

**FARMING CATTLE, CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS: CATTLE OWNERSHIP AND
CULTURAL POLITICS IN PEDDIE DISTRICT, EASTERN CAPE.**

By

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Abstract:

This paper would fit into the areas of Agriculture and Poverty and Livelihood.

In many rural and peri-urban areas of the Eastern Cape, far from being the 'last stronghold of traditional modes', cattle represent thoroughly modern resources that are culturally and economically embedded in the livelihoods and lifestyles of a great many households. This is so not only for the households that own cattle, but also for the majority of people who are without cattle, but who nevertheless derive significant benefits, of both a material and symbolic nature, from the presence of cattle in their settlements and villages.

Increasingly, studies conducted in southern Africa and elsewhere are attempting to put monetary values on the benefits derived from environmental resources in the broadest sense. The material benefits that accrue to cattle owners have also been subjected to such valuation, thus proving –if any further proof was needed – that peasant farmers are, for the most part, rational in their farming and investment decisions. In this paper, I ask why cattle in particular appear to be the saving and investment instrument of choice in rural areas. I then shift the focus onto three questions relating to cattle ownership that are of particular interest:

- (i) in terms of the broader rural population of the former Ciskei, just who are the present-day owners of cattle?
- (ii) in what significant ways do cattle feature in the livelihoods and social relationships of rural people?
- (iii) how is this articulated in the perceptions of differently situated people towards cattle as a 'special domain of property' or otherwise, à la Ferguson (1994)?

With respect to the broader projects of 'poverty alleviation' and 'integrated rural development' many of which seek to encourage greater *commercialisation* in the rural cattle production sector, I argue that we

need to understand more clearly and to acknowledge the important role that cattle play as powerful cultural icons in the changing cultural and gender politics of the rural Eastern Cape.

Introduction: Situating South African agricultural practice

Consumers in wealthier countries across the world are growing increasingly suspicious of what some pundits refer to as 'Frankenstein' science. Concerns are being raised over particularly the pervasiveness of sub-lethal doses of chemical poisoning in food through the use of pesticides, herbicides and the dubious animal feeding practices¹ in modern-day food production. A convoluted and much-hyped struggle rages over fears relating to the environmental implications of aggressively marketed GMOs². As a result, many Northern consumers are agitating for changes in the way food is produced, processed and distributed. Under pressure from consumers, farmers have started to respond and to embrace smaller-scale, safer 'organic farming' methods of producing food. But while these changes might yet revolutionise the way food is produced and consumed in the northern hemisphere, to date they have had little impact on the way food is produced in countries like South Africa.

Apart from these developments in food production *per se*, the deepening political crises around the world, many of which are fuelled by growing economic and social inequalities on a global scale, have caused international debates about 'development' to begin taking a fresh look at interventions at the micro-level. Globally, issues such as local economic development and 'local food security' are enjoying renewed currency (Maxwell 2001). In the US, for instance, interest is growing in 'making space for sustainable food systems' at the community level (Feenstra 2002) and in the notion of '*civic agriculture*', which applies to 'local growers, consumers, rural economies, and communities of place....' and

'has the power to focus public attention on the contradictions within our industrially-modeled and corporately-controlled agriculture, as well as on the potential of 'relocalized' food systems' (DeLind 2002:217)

In the EU, a clear recognition exists, backed by a formidable, \$50-billion a year subsidy regime, of the value of farmers and agriculture to what Legum (2003) refers to as 'Europe's whole way of life, including its environment ... the variety of food, the cuisine, the countryside, the village life.....'. This, the fact that Europe is food-secure and the 7 million votes that European farmers represent, make political leaders in the EU's constituent countries less than enthusiastic about tampering with farming subsidies across the

¹ Most notably generated by the crisis over the widespread incidence of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in cattle herds in the U.K. since the mid-1990s and more recently in Japan. Globalised trade in animals and raw animal products makes it virtually impossible to maintain disease-free status in large geographical areas of the world, a situation unlikely to be reversed as public funds for monitoring diseases shrink further (Standard Bank Agri-Review, April 2003).

² Genetically modified organisms. For the past five years, the EU has had in place a ban on the import and cultivation of bio-engineered foods by member states (Daily Dispatch 9 August 2003).

EU. This is largely to the detriment of countries like South Africa which are keen to exploit opportunities in the EU's agricultural markets.³

So the trends in much of Northern hemisphere agriculture include:

(i) continued and unequivocal protection of local farmers to reverse the decay of diverse, local agricultural economies, including through protection of products and places by means of 'place of origin' legislation (ii) more strident questioning by consumers of conventional methods of farming and producing food, with 'organic' methods of production gaining ground and (iii) renewed emphasis on the *social* and *cultural* value of farming livelihoods, rural lifestyles and on keeping people on the land in rural areas.

In this paper, I take these trends as the international backdrop against which to compare and evaluate developments in South African agriculture. More specifically though, I want to focus as the title of my paper suggests, on the *sociology* of cattle production in the former bantustans of the Eastern Cape. Specifically, I want to look at how developments in this sector might contribute to moving us closer to – or further away from - these apparently positive trends in food production in some Northern hemisphere countries.

In the next section of the paper, I give a brief overview of the institutional and ideological changes (and continuities) in South African agriculture over the last 10-15 years. I then offer a *partial* review the contribution of anthropological understanding, gained through long-term ethnographic fieldwork, to debates about agrarian change, specifically in the Eastern Cape. Thereafter, I turn to a case-study of the role of cattle in mediating the economic and social disparities between the rural and the urban and within the rural areas themselves. I provide some data on who owns cattle in Peddie district and how cattle feature in the livelihoods and social relationships of rural people. In conclusion, I offer some thoughts on the place of cattle production in future given, *inter alia*, current efforts by government and other state agencies to promote commercial activity in the 'subsistence' agricultural sector.

Transforming the South African economy and agriculture: A neo-liberal coup?

Post-apartheid South Africa, in several important ways, is seriously out of step with the 'localising' developments in the Northern hemisphere. Here, government is still intent upon 'streamlining' our economy, essentially through initiatives inspired by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme that are decidedly *not* pro-poor in nature, to be 'globally competitive'. We remain enthralled by the prospect of foreign direct investment ('FDI') which will surely come flowing in once our economic house is in order, with deregulation and privatisation high on the agenda. To date, this Cinderella

³ Health and environmental concerns regarding production practices in the South are seen as the 'new barriers' obstructing competitive access to these lucrative markets.

approach has been, at least from the perspective of the unskilled majority of the population, woefully unsuccessful, with retrenchments driving further unemployment and deepening poverty⁴ in the townships and rural hinterland areas of our country. Foreign investment in the real economy, rather than in speculative equity and capital markets, meanwhile remains decidedly elusive.

In the agricultural field, efforts since at least 1990 to improve economic efficiency have included the 'medicine' of deregulation: slashing production subsidies, debt relief schemes and marketing support⁵ to 'commercial' (white) farmers. Significant cuts in agricultural research budgets that were previously directed exclusively towards 'commercial' agriculture have also been instituted. The reorientation of agricultural research to serve the needs of 'black' farmers has not happened to any marked degree, because of institutional 'path dependency' and powerful vested interests in the sector as a whole.⁶ The 'right-sizing' and reorientation of public institutions such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the Land Bank and the various former bantustan agricultural development corporations (see Lipton 1996:406ff), has arguably been more successful, particularly in the case of the Land Bank, which has adopted an approach much more in tune with the needs of resource-poor farmers.

