

Chapter Three

VRYHEID, KWAZULU/NATAL

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND ONE

It was five and the heat was quickly dying; the glorious golden colouring of the late afternoon was creeping over everything when she rose from her chair. She moved to the door and took from behind it two large white calico bags hanging there, and from nails in the wall she took down two large brown cotton kappies. She walked round the table and laid her hand gently on her daughter-in-law's arm. The younger woman raised her head slowly and looked up into her mother-in-law's face and then suddenly she knew her mother-in-law was an old, old woman.

"I am going out to sow – the ground will be getting too dry tomorrow," she said gently. The younger woman looked into her face and taking one of the brown kappies from her hand, put it on, and hung one of the bags over her left arm. The old woman did the same and together they passed out of the door.

The mould in the land was black and soft: it lay in long ridges, but the last night's rain had softened it and made it moist and ready for putting in the seed.

The bags which the women carried in their arms were full of the seed of pumpkins and mealies. They began to walk up the land. At every few paces they stopped and bent down to press into the earth, now one and then the other kind of seed from their bags. Slowly they walked up and down until they reached the top of the land, and then they turned and walked down, sowing as they went. The light of the setting sun cast long, gaunt shadows from their figures across the ploughed land, shadows that grew longer and longer as they passed slowly on pressing in the seeds.

The seeds! ... that were to lie in the dark, dark earth and rot there, seemingly to die, till their outer covering had split and fallen from them.... And then when the rains had fallen, and the sun had shone, to come up above the earth again, and high in the clear air to lift their feathery plumes and hang out their pointed leaves and silken tassels! To cover the ground with a mantle of green and gold through which sunlight quivered, over which the insects hung by thousands, carrying yellow pollen on their legs and wings and making the air alive with their hum and stir, while grain and fruit ripened surely... for the next season's harvest.

..... Near one of the camps are the graves of two women. The older one died first from hunger and want. The younger woman tended her with ceaseless care and devotion till the end. They buried them side by side. There is no stone and no name upon either grave to say who lies there ... our unknown... our unnamed... our forgotten dead.

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FOUR

If you look for the little farmhouse among the ridges you will not find it there today. A syndicate of people from Johannesburg and London bought the farm, they purchased it from the English government, because they think to find gold on it. They have purchased it and paid for it ... but they do not possess it. Only the men and women who lie in their quiet graves upon the hillside, who lived on it, and loved it, possess it... and the piles of stones above them, from among the long-waving grasses, keep watch over the land.

- Entitled "Eighteen Ninety-Nine", from "Stories, Dreams and Allegories" by Olive Schreiner, 1906, from the book "A Century of South African Short Stories", published by Ad Donker, 1978. This Schreiner story recalls the hardships endured by the women left behind after their male relatives had succumbed during the Anglo-Boer war in South Africa, 1899 – 1903.

The Afrikaans word *vryheid* means freedom, liberty –

even independence. Many South African farms and towns have Afrikaans names, and only someone who knows this evocative language can appreciate the passion behind these names.

The country's turbulent history is the fount of many. Other names express the emotions of a certain time and place – longing, happiness, sometimes melancholy. In

no other Western country are names used so descriptively to reveal the heart of a people and their attachment to the land.

And so it is with Vryheid, in the province of KwaZulu/Natal. Through this part of South Africa flows Blood River, the 1838 milestone in Zulu/Afrikaner history. Vryheid was the capital of Die Nuwe Republiek, the territory given to Voortrekker leader General Lucas Meyer by Zulu chief Dinizulu in return for help in his struggle against the two opponents of his father, Zulu king Cetshwayo. This land was 1 355 000 morgen in size. The republic lasted only three years, from 1887 to 1890, but this land grant is an historical fact. Farmers in the area should carefully examine the land claims against their farms for historical authenticity.

In the context of South African history, land and its possession gave rise to the ebb and flow of power, struggle and victory. But today's battle is about food, its production and the ultimate survival of 45 million South African people. These people depend on South Africa's commercial farmers for their daily bread. We are talking about an assault on South African agriculture, where the number of commercial farmers has decreased from 70,000 to less than 35,000 over the past thirty years. We are talking about future famine in South Africa if this assault on agricultural stability is not stopped in its tracks

For years now, Vryheid farmer Kerneels Greyling has been involved in running battles with authorities past and present about his family's four farms he now says are "worthless". Copious correspondence handed to our researchers reveals a desperate farmer trying to save his life's work

These farms are either near or bordering properties handed over to 'emerging' farmers by the Department of Land Affairs (DLA). Stock and crop theft are the order of the day. "They come seven kilometers to steal. They hire a bakkie (pickup vehicle) to collect the meat and the mealies (corn)", says Greyling. He had to go 38 times last year to his daughter's farm to spend the night trying to catch crop thieves there.

He blames the previous government for his current predicament, and his barrage of letters to the former state president has elicited no assistance, no sympathy. Mr. F.W. de Klerk has essentially washed his hands of the present situation. More ominously, no commiseration has been forthcoming from Deputy Minister of Land Affairs Dirk du Toit – on the contrary, the aging Mr. Greyling was given short shrift by du Toit who told the farmer his efforts at redress bordered on the vexatious (*selfsugtig*).

