation (hence absence of common economic interests) and increasing household dependence on migrant labour.

## CONCLUSION

The relation between economic change and political resistance is subtle and complex. This essay has stressed the environment as mediating the economic-political relation in rural Transkei in two ways. Firstly, forms of economic organisation combined with state African policy (de-urbanisation, maintenance of 'communal' land rights, etc.) led to environmental degradation and collapse, undercutting the rural economy and increasing the effectiveness of urban African political opposition. Secondly, within the state, soil erosion was understood as a physical not a social problem, leading to attempts to reorganise the physical conditions of production for rural producers without much understanding of the social factors determining economic behaviour - i.e. overexploitation of the soil as a rational survival response to economic and political oppression. Thus, while stabilisation was to a limited extent effective in limiting soil erosion and maintaining rural resources, its long-term effects were small, and the hoped-for recovery of rural output never materialised.

But while this is an important 'top-down' part of the story, there is a vital need for in-depth exploration of rural resistance. Ground-level political action has a variety of 'feedback' and often neutralising effects on state policy, which may be difficult to isolate and analyse properly. Only in these terms can the ultimate failure of state reserve policy be understood - via peasants resisting state reorganisation of their conditions of production and stolidly refusing to be separated from their land and cattle. When combined with state upholding of pre-capitalist class forms, this led to the stagnation of rural production and environmental deterioration, and in due course to a renewed urban African political challenge.

An intriguing element here is the widespread evidence of 'everyday' resistance to the state in rural Transkei, but its extent, timing and effects are unknown. It is clear it had a major influence on policy via the magistrates of the Native Affairs Department, who were very sensitive to local political conditions. This was the most important means by which rural Africans were 'represented' within the state apparatuses. Feedback from the magistrates had important effects on state policy, especially in the pre-1950s period. This was part of the reason why the NAD was so extraordinarily effective in disorganising and repressing the rural masses in the first half of the 20th century. It is no coincidence that the imposition of Bantu Authorities and the larger-scale resistance of the 1950's coincided with the decline of the magistrates and a shift in power to the far more crude and centralised upper

reaches of the NAD. These issues have been little explored in the literature, which displays a penchant towards examining urban politics and organised rural revolts instead.

Finally, much of the Transkei peasant experience - including differentiation, the activities of the Native Affairs Department, regional and geographical aspects of environmental change, the role of pre-capitalist political and cultural elements in facilitating and limiting political organisation - has not yet been explored. This is an exciting area in which several data sources (oral evidence, magisterial archives, contemporary surveys and research) have hardly been tapped. In this respect, more and detailed micro-level research would be very welcome.

## APPENDIX: SOURCES AND RESEARCH

### 1. Documentary Sources

There is a large variety of material available on Transkei and the reserves in the period dealt with above. The most useful secondary work is that of Beinart (1979, 1981, 1982) and Beinart & Bundy (1980, 1987), who also cover sources and references (see especially Beinart, 1979 Appendix 1, 351-376 and Bibliography). Muller (1986) surveys the evidence on poverty and inequality in 20th century Transkei. Essential contemporary sources are Hunter (1979, first published 1936), Fox & Back (1937), Jokl (1943), Kenyon (1939) and Mears (1947).

Uncatalogued material on state policy in the reserves and efforts at rural restructuring can be found in the Umtata Archives in Transkei. Three sets of files proved useful:

- a) The Chief Magistrate's files (referred to as CMTT), particularly categories 3 (Chiefs and Headmen) and 64 (Rehabilitation). Both include useful debates and documents, particularly the correspondence between the SNA and the Chief Magistrate.
- b) The UTTGC Agricultural files (referred to as UTA A). This is a series of uncatalogued files and boxes dealing with select agricultural issues in Transkei until 1955; boxes one to eight deal with rehabilitation, district by district. These include location planning reports, details on how planning and reclamation were implemented, and other rehabilitation matters, with some details on resistance.
- c) The Transkei Territorial Authority files. Some files include figures on stock, dipping returns and distribution of arable allotments.

Other important sources include:

- a) United Transkeian Territories General Council, *Proceedings and Reports*, 1931-1955.
- b) *The Report of the Commission for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa* (Tomlinson Commission). Most researchers use only the published summary, UG61/55, but the



unpublished 1954 version in 51 chapters and 3,755 pages is available, and includes detailed material on every aspect of state reserve policy and conditions in the reserves. Volume 7 chapter 19 on Agriculture was the most useful.

c) *The Report of the Departmental Committee on Stock Reduction in the Native Areas* (De Wet Nel Committee), 1954. This Report was not published or released, but a copy is in the possession of a member, V.M.P. Leibbrandt. It includes data on culling of stock, stock sales, economic farming units and resistance to culling.

d) *The Report of the Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland* (Van Heerden Committee), 1960. This includes evidence to the above committee, and has exceptionally detailed information on the 1960 Mpondo rebellion. It was not published; only recently have some library copies become available in South Africa.

## 2. Oral Material

Various people were interviewed in 1982 and 1983, from two groups:

### a) Magistrates and agricultural officials

Field officials in Transkei 1925-1960 proved to have an incredibly thorough and detailed knowledge of local economic and political conditions in Transkei and of NAD policy, despite lacking formal social science training. They were a mine of empirical information and illustrated the degree of local autonomy in the administration and carrying out of regulations; they firmly believed they shaped policy to suit local conditions, and provided observations on what it was like *on the ground* when policy changed in Pretoria.

### b) African farmers, agricultural extension workers, and migrants

Interviews with urbanised Africans were fairly straightforward, but in the rural areas language barriers and racial difficulties were encountered all the time. The Qumbu district was chosen as case-study (Moll, 1983, chs. 8-9) and groups of older men from various administrative areas were spoken to. Discussion amongst them was encouraged, and one could thus gain a comparative perspective from men who lived through the events dealt with above - although they were all drawn from a similar social grouping.

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### 3. Interviews and Discussions

P.M. Goso, Upper Culunca, 3/1/83; Qumbu, 5/1/83. Teacher in Tabankula and Qumbu since 1930s, now retired.

S. Gidmasana, Umtata, 13/2/82. Senior Agricultural Officer for Griqualand East.

A.M. Gwele, Qumbu 13-15/12/83. Teacher in Qumbu district since the 1930s.

M.K. Guzana, Umtata, 5/1/83. Lawyer with experience in fighting rehabilitation, leader of Democratic Party (Official Opposition) in Transkei, 1964-76.

L. Hagen, Cape Town, 25/10/82. Agricultural Official in Transkei, lecturer and later Principal at Flagstaff Agricultural College until 1968.

V.M.P. Leibbrandt, Durban, 1/12/82. Magistrate in Mount Ayliffe 1945-47, CMTT 1959-63; member, De Wet Nel Committee.

T.A. Moll, Umtata, 28/12/82, 5/1/83. Magistrate in Transkei and Ciskei since 1950s.

J.A. Norton, Gonubie, 2/1/83. Agricultural Official in Transkei 1930s to 1950s; member, Transkei Planning Committee and De Wet Nel Committee.

Enoch Z. Myeki (headman) and about 10 men, Chief's Great Place, Sulenkama Administrative area, Qumbu district, 30/12/82.

B.B. Mgobozi (headman) and about 8 men at the Headman's Place, Upper Culunca Administrative Area, Qumbu District, 3/1/83.

H. Matiwane (headman) and 7 men, Qaba Administrative Area, Qumbu district, 4/1/83.