Among many other changes⁷, many white farmers have moved to improve their efficiency by cutting their biggest input cost, namely labour. This has been achieved through increased mechanisation and changes in farming practice, with a striking turn to various forms of 'game farming' evident, in the Eastern Cape for one. The resulting haemorrhage of labour off farms and into informal, shanty settlements on the outskirts of virtually all towns and cities is ensuring that rural food production and the viability of rural sociality are under greater pressure than ever before. The casualisation of farm work has become the norm in many areas, making livelihoods evermore insecure for millions of people, fuelling rural crime and increasing the physical (security) and economic risks of farming and rural life for all.

For the *former bantustan communal areas*, a particularly worrying aspect of the government's neo-liberal economic path is a predictable obsession with increasing 'economic efficiency' - equated by government with 'commercialisation' of agriculture - where 'subsistence' or even 'sub-subsistence' or 'survivalist' production is said to be the norm. This drive to commercialise 'subsistence' agriculture, ideologically underpinned by the urgent 'necessity' of major tenure reform in communal areas, is a key site of

⁴ The 2001 Census pegs national unemployment at 41,6 per cent, with the Eastern Cape 'leading' with 54,6 per cent unemployment (SundayTimes August 10 2003). Ngwane *et.al.* (2001) estimate that two-thirds of the rural population of South Africa live below the poverty line.

⁵ Through the various statutory Marketing Boards brought into existence by the 1937 Marketing Act. These Boards were only finally axed in 1998, after a protracted struggle.

⁶ The Standard Bank's Agri-Review of April 2003 argues that 'the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) is channelling the operational funds it has available into non-commercial agriculture.'

⁷ Other, socially progressive changes have sought to 'transform' the sector and include pieces of legislation that seek variously to set in train a land reform process, protect the rights of labour tenants and other farmworkers, and set out minimum wage levels and other 'basic conditions of employment'.

contestation around agrarian policy in government circles and civil society networks. Much of the debate rather unhelpfully takes the implicitly linear, modernist notion of *dualism* as its lodestar.⁸

In another paper (Ainslie 2002b), I take up the cudgels against the limited utility of *dualism* as an analytical concept (as opposed to its use as a political tool) in theorising about agriculture in South Africa. My purpose in this paper is to argue for a more nuanced understanding of the variety of livelihoods and lifestyle options that characterise former bantustan rural areas that are still home to some 12,7 million South Africans⁹ (Statistics South Africa 1999). In particular, I *argue for* retaining these 'multiple options', including the possibility of achieving household food-security, and *against* a drive for 'commercialisation', particularly one that is naïve of history and economic realities (see Murray 2000).

Anthropological contributions to making sense of the former bantustans in a post-structuralist, 'rural livelihoods' world¹⁰

Structuralist (for example, neo-Marxist) analyses of agrarian issues as they pertain to the former bantustans are out of favour in most quarters and are generally only deployed strategically and/or rhetorically these days. In their place, the fuzzy, multi-directional and arguably, de-politicising 'sustainable rural livelihoods' model is currently in vogue in much of the poverty and development literature (Carney 1998; Campbell *et.al.* 2002; see also critique in Murray 2000:117).

While one might be forgiven for thinking that they would have something to offer these debates, precious few contributions are being made by local anthropologists to current debates about rural development and 'agrarian transformation' in South Africa.¹¹ Why this should be so is the topic for another paper, but may include their woeful intellectual marginality in post-apartheid South Africa at least¹² and a reluctance to

⁸ My take on this is simple: is agriculture and the agrarian economy of South Africa a *unitary* system, the various components of which are intertwined in significant ways, even though some parts of the whole were (and remain) politically and economically marginalised under colonialism and apartheid? Alternatively, are there *dual* systems of agricultural production in South Africa: one that produces food and fibre on freehold land and along commercial lines and another that takes place in communal areas at a level of subsistence production? I am an advocate of the first conceptualisation. In contrast, two highly regarded contributors to debates in the agricultural sector – Nick Vink and Johann Kirsten – suggest that one of 'the three most important economic features of South African agriculture [is] its dualistic structure (commercial and subsistence sectors)...' (Vink and Kirsten 2003:3; see also Lipton 1996; Ortmann and Machethe 2003:47-8).

⁹ Among rural people, three-quarters are poor, most of them chronically. The poorest third of African households are falling into long-term destitution (Daily Dispatch 14 June 2003, quoting Cobus de Swardt, PLAAS, UWC).

¹⁰ This section is a very preliminary and selective 'first stab' at critiquing the *anthropological* corpus which deals with the Eastern Cape. I acknowledge that other anthropologists, particularly at the University of Fort Hare (for eg. Raum and De Jager 1972), as well as prominent historians, notably William Beinart, Colin Bundy and Luvuyo Wotshela, have made major contributions to this corpus, and I hope to engage with their work and the larger corpus in a future paper.

¹¹ McAllister's excellent 1992 paper stands out here (see McAllister 1992).

¹² The impact of South African-born anthropologists on the discipline internationally remains impressive (see Hammond-Tooke 1997).

speak out too critically, given these academically fraught times, against the policies of the ANC-led government.¹³

To be sure, precious little long-term *ethnographic* research into agrarian issues has been conducted in the Eastern Cape's former bantustan rural areas since the efflorescence at Rhodes University during the early to mid- 1980s.¹⁴ Even then, changing times and the exposè nature of much of this work meant that it struggled to pick up the intellectual threads of an earlier generation of scholars, notably Mayer, Pauw and Hammond-Tooke¹⁵. Instead, the 'new' generation of fieldworkers sought their ethnographic bearings most often in the Eastern Cape classic studies like Hunter's 1936 *Reaction to Conquest* and the *Keiskammahoek Rural Survey (KRS)* (1952). Research into the *connections* between these areas and regional centres, such as Umtata, Mdantsane, East London, King William's Town, Queenstown and other 'border' towns, remains virtually non-existent, with the 'Xhosa in Town' trilogy of the early 1960s, which covers East London and its hinterland, a monumental exception.¹⁶ These lacuna (mercifully) deter many academics from voicing their opinions on subjects into which they have rather limited insight.

In the Eastern Cape, the work of De Wet and Manona (in the former Ciskei) and McAllister (former Transkei), the bulk of it undertaken in the politically fraught 1980s, stands out. Many other studies, conducted for graduate degree purposes, or as part of larger, national, 'snap-shot' surveys, have contributed far smaller pieces of our rather fuzzy, jigsaw puzzle understanding of social, economic and cultural practices in the rural areas of the former bantustans. Synthesis *over time and place* has also not been a notable feature of this corpus.¹⁷ Bank's recent efforts to demonstrate the extensive *interpenetration* between town and countryside, by drawing out the myriad connections between what has happened in Duncan Village in East London over the past forty years with processes of social and economic transformation in the adjacent rural hinterland, are exceptional in this regard and highly laudable (Bank and Qambata 1999; Bank 2001; 2002a; 2002b).

¹³ Instead, the debates about 'agriculture, land and the South African economy' tend to be dominated by the neo-liberalism of mainstream agricultural economists, based at the universities of Pretoria, the Free State and Stellenbosch, some of whom are close to senior government officials. The Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape and the National Land Committee remain lone, critical voices against the direction being charted in government agrarian reform policy.