Greyling's predicament reveals nothing else other than that South Africa's commercial farmers are on their own. Greyling sits with an "emerging farmer" (this is surely a euphemism!) right next to his property. Mr. Johannes Mdlalose, brother of the infamous Jabulani Mdlalose (whose sole occupation appears to be the selling of plots on white farms to itinerants at R1 500 a throw), wants to bring his 400-strong community onto his newly-acquired farm. Johannes has already demanded a five meter public thoroughfare through Greyling's mealie fields.

Greyling says he told the government there was little water on Johannes's new farm – that the borehole had almost dried up. The soil is poor and there is much erosion. Only 18 ha is under irrigation. All the dams are empty, and the farm is only good for a limited amount of cattle.

So why hasn't Johannes invited his community to occupy the farm? Greyling's activism and continual complaining appear to have stemmed an invasion of squatters on to Johannes's farm, at least in the short term. Two years ago, Greyling's attorney wrote to the DLA and demanded sight of a development plan for Johannes's farm. In March 2002, the DLA informed Greyling that the steering committee formed to look

at the planning for Johannes's farm would take into consideration "the views and concerns of the neighbouring farming community, including yourself". Further, the planning would address "the sustainable settlement pattern and the building up of the desired relationship between the Mdlalose community and its neighbours".

In March 2003, the Department of Land Affairs told him that "detailed planning has not been done", but will be forthcoming when DLA transfers planning funds to the Zululand District Municipality.

Satisfied

Greyling says he will not be satisfied unless cognizance is taken of what is needed to sustain residents on Johannes's farm. He refers to Act. No. 70 of 1970 which sets limits on the size of land subdivisions. Although this Act has been repealed, there are some clauses remaining.

The Vryheid farmer declares an acceptable sustainability formula is at least 3,5 ha per beast or 300 ha per family. He says he has no objection to black farmers next to him, as long as they can make a living and not have to steal to keep alive. One needs R3 600 to travel to Vryheid for one year, 6 days a week, says Greyling. So if the farm is non-sustainable, from where will family members obtain money to travel to town for a job and shopping?

Challenge

In 2001, farmer and former Democratic Alliance member of Parliament Wessel Nel wrote that "land is a shaky vehicle for redistribution". He says the government is wrong to believe that small cash grants make for the beginnings of sustainable small-scale farming. Establishment capital of around R25 000 has the purchase capacity of approximately 10 hectares, a meager R10 000 having been set aside for a house, livestock and operating capital. This would only sustain perhaps 2 head of cattle and 5 goats or sheep.

The gross income from such animals would be around R2 500 per annum, with maybe 2 litres of milk per day, says Nel. These facts would assume no deaths or theft, 75% reproduction, no domestic slaughter and no expenses. Nel makes the same argument as Greyling – if a small holding were only 20 km from town, and if only two family members commuted daily by taxi to work or school, the taxi fare alone for the year would far exceed the total gross annual income of the smallholding. Such a land redistribution programme would condemn the beneficiaries to a "rural poverty trap", declares Nel.

Hence Greyling's reasons for demanding a development plan for the neighbouring 5 000 ha farm. Some years ago, seven black farmers and their families were given 200 ha by a church mission group, right next to Greyling's farm. (The church people have long since abandoned their converts. Giving them the land was enough, they possibly thought.) For years now, on a daily basis, Greyling experiences border fencing theft, with the squatters' herds mingling with his. These neighbours walk through the farm, leaving the cattle gates open.

For non-farmers, this mingling of herds seems innocuous. According to another Vryheid farmer with a herd of 400 cattle, most herds belonging to the Zulus have trichomoniasis, commonly known as 'trich.' This disease lowers the healthy calving rate – a profitable and successful rate is 70% to 80%, while most Zulu herds' calving rate is 40% to 50%. "We have to pay a vet to test our bulls – R200 per bull.

The mixing of the herds means a possibility of trich infection, which spells devastation for a healthy herd. A good stud bull is valued at anything from R10 000 to R15 000, whereas a bull for slaughter only fetches R4 000. I recently had to kill 4 stud bulls infected with trich.”



Some new settlers, land claim transfer, Vryheid.

Greyling loses R30 000 a year in mealie theft, and fires move on to his farm with regularity. He often hires a helicopter at R1 350 an hour to search for his stolen stock. In one three-month period he lost 85 head of cattle. He and his son, with their security company personnel, regularly go into traditional areas to try and retrieve their cattle. They often see the skins and the heads where the cattle have been slaughtered. They recognize their own animals. This “citizen policing” is obligatory because the police are simply overwhelmed and, in many cases, are clearly not interested. Greyling and his sons have to pay informers – sometimes up to R9 000 a month – to find their cattle. The rate is so high because informers are in many cases beaten by the thieves.

So Greyling and his sons pay the security company, the helicopter costs, the informers, the commandos and the people who patrol their lands.