¹⁴ This an indictment of the way many of us, despite our disciplinary hubris about the merits of long-term ethnographic fieldwork, continue to practice 'helicopter anthropology' in this country.

¹⁵ McAllister and Manona's early fieldwork was guided intellectually by Mayer, then Director at the ISER, Rhodes University (see Mayer 1980). Personal communication, Cecil Manona 15 August 2003.

¹⁶ Lipton (1996:404) notes that 'there are serious gaps in our knowledge of South Africa's agrarian history, particularly in the demographic and output data..'. Similarly, Weiner et.al. (1997:46) suggest that 'there is still considerable confusion about who the bantustan population are, and what they want, need, and are capable of achieving.' See Lahiff (1997) and Ainslie (2002) for further discussion on this subject.

¹⁷ Indeed, should we not be asking probing questions as to why, for instance, the belated publication of a collection edited by De Wet and Whisson (1997) got a rather lukewarm reception, particularly when compared to the original study it sought to build on, namely the KRS? Are we to conclude that the days of broader, integrated research programmes – along the lines of the Xhosa in Town trilogy and the KRS - that seek to synthesise our understanding across a range of cultural, social and economic changes for particular locations in the Eastern Cape, are over? If yes, is this 'development' a cause for celebration or regret?

Far more typical have been ephemeral, parochial studies that do not adequately situate the study location within the larger regional and national economy and cultural spaces. For one thing, this 'localising tendency' has allowed the notion of agricultural dualism to persist well past its sell-by date, because such studies provide 'evidence' of the continued economic and social isolation and cultural 'otherness' of people and agrarian systems in bantustan rural areas.

In this light, McAllister's (1999; 2001) exposition on the intimate relationship between agrarian activity and a sense of community or an agrarian identity in 'the face of momentous social change' amongst Xhosa-speakers in Shixini, is a useful paper to pay closer attention to.¹⁸ Through skillful demonstration of Shixini people's complex interweaving of, by turn, insular cultural/ritual practice and expansive economic activity, McAllister makes a powerful case for the illuminating – and indeed corrective¹⁹ – *anthropological* insights that long-term engagement with a particular research site, and with particular people's lives, can generate.

For me, McAllister's major contributions in this paper and in his recent monograph (2001) have included the offering of a meticulously researched, culturally nuanced *corrective* to the linear notion of widespread 'de-peasantisation', of how political and economic circumstances have apparently conspired to turn rural economies and people 'inside out', forcing them to adopt an 'outward orientation', with respect to their economic livelihoods and social lifestyles, at the expense of local practices and 'efficient agriculture'. This idea is rife, if sometimes implicit, in the South African and African debates on rural development and social transformation (Bryceson 2000; cf. Lipton, De Klerk and Lipton (eds) 1996; Ferguson 1999), and is mainly driven by the widespread evidence of a general abandonment of arable cultivation in many bantustan rural areas and the limited *formal* marketing of agricultural produce (and hence the official invisibility of such production). Indeed, rural people tend often to come across as helpless and disorganised and their agricultural production depicted as 'scratching about in the soil'. In contrast to this typical depiction, people in Shixini appear instead to be singularly (and unsurprisingly) goal-directed, and engaged in building their homesteads and communities through agricultural activities that are not, however, oriented towards *individualised* capitalist production (McAllister 2001; Bank 2002b:12; see also Gudeman 2001:11 on the inner/outer relationships of house/ community economies contained within market economies).

Standing against mainstream prescriptions for how to tackle what is 'wrong' with the 'subsistence economy' of the rural (former bantustan) hinterland, McAllister's work demonstrates not only that there are still pockets of a 'functional' agrarian economy but, more importantly, that these pockets exist because

¹⁸ I concentrate on McAllister's recent work (1999; 2001) because of its intellectual weight and because it has been picked up by progressive observers, notably Ben Cousins at PLAAS, as supporting an alternative reality in 'communal areas' of the former Transkei (see McAllister 2000).

¹⁹ His example in the paper concerns the inaccurate measurement of maize yields in the former Transkei by surveys conducted in the past, but applies to a wider range of issues than this.

of their inherent meaningfulness, and the ongoing commitment to and identification with this 'way of life' by significant numbers of rural people who *choose*, through their cultural practices and material investments, to remain rooted in their villages rather than be sucked into the (for them) less coherent, globalising vortex that is post-1994 South Africa.

Given that the 'backward', subsistence sector is most often seen as

(i) a significant drain on the fiscus, through both massive welfare transfers in the form of pensions and grants (Lipton 1996:412) and in the more recent imperative to 'deliver' expensive rural infrastructure, and (ii) as an environmental disaster zone, starting with the 'evils' of the communal tenure system, McAllister's perspective is refreshing for its championing the cause and the *agency* of rural, peasant actors. In doing so, his perspective concurs with Kiernan's that 'ordinary people [sic]...are not lacking in cultural resources [n]or in the capacity to resist the meanings which dominant others impose on events and to impress their own meanings on what is happening to them' (1997:61ff) – and, of course, to act on these 'meanings.' By pointing to this capacity, McAllister opens up space for debate around the nature, effects and importantly, *the limited social and economic attractiveness* to marginalised, largely unskilled, social actors of 'integration' into a 'commercial' agricultural economy with its totalising market hegemony.²⁰

Where McAllister's argument is unhelpful is when it is splashed onto the broader canvas that is the former Transkei, let alone the Eastern Cape: do people in Shixini really have a highly *particularistic* identity as rural Xhosa, with 'built-in' agrarian buffers of ritual and communal activities, such as work-parties, and an 'agrarian morality' or do they share this with other Xhosa-speaking inhabitants of (similar) rural villages across the Eastern Cape? If the former, what makes the Shixini situation different from other, more or less socially connected and economically integrated areas and how relevant are McAllister's argument and the Shixini case?

On a different tack, we may ask to what extent the 'identity as rural Xhosa' that Shixini people apparently share is in fact a hegemonic one, an 'outcome of specific historical forces' (Bank 2001b:17), and the product of a patriarchal value-system that has itself been propped up through ritual practice, tribal authorities and labour migrancy practices. Given, for instance, the steady economic advances made by women in South Africa since 1990, and the growing economic and social marginality of men (especially younger, unskilled men) is it not possible that this value-system is increasingly contested in a variety of social and cultural spaces, by socially 'subordinate' categories of rural people?

²⁰ Where McAllister's paper is less successful, I would argue, is in failing to make and to demonstrate the myriad connections between the economic and cultural practices of Shixini people and the world beyond Willowvale district. The result is an uneasy sense of chronic isolation and of stasis - social and cultural, not to mention economic - in 'idyllic' Shixini. McAllister appears to anticipate this criticism, because his work acknowledges 'intrusions' like Betterment Planning, out-migration, long-term labour migrancy and the rise of the 'pensions economy' – the most immediate shocks of (late) modernity in Shixini. But these are, for the most part, cursorily surveyed and dispatched as having an impact upon, but ultimately *not* disabling the 'sense of community and social integrity....maintained through a dense network of relations...' in Shixini (1999b:21).

While McAllister has emphasised field and garden cultivation as central to agrarian practice and identity in Shixini, the focus of my fieldwork in Peddie (Ngqushwa) is on the 'local politics' of *cattle production*. While there are many similarities in our work and in developing an understanding of what people in Peddie are 'doing' with cattle, I have borrowed from McAllister's work, there are significant differences.

Some of these differences stem from the comparatively greater economic integration, because of its geographical location, of an area like Peddie, compared to the isolation of Shixini, Willowvale and many of the Transkeian seaboard and hinterland areas more generally. This means that, for the most part, the overall 'subsistence ethic' or 'agrarian morality', which for McAllister is based on actual agrarian production, is considerably weaker in the villages of Peddie than in Shixini. Furthermore, 'commensuration through the alchemy of money' (Gudeman 2001:15), i.e. the penetration of money into everyday exchange, even in respect of culturally enclaved commodities like cattle, is probably also greater in Peddie. Does this mean that 'community' in Peddie is more fractious and contested (or even illusory) than in Shixini? If yes, do people struggle against this fractiousness, resisting other people's constructions, scripts and projects and try instead to impose their own narrower meanings on 'community' or the equivalent of an 'agrarian morality' and if so, how? In the final analysis, where does this leave projects like those of government, aimed at changing patterns of material and cultural production and consumption in these areas?

'Untapped potential'? Cattle in the Rural Economy of Peddie District

Rural Peddie district²¹, comprising 68 villages, is characterised by a predominantly 'subsistence' economy, that is heavily reliant on sources of income derived from outside the district. These include government old age pensions, disability and child support grants, and grants for HIV-infected people. Remittances from urban-based family members are also important for household livelihoods. Because of this, people have invested heavily in urban networks. There exist elaborate and longstanding patterns of rural-urban migrations and interactions between rural Peddie and specific urban centres in the Eastern Cape. Circular migration between town and country play a critical role in the circulation of resources, people and increasingly critical, information about job opportunities, with the view to providing resources in cash and in kind to rural homesteads (Ainslie 2002a). Not everyone is poor though, and glaring wealth and resource differentials have been a feature of these areas during the last half of the twentieth century and quite probably well before that.

In terms of cattle ownership, only some 30 per cent of the households in the district currently own cattle, but the district has held roughly the same number of cattle for the past fifty years, albeit with acute die-

²¹ As of November 2000, Peddie district no longer officially exists. It was merged with 42 villages formerly in Zwelitsha district and the larger area has been renamed Ngqushwa Municipality.

offs of cattle during prolonged drought. While there are households that hold 80 or more cattle, they are rare and I would disagree with the contemporary relevance of Sansom's assertion that cattle ownership lends itself to 'spectacular differences in wealth' (Sansom 1974). In any event, even destitute homesteads can become cattle owners: they can do this by inheriting cattle or by requesting that some of the bridewealth or 'damages' paid for a daughter be paid for in 'cattle with legs' and not in cash.

Of the 30 per cent of households of cattle-owning households, nearly 54 per cent own between one and six animals and only some eight per cent own more than 20 animals. Average cattle holding per household is nearly 9 cattle (note: *not* Large Stock Unit). Although ownership is more evenly spread in coastal villages, on average across the district, 48 per cent of the household heads that have cattle are over 65 years of age, while those household heads under 50 years of age, comprise between 24 and 32 per cent of the cattle-owning households. Households headed by *men* account for around 79 per cent of the cattle-owning households, and both the least and best educated people are among those with the largest herds of cattle. That said, the tiny number of people in Peddie with a tertiary education, have the highest average cattle holdings per household, at 17 animals/household.

Far from being the 'last stronghold of traditional modes' that government and other agents of development have to wrest away from their reluctant owners, the cattle (and goats and sheep) kept by people in rural villages in Peddie district thus represent thoroughly modern resources that I want to argue are culturally and economically embedded in the livelihoods and lifestyles of probably the majority of households (Ferguson 1990, 1992; Ainslie (ed) 2002). If as Gudeman has argued, 'in community, goods are indices of [social] relations' then few are more so than cattle in rural Peddie (Gudeman 2001; see also Appadurai's scintillating essay, 1986).

The gist of my argument, which I develop through a review of the 'embeddedness' of cattle, aided by presentation of short vignettes²² of people with and without cattle, is that cattle perform vital, albeit contested, functions in the ever-changing, *but ever marginal*, rural economy and cultural politics of people and households in areas like Peddie (Ferguson 1990). In this regard, I concur with Murray (2000:139-140; see Bank 1997) that,

'The specific trajectories of individual's working lives, in circumstances of constantly shifting opportunities and constraints, and against the background of the changing life-cycles of households and extended families, are important to an understanding of patterns of accumulation, dispossession and differentiation.'

²² Selected from over eighty life-histories conducted with people during my fieldwork in Peddie district in the period November 2000 to December 2001.

Indeed, seen in this context, it is clear that cattle ownership is only one index of the extent of a household's relative and possibly ephemeral success or longer term failure in marshalling the means necessary for physical survival as well as cultural consumption and economic accumulation.

Firstly, to dispel an abiding myth: Contrary to what some observers have suggested, local cattle have a 'commercial', market-related cash value that most villagers are all too well aware of.²³ This commercial value or price is set at the regular stock-sales held around the district, although extensive intra-village sales and exchanges between locals, which take their cue at least obliquely from stocksale prices, and between locals and outside roving speculators, offer alternative, more accessible points of reference.

At stocksales, which are fascinating 'tournaments of value', white speculators and butchers from outside of Peddie (mostly from the East London area), buy cattle from local villagers. Prices paid relate directly to the 'dressed' beef price of the day, set at regional abattoirs, plus the transport costs of getting the animals to the abattoir and of slaughter fees. So where lies the problem here, I thought, where does government's commercialising zeal fit into this set-up? Well, apparently, villagers are, for 'cultural reasons', generally very reluctant to sell their cattle and even more so because of the low prices offered by outside buyers relative to the perceived local value of their cattle (not to mention the seven per cent commission levied on the seller by auctioneers). The standard model, alive and well among seasoned buyers around the stocksale ring, can be depicted as follows: (where → = gives rise to):

Local farmers want to 'build' their herds → too many animals on the available rangelands → rangeland management breaks down → degraded rangelands → not enough grazing → animals in poor condition, susceptible to tick-borne diseases and worm infestations → lower prices → fewer sales (to outsiders) → older, sicker animals → lower prices offered → repeat the cycle in downward spiral with an increasingly 'inefficient' result, i.e. aging herds with low reproductive rates and minimal returns.

By the same logic, the enthusiastic purchase by villagers of especially heifers, but also of animals (mostly oxen) for ritual slaughter, from neighbouring white farmers steams ahead, essentially because the 'inefficiency' of the off-take system necessitates 'buying-in' cattle after drought-induced die-offs. Sites of 'development' intervention in the past were to simply cull 'excess' animals and/or to institute 'betterment' type range management schemes. Neither intervention was a roaring success with cattle-owners, but they did harden the resolve ('resistance' has long been the term of academic choice, see Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, etc.) of villagers against the desirability of outside interventions into cattle production generally (Kepe 2002).

²³ Not least young women from well-to-do families, who otherwise have virtually no interest in cattle *per se*. This is because they want to gauge how much money a prospective husband needs to come up with to pay their (cash) *lobola*.