We drove through Greyling’s 1754 ha farm. He produces mealies, wheat, beef cattle and sheep. 400 ha are irrigated. He has built roads and bridges throughout the property. He pointed out a derelict neighbouring property where squatters had moved in.

To stop them stealing from him, Greyling planted mealies for them right on their doorstep. For six years he did this, then they complained the weed killer Greyling supplied was “no good”. The stealing re-commenced.

Despite Greyling’s activism in trying to stop an influx of squatters on to his neighbour’s farm, he currently cannot sell his own farms. The government’s land reform program has seen to that. The borders of KwaZulu are moving onto what used to be productive commercial farmland. Other farmers in the area have been driven off their properties.

The Invaders

A pattern is developing throughout traditional South Africa. Tribal chiefs appear to be having a field day courtesy of the land reform program. In northern KwaZulu/Natal, in Mpumalanga, in the Eastern Cape, in Limpopo, the chiefs are working assiduously to gain land, not for “the people”, but for themselves. Vryheid is no different. One Jabulani Mdlalose has become something of a warlord in the area. He has encouraged the invasion of privately-owned farmland by selling plots to squatters.

As in the north of the province, Mdlalose is emboldened by the lack of law enforcement. Early in 2003, he notified the provincial Department of Land Affairs in writing that the Othaka Tribal Authority intended to take possession of 200 commercial farms in the area.



A deserted school house, Gwebo land claim, Vryheid.

Although no such land claim has been validated, he has nonetheless threatened certain farmers to vacate their properties. To back up these threats, he has sold plots on their farms, and the illegal invasions have taken off.

When Jabulani's father Chief Dalwayini Mdlalose died in 1994, Jabulani's younger brother Johannes was appointed his successor. Because of Jabulani's activities, Johannes Mdlalose and 18 Vryheid farmers approached the Pietermaritzburg High Court to grant a permanent restraining order to prevent Jabulani from persuading people to invade, trespass, graze livestock, plant crops or build homes on privately-owned farms in the district.⁽¹⁾ A temporary restraining interdict was granted against him.

And not a moment too soon! In September 2002, three local farmers appealed to the government to prevent the illegal occupation of their farms. Since 1986, Johan Birkenstock has produced an average of 30 tons of maize per month on his farm Forlorn Hope. After the new government came to power, things worsened. His fencing was stripped, and his cattle and crops were stolen. The hunting of his game and cattle increased to such an extent that calves were regularly ripped apart by the dogs. His grazing was regularly burnt. Then his life was threatened, and he stopped milling.

Concerned about his labour, Birkenstock told the then MP for the area Jan Slabbert that "this is causing great distress to people who now have to buy maize and mealie meal in town at a very high price."

In 1988, Birkenstock rented the farm Waterval. He received a visit from Jabulani Mdlalose who told Johann he wanted the keys to the farm. In 1999 he was again visited by Jabulani who said the land was his and that he and his followers would "move in" if the government would not resolve the land reform question.

Although Birkenstock told Jabulani he was willing to sell his land, the intimidation continued. Indeed, it has increased over the past three years. In July 2002, he noticed that structures were being erected on the farm Roodepoort, which he was renting. Those building the structures told him that they had obtained "permission" from Jabulani Mdlalose

Dirk Kotze

In the same vein, farmer Dirk Kotze told MP Slabbert of his woes. He has been farming on Palmietfontein for thirty years. His farming operation supported more than 1 000 families with food per month, and 100 families with milk per day. Farms bordering on his were occupied by illegal squatters and the security situation deteriorated dramatically, he said.

His family regularly received threats, and on 6 February 2003, he and his wife were brutally attacked by five armed black men and robbed of their firearms, money and vehicle.⁽²⁾ As with many other farmers, Kotze feels helpless. With no law enforcement, he sees no future in farming and asks the government to buy his farm. His farm is in pristine condition – Eskom lines, sufficient water, good buildings and chicken runs.

Steve and Fanie Van Jaarsveld

A third farmer in the area, Steve van Jaarsveld was visited by Jabulani in July 1999. He told Steve of his plans to “settle” people on various commercial farms in the district. In March 2002, occupations began on the neighbouring farm Wanbestuur which belonged to absent farmer Neil Prinsloo. The farm had been returned to LandbouKrediet (an agricultural loan company) because of Prinsloo’s financial difficulties. The squatters appeared in April 2002 and erected structures. Van Jaarsveld reported the matter to the police who said they could do nothing because the owner of the property, LandbouKrediet, had not laid a charge. Despite many calls to LandbouKrediet, it appears no charges have been since laid, and more squatters have streamed on to the farm.

In June 2002, structures appeared on the farm Metzelfontein which van Jaarsveld was renting. The police investigated, but again said they could do nothing because “the people said they had purchased the farm from Jabulani Mdlalose”. End of story! No investigation into whether what they said was true, no removals, no charges laid. It would appear that the police and Mdlalose are very good friends, as is the case with Chief Mathaba and the police in northern Natal. (See the story of the Dunn family).

We saw the farms of Dirk Kotze, Johan