Contemporary agents of change argue that, given a chance (*aha !*) the market will solve this 'anomaly': by improving the prices offered to sellers, through better organised sales and by getting more buyers to the point of sale, monitoring prices paid, and in some cases, even nudging buyers to pay more.²⁴ As soon as people learn that prices more closely match their own estimations of the worth of their cattle, they will come forward and sell more animals. Has it worked? Well, yes: in the period January to December 2001, the USAID-funded Agri-Link project facilitated 25 stocksales in Peddie (up from 12 sales in 1999), which saw 1 507 cattle sold, more than doubling the number of cattle sold in 1999. While news of the higher prices paid spread and may well have encouraged people to sell some of their older, non-reproductive stock (so-called 'target selling'), it is possible that this related more to the deepening poverty, fuelled by 'distress sales', i.e. increased retrenchments of men who were now 'relying on their kraals' to feed their families.²⁵ By mid-2002, the anticipated levelling off in sales was evident, as cattle owners sought to retain their remaining, presumably more productive animals with a view to rebuilding their herds (cf. Kerven 1992).²⁶

In trying to account for the supposed 'black box' of an incommensurability of cattle and money, I decided to test Ferguson's notion developed in Lesotho of a 'one-way barrier' between cattle and money in rural Peddie. I questioned people (mostly men and some older women) about the conditions under which cattle can be exchanged for money and money for cattle (see Ferguson 1990; Hutchinson 1996). Cattle and cash, I was told over and over again, are not the same, and neither is better than the other, they simply have different uses that are context specific (I think I can be forgiven for wondering whether my informants had read *The Anti-Politics Machine!*). Money in the bank, for those who have that luxury, is for buying things, but is whittled away quickly. Cattle, however, are *not* like a cooked meal, or like peanuts, which can simply be used at will. No, cattle can only be sold when a homestead is in dire need, to put food on the table. It is unheard of, people told me emphatically, that cattle can be sold to buy a television or fridge. Selling a beast then, is generally evidence of 'a problem' as a beast is sold to buy food so that a homestead can survive. Further probing, though, revealed other reasons for selling, indicative of class differences and new realities. These are to defray tertiary education expenses (a round-about way of using cattle to 'build the homestead') and the costs associated with funerals, which are visibly on the increase.

²⁴ Another way to increase market efficiency and the prices paid would be to improve the quality of the livestock on sale, hence the abiding obsession with improving breeding stock in communal areas with bulls and rams sourced from white farmers (see Ainslie 2002).

²⁵ Indeed, this 'interest' in selling, in the context of high stock numbers after six years of good, 'Mandela' rains, may account for why cattle marketing was targeted for intervention in the first place.

²⁶ If the data were available, I am convinced that we would be able to plot the correlation between a coincidence of cycles of local economic downturn and sustained higher rainfall on the one hand, and an increase in cattle sales on the other (see Kerven 1992). This may be the key lesson to would-be development agents in this sector: to identify and be supportive of local needs and develop the capacity to respond flexibly as these needs change, achieving small successes intermittently, rather than be prescriptive and introduce cumbersome, one-size-fits-all ('oiltanker') programmes.

Case One: Nomvuyo decides to sell

Nomvuyo, at 36 years of age, is the oldest child of her recently deceased parents. She is a teacher and has several male siblings, most of whom are not gainfully employed. The family home is in Peddie Extension, which began as an informal settlement and has now been upgraded, so that it is an increasingly fashionable place to live. Nowvuyo's father had 63 cattle when he died. According to widely recognised cultural practice, these cattle should constitute the inheritance of his eldest son, who *may* decide to share some of them with his male siblings. He may also give some to single/separated sisters who have dependents of their own to care for. In Nomvuyo's case, she is the educated one in the family: she is a teacher and she has clearly taken charge in the family. In the process of 'taking charge', she has sold off 61 of the 63 cattle and banked the money, asserting in the process, that '[sensible] people are selling all their cattle these days.' Her brothers can oversee the care of the remaining two cattle.²⁷

On the whole, people in rural Peddie use cash to meet everyday expenses. As everywhere, barter as a means of exchange is in evidence, but cash is king (or perhaps prince, with 'credit' a long-serving regent!). Cash, however, is problematic on two counts: it is invisible once inside someone's pocket or their bank account, and it has a nasty habit of 'disappearing' quickly, often inexplicably. Cattle, staid and slow, are of course visible to all and can generally be relied upon to *increase* in number – assuming one's herd structure - is 'engineered' for it.²⁸ Significantly though, *cash* is necessary to get and to keep cattle: in contemporary Peddie villages, cattle are bought with cash earned elsewhere. One's herd of cattle is consolidated and expands systematically, rather than haphazardly, through one's pocket, i.e. the ability to treat animal disease and ailments as they occur and to buy extra feed when required. All the men I interviewed understood this clearly. On the other hand, cattle can stand as implicit guarantee against loans, as the interview with Mr.Hokwana about the similarities and differences between cattle and money, suggests.

Case Two: Mr. Hokwana, 78 year-old owner of 21 cattle

They [cattle and money] are the same in that you have to have cattle and you have to have money, but what I know is that there is no drought in money. You see how cattle and money are the same thing: if I die and my wife needs money, she might go to borrow money from someone, a neighbour. It will be easy for you to lend it to her, because you can see the cattle in the kraal here, walking around and eating grass. If you don't see

²⁷ I used this case to telling effect in subsequent interviews to overcome men and women's reticence to talk to an outsider about their cattle and to engage their individual, often strongly-held views on the pros and cons of cattle ownership.

²⁸ Fielder (1973:352) showed that investments in cattle could show an annual increase of up to 15 per cent.

them, it would be difficult for you to give her a loan.....Cattle are easier to get these days. When cattle were only R6 in the past, money was also very scarce. A whole month underground would only get you R6 if you worked very hard. Now, there is lots of money around.....

(Interviewer: Really?)Yes, there is much more money around these days.....[still] young men don't have any interest in cattle. Money in your pocket will be used very quickly, but buying cattle and putting them in your kraal is a far safer thing....It is true, you tie up your money like this and you will be afraid to go to the kraal to take a beast to sell it, because you will be wondering what your brothers will say about this. This is because *inkomo asiyonto yokudlala* (cattle are not a thing for playing with). By comparison, money in the bank can be eaten, but not cattle. You can't see your son when he goes to the bank and draws money there and spends it on what he wants to.

Why this special place for cattle *per se* in local economies²⁹ in Peddie, which are so economically connected to the cash economy in other ways, such as through monthly pension and grant disbursements made to about 70 per cent of rural households in Peddie? Why are men considered 'big men' and 'successful' if they have twenty or more cattle in their kraal? Is it because these twenty cattle equate to about R36 000 in cash? But if it is the cash equivalent value of cattle that is prized, why not simply liquidate the bovine assets and bank the money? Is it possible that cattle ownership confers and encompasses other, non-monetary values and uses that are different and favoured over holding money or accumulating other forms of wealth?

The uses of cattle include obvious ones, such as providing draught power, manure and milk. The decline in field cultivation does not reduce the need for draught, as 'scotch-carts' are widely used to collect fuelwood and water, among other things. But besides these uses of cattle, which are exhaustively documented in the literature, people regard cattle as a reliable store of wealth and safe investment in places where commercial banks are scarce and distant (and thus poorly understood³⁰ and expensive to

²⁹ Sansom's linear 'phases of development' refers to the way in which Nguni men, during the early stages of integration into the cash economy, were 'detachable from the household economy' because domestic production for household consumption continued in their absence and because where they had previously had a 'prestige' cattle economy, they were able to replace this with a cash-based one (Sansom 1974:168,171; Fielder 1973:359). The negative social and cultural legacy of migrant labour on black family life is now widely recognised.

³⁰ I had some eye-opening conversations with informants about what happens to money once inside the 'FNB', the only bank in Peddie town. On the whole, people know that, despite this thing called 'interest' that supposedly makes their deposited funds grow, the reality is that through the burden of 'bank administrative charges' and charges associated with depositing and withdrawing money, one's money often shrinks in a bank. Recent research shows that 72 per cent of black South Africans do not have a bank account. In the Eastern Cape, this figure rises to 79 per cent for black women and 75 per cent for black men. Reasons include unemployment, distances from banks, illiteracy, innumeracy and 'blacklisting' by credit bureaus (Daily Dispatch 30 April 2003).

transact through) and in a situation where other forms of investment (for eg. motor-cars or houses³¹) do not promise the same level of returns. Cattle are kept and exchanged for slaughter to conduct certain rituals aimed at securing the ancestral blessings deemed necessary for the well-being of the family. Cattle are never slaughtered in the village simply for their meat, this is regarded as unacceptable waste. The conducting of rituals is a male prerogative: addressing the ancestors in the kraal is the domain of established homestead heads, presided over by senior men of that particular agnatic cluster or, where no male relative of this description is available, of the same broad lineage as a deceased homestead head.

Through strict adherence to gender and generational roles in cattle management (ideally, women should be kept away from cattle, specifically their management and transactions, including *lobola* negotiations), cattle ownership provides a powerful arena for reinforcing hegemonic masculine cultural values, including the (increasingly troubled) role and identity of men as *intsika yekhaya*, the pillar of the home. The reality is often quite different: women take an interest in any cattle that are paid as *lobola* for them. I recorded a case where a young woman met her uncle in town and asked him to help her get an animal from his father (her grandfather) for a graduation party. When the uncle rebuffed her, she claimed to have rights in some of her grandfather's cattle, since they included cattle paid to him as *lobola* for her mother years before.

Case Three: 'Even R10 *lobola* is enough'

As a beerdrink winds down at Susan P's place, I sit with three, older women when another, younger woman comes in to borrow some matches. She is pregnant and the women comment on this. The pregnant woman says that she is sure the father of the child will marry her. The youngest woman of the three present says 'we want *lobola*, we can't just get married', to which Madlamini, aged 58 years, replies, 'as long as you have some nice clothes and food in your stomach, then even R10 *lobola* is enough.'

Had any senior men in the village overheard this off-hand remark, they would definitely have had something to say about it.³² As it stands, it is a testimony to many, often poorer, women's accommodations of current economic and social realities and the cultural fissures that these might open up between men and women as the 'patriarchal economy' of the homestead and village threatens to unravel.

³¹ Not always regarded as investments by economists, rather as depreciating assets or even liabilities. In rural Peddie, motor-cars and trucks can be used as taxis, while houses can be rented out. Homesteads, I argue, generate income, since they allow their occupants to press for support both from the state and from their members employed in other centres.

³² Of course, *ukuhlalisana* (living together) relationships between young people that do not involve the exchange of bridewealth are as well-known, if not as widespread, in rural Peddie as in urban centres in the province and country.

The presence of cattle in their home kraal serves notice to those members who are employed elsewhere of the expectation that they will contribute to 'building' their rural homes, by making investments in these homes. Indeed, once bought, high value rural investments like cattle, tend to focus and hold the attention of especially male, urban-based household members.

Selling cattle, particularly to white buyers in the morally negative space that is the extra-village, stocksale situation, is widely regarded as socially and economically undesirable. This is particularly so for the way it publicly exposes the acute neediness of households forced to engage in 'distress' sales to the white outsiders. It is also undesirable because the sale³³ of any animal to white buyers usually detracts from the project of *building the homestead*, and by extension, also deprives the community of their rights in this animal. In contrast, selling to other members of the village community is less problematic because, as McAllister (2001:180) correctly points out, 'people are implicated in the building of every homestead' in the village.

In terms of building relationships between people and families that are the bedrock of 'community' or an 'agrarian morality', cattle are well-suited –although perhaps not as well suited as maize or other crops, partly because of their high value and inherent indivisibility until slaughtered (see Sansom 1974) - to the intra-rural redistribution of resources between differentially resourced households. This is achieved through exchanges of animals, the frequent payment of male labour for tasks associated with cattle management, the sharing of *amasi* (sour milk) and the provision of meat and other food at ritual slaughter occasions. Cattle serve not only to *lock* resources in the rural sphere –resources that might otherwise have dissipated rapidly if held as cash, leaking out of the household and village economy, or if left in the urban sphere – but also to ensure *a flow of more* resources to the rural areas, through remitted contributions towards the payment of dip, of the labour needed for herding and of the costs of hosting ritual slaughter events. In Peddie district, and probably for many other rural areas where arable farming has been marginal, there is currently no other commodity or even suite of commodities that can perform these multiple utility, economic and 'community' functions with the same efficacy and cultural potency that cattle do³⁴.

Dandy. So, cattle are culturally, economically and socially highly desirable in rural Peddie: or in other words, contrary to the neo-liberals' lament, they are 'tapped' resources³⁵, in the fullest sense? Well yes, but the issue is more complicated than this, because given high levels of rural poverty, only about 30 per cent

³³ Exchanging oxen for heifers with white farmers/speculators is unproblematic.

³⁴ Goats, regarded as the 'coins' to the 'notes' that cattle represent, have many of the same characteristics as cattle and are sought after for use in a variety of rituals, but they do not enjoy the same prestige as cattle.

³⁵ Presumably, 'commercialisers' would be very happy if all the wealth held in cattle in Peddie district was converted in motor-car ownership: this would be mean environmentally sustainable rangelands, purchases of capital items (cars) that contributed to economic growth and ongoing purchases of petrol and spares that stimulated not only the local, but also the national and global economies. The few men I interviewed who, contrary to advice from others, have spent their retrenchment packages on buying *bakkies* (pick-up trucks) or tractors, would probably beg to differ.

of rural households actually own any cattle. Also, because they often represent the single largest domain of household investment (around R54 million in Peddie district alone), they are also a highly contested resource at household level. Again, because of their place at the heart of a patriarchally-ordered social universe and cultural economy, as the social roles of men are undermined by growing unemployment and economic marginalisation, cattle ownership increasingly becomes a 'gender football' at village and household levels.

Case Four: Mbuyiselo on the edge of the abyss

Mbuyiselo G is 47 years old, going on 60. His wife, MaTshezi, is 44 years old. Both are formally unemployed. They have four children between the ages of 3 and 20 years, and are responsible for one granddaughter aged 4.

When I conducted a series of interviews with them (during 2000), I found that Mbuyiselo's family is supported by 'hand-outs' from his father, a old age pensioner and *ixhwele* [herbalist] of some renown. Although they no longer live with his father (the family has recently acquired a two-roomed, government subsidised 'RDP' house in the same village), Mbuyiselo and his son (13 years old at the time) still herd the five cattle of his father. This makes sense, though, as it is normal for Mbuyiselo, as the eldest son, to have a close interest in the well-being of his father's cattle, which he stands to inherit one day. Moreover, by persisting with the herding of these cattle after moving away from his father's *umzi*, Mbuyiselo continues to enjoy three meals a day at his father's homestead, and is able to prevail on his father occasionally for 'tobacco' money (unlike many other men in his predicament, Mbuyiselo does not drink outside of ritual occasions). Furthermore, because of his own family's precarious financial position, Mbuyiselo's son continues to reside with his grandfather and Mbuyiselo's other children are frequent recipients of meals there. For various reasons, MaTshezi is less welcome at the homestead of her affines. Instead, she seems pleased about having her own domestic space and manages to make small amounts of money by gathering sea shells on the beach nearby with which she makes decorative objects for sale. She also collects and sells oysters to tourists or fishermen in the village below.

Mbuyiselo previously spent 19 years as a migrant worker, employed on a number of different goldmines on the Witwatersrand. During this time, he was a regular remitter to his wife in a village in Peddie district (she confirms this) and he was able to accumulate a small number of cattle. In fact, he has been buying cattle with his pay since he was a *inkwenkwe* [boy]. When they married in 1980, he had been in a position to pay *lobola* of

eight cattle for his wife (in cattle, not cash). He would buy cattle regularly in those days, trying to buy one animal every year.

In the prolonged drought of the [mid-]1980s, six of his cattle died. Mbuyiselo bought one cow from the Mhlaza family in Hamburg after the loss of these six animals. The cow gave birth several times, but most of its calves died, the latest of these in 1998. At the moment, only the cow and one of its calves survive. Now, they are about to sell the cow itself for R1 800 to the family of Mlungiseleli B, a relative of MaTshezi's, who need an animal to slaughter for a funeral they are to conduct.³⁶

Mbuyiselo has no arable land of his own, but he assists with the ploughing and sowing of his father's lands. Because of their dire situation, MaTshezi is keen to start a vegetable garden in the tiny yard of their new house, with its on-site tapped water. She was the one who found the buyer for their remaining cow and says that they will use some the money from the sale of this animal to buy fencing material and poles with which her husband will fence their small yard. They will also use some of the proceeds from the sale of the animal to set MaTshezi up in a clothing business. She plans to travel to Durban to buy clothing to resell locally as well as to make and repair clothing for the local market in the village. They have not given up entirely with cattle ownership and hope to increase their cattle numbers by way of the future progeny of their one remaining heifer.

In a vein that I was to encounter time and again, especially with regard to male migrants, Mbuyiselo's economic fortunes have ebbed drastically over time, and with them, his status as *intsika yekhaya* in his household. He has a standard three education only and when he left the mines in 1996, he did not know which forms to sign or where to turn for assistance to secure his pension. Within six months of his retrenchment, his funds had dried up and with them, his position as head of household and, by all accounts, his self-confidence, has been affected and considerably undermined. To the extent that his own skills, employment aspirations and labour feature in the future livelihood plans of the household, these are directed only at setting his wife up in business and in gardening.

Not only that, but Mbuyiselo's younger sister is a nurse in Whittlesea who visits their father's home in Hamburg frequently, driving her newish model Ford motor-car. She always brings provisions for her father's home and clothing and shoes for the children living there, including Mbuyiselo's son. A single mother, her own son started studying at Port Elizabeth Technikon during 2001, while Mbuyiselo's twin daughters, who are older than her son, are struggling to complete standard seven and repeat standard ten

³⁶ Mlungiseleli later reported that he actually paid R2 000 for the cow.

respectively. Mbuyiselo's sister is very close to her father, (her mother passed away in January 2000). During the course of my fieldwork, she was actively trying to discourage her father from buying more heifers, no doubt well aware that cattle are a male domain and regardless of her contributions to the home, once her father died intestate³⁷, she would struggle to get any part of his herd, given that she has three brothers with prior claims to these animals. Mbuyiselo and her seemed to have less and less in common.

Women as household heads are, for instance, far more likely to invest their savings in commercial banks than in 'four-legged banks' and to build their more 'female' social networks through *imigalelo* clubs (rotating credit associations) and burial societies than through cattle and cattle exchanges (see Bank 2002b). Lastly, many young people are 'fed up' with the idea of investing in cattle, which they compare to the now unfashionable handing over one's wages to one's father (or parents) at month-end. Their preference is to rather invest any income they have strategically in siblings or parents, including by contributing selectively to projects of conspicuous consumption in their homes.

Case Five: Patrick's choices, Patrick's dilemmas

I am 28 years old. I started to work for Telkom in June 1997 and worked until July 1999. I had arrived [back in Hamburg] from East London just a week before starting work at Telkom. At my home was my father, my two sisters and my child. Only my elder sister [Nontembeko] was working at the Hamburg Municipality [at the time]. My mother was away working in East London as a domestic worker and my brother was at East London College doing [a course on] Marketing and Management.

[At Telkom], I got at least R1 500 per month. [With this money], I did groceries of R300, but I didn't do it myself, I gave the money to my [elder] sister, who demanded it. I bought clothes, costing around R250 per month, because I opened an account at Sales House. Even this was not my aim, but it was because of my sister, because she wanted to take her clothes in my account [i.e. on credit].

I also paid for the school costs of my brother but I didn't pay myself, I paid money into his account, giving him R250 per month. I spend some money on my problems, like if I wanted to visit East London or Port Elizabeth, even wherever. I didn't think about buying cattle and I'm sure it's because my father [already] had cattle, so I saw no need to increase them.

³⁷ I encountered ambivalence among my informants about the usefulness of writing a last will that could help to resolve the tensions the seem to emerge between siblings when their parents get older or pass away. Space does not permit a discussion on this subject here.

I helped my parents with conducting *imisebenzi* (rituals) for example, there were *iindwendwe* (visitors) – actually *iinyosi* (bees) in my parents' room. So what I did was to buy a goat, which cost R400 in Tshalumna and also *imithombo* [ingredients to make traditional sorghum beer] at a cost of R200. [I] gave my mother R350 for groceries and I also bought 6 bottles of brandy. After that I told them to do *umsebenzi* of bees/visitors.

My sister and I decided to buy a lounge suite and colour T.V. [for the home]. I gave her R2 000 and she bought these things but I don't know how much she [actually] paid for them. I also spent my money buying some things for my girlfriend.

Patrick's family are part of the 'educated', 'respectable' section of the village. Patrick's father has 10 cattle³⁸ but he has been unemployed for several years. Instead, he does 'jobs' around the village. Notice how Patrick's description of the expenses he incurred during the just over two years that he was employed by Telkom do not include any mention of cattle or livestock medicines, etc. Instead, he spent his money on groceries in the home, on a monthly payment supposedly towards his younger brother's school fees, by contributing towards a ritual conducted by his parents and by contributing towards the cost of a lounge suite and a new television for the family home. He also spent money on clothes for himself, on travelling to various places and to buy things for his girlfriend. Although he does not mention it, his own expenditure almost certainly included spending some money at shebeens in Hamburg. Overall then, his outlay seems to indicate a commitment to *ukwakh'umzi* [building the homestead], but without the characteristic investment in cattle. Why should this be so?

I think that part of the explanation is the fact that although Patrick's father is still relatively young, he is structurally unemployed. He previously spent a long period living away from his family in Port Elizabeth as *itshipha* [an absconder] and, although re-united with his wife and family, can be slightly unpredictable in his behaviour. Patrick has reasoned that, even though he is the eldest son and thus stands to inherit his father's cattle, the herd may be dissipated before then. For the same reasons, investing his own funds in cattle for the family kraal would be strategically naïve. Also, his elder sister is an assertive young woman who has, for the past few years at least, supported particularly the Hamburg-based family members (which include Patrick's daughter who lives with the family) with the salary she earns as an administrative assistant at the Hamburg municipality. This means that she has considerable influence, especially when

³⁸ Two of these cattle appear to be owned by the sons of his deceased elder brother.

working in liaison with her mother³⁹, the other breadwinner in the family, over how Patrick should spend his money.⁴⁰

Like other young women, Nontembeko, who I interviewed on a later occasion, is adamant that cattle are a poor investment choice. For his part, Patrick knew that the Telkom job would be of limited duration and since he was very likely to be reliant on their incomes again in future – as indeed he is - he can ill-afford to make what his mother and sister would perceive to be short-sighted and selfish investments in cattle. To do so, would be to both convert his wages into the culturally enclaved domain of property which is firmly (and perilously) within his father's (and other, more senior male relatives') ambit of control and to send the wrong message to his mother and sister about his commitment to them, thereby prejudicing his mutually supportive ties with them, arguably more important to him in the long-term.

But lest we imagine that cattle ownership is destined to fade away, consider the case of Zimasile M (below) which suggests that not all men of the younger generation are turning their backs on cattle ownership.

Case Six: Zimasile M: Leaning on old, familiar ways or learning new ones?

I was born in Hamburg in 1971 and I grew up here. My father didn't have cattle while he was alive [while] we lived here. When he died, he was *itshipha* [absconder] in eRhawutini, without cattle. When I was working at Telkom on a contract, [for the period July 1997 to June 1998], our pay was not less than R1 500 a month. I bought one animal from Fakati N in December 1997. It was a heifer and I paid R1 500 for it. I didn't save any money, I built my home and bought my things, including living expenses, like food. I live with my mother, brother and sister here. Noyise, my other sister, lives at Phola Park (i.e. in the 'RDP' section of the same village). I help to buy groceries and whatever else might be needed here.

Interviewer: why did you decide to buy cattle?

ZM: Cattle are our bank. We save our money like this. Also, I like to keep cattle. I don't have a bank account, [although] I plan to have one, but there are lots of money problems [here at home].

Interviewer: What would you say are some of the differences between cattle and money?

³⁹ Patrick's father later told me that, '[I]t is very difficult to be a man these days, really...my wife is like that, wanting to know about this and the cost of this...' Patrick intimated that it is likely that his mother gives his father pocket-money to pay for his incidentals this side [in Hamburg], while she is away working in East London, but that he wasn't sure about this....

⁴⁰ It might be difficult to establish this conclusively, but there is more than a fair chance that Patrick got this contract because his sister is close to the powers-that-be in Hamburg and put a word in for him when the Telkom jobs were mooted, thus making him doubly beholden to her.

ZM: Cattle increase and the price of them [also] increase[s] and they are a good savings method. Money [by contrast] is ready-made food – it's easy for money to leave your pocket. This is bad. If you buy an animal at R1 500 in 1997, in these days it will fetch R2 000 or more. If you bought a cow, after a year, you have got 2 animals. Our health, as Xhosa people, is dependent on cattle. You can't use a R10 [note] to make an *intambo* [the necklace made from the tail hair of a *inkomo yekhaya* beast⁴¹ that is worn to ward off evil].

Interviewer: It seems to me that you are taking the route of the big men in the village, by investing in cattle, unlike some other young men who don't even consider buying cattle?

ZM: Yes, this is the route of big men, to buy cattle. I grew up here, so I saw from my neighbours that cattle are a good thing. I did ask older men, like John T, about this and I heard that cattle are a good thing to have, especially when you are unemployed.

Interviewer: Are these cattle yours or do they become the property of the *umzi*?

ZM: These cattle are mine. I am the owner, they were bought with my energy. But it is not a Xhosa future, to sell something without consulting your parents. Before I sell, I will speak to my mother.

Interviewer: What will force/encourage you to sell?

ZM: I will sell if I have no money; if someone dies, to bury them, etc. [I would do this] rather than have my family [members] 'burn there' [cremated at the morgue, away from the village].

Interviewer: How many animals would you regard as enough?

ZM: As I said, cattle are money, so there will never be enough: even a millionaire wants to have more money.

Interviewer: What about droughts? How will you act at such times?

ZM: Water is the most important thing in a drought. The last big drought we had was in 1983. What about diseases in our cattle? Can you advise us about these things, as we don't know about these diseases?

Interviewer: No, I don't know much about them myself, but there is a book written in Xhosa, that deals with livestock diseases that the *abalimi* [extension officers] have. I will get it for you.....

The case of Zimasile shows a young man who has been motivated essentially by the *ukwakh'umzi* ideology to buy cattle to be placed in the homestead kraal. An important part of his motivation, however, is the fact that he is the eldest son of the household and stands to recoup most of these cattle through inheritance anyway. Already part of the conservative section of the village, his observation and experience of the limited future employment prospects available to young men like him provide an additional motivation to invest in cattle that reproduce, unlike money, and allow one to become

⁴¹ Literally, the animal of the home.

recognised as a Xhosa man of status in the village. Shortly after our interview, Zimasile married his pregnant girlfriend. He paid *lobola* in cash, possibly from income generated through lucrative (but illegal) abalone harvesting activities, that are recent economic boon for especially young men in the coastal villages of Peddie. In fact, many young men currently engaged in abalone harvesting have found that buying cattle is an excellent way to launder illegal cash into the practically invisible rural economy.

Conclusions

I started this paper by looking at some international trends in food production in agriculture. These trends include a growing concern for 'industrial' farming methods and a re-evaluation of the social and cultural value of farming lifestyles and communities in the North, and a concomitant, substantial fiscal commitment to these lifestyles. All told, they seem to suggest that food production is coming full circle, with a move back to small-scale (albeit hi-tech) 'organic' production, with 'traceability' high on the agenda. In reviewing the debates regarding economic growth, agriculture and rural development in South Africa, I suggested that in contrast to these developments in the North, as a country we seem to be moving in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, the 'backward' agricultural production practised in rural areas like Peddie district ironically seems (by default) to be more in tune with the 'new thinking', in terms of the social value placed on agriculture and the low dependence on chemical and other 'Frankenstein' inputs. That said, there are, however, many areas of this production system that can and should be seriously 'tweaked', for instance, better provision of access to water for crops and animals, but this is most profitably done in the interests of promoting *household food security*, and not through the prioritising of 'commercial production for the market' out of these areas.

I then looked briefly at the contribution of anthropologists to the debates around agrarian production and reform in the Eastern Cape, arguing that not enough attention has been paid to the connections between rural, peri-urban and urban areas, and between people's investments in these different spaces, whether material, social or cultural. Nor has synthesis over time and place been undertaken with any conviction in recent decades. This means that the valuable anthropological insights generated about rural people's lifestyles and livelihoods have not engaged with wider, economic debates.

The case-study on cattle production in Peddie shows, I think, that it is in the interstices of the market economy that more and more of the population of the Eastern Cape are likely to find themselves in the years ahead, given changes in the macro-economy that puts a premium on skills and training. It is thus alternative forms of savings and accumulation, particularly those that provide people with opportunities to engage with each other socially and culturally, that will be to the fore. Where these promise a measure of economic and social control at the household level over the impact of dominant market forces, they might well be worth supporting. Ultimately, we would be naïve to expect cattle ownership to disappear from

rural people's *cultural* repertoire, or that an ongoing 'educational process' will deliver cattle in ever-increasing numbers into the sphere of the market economy.

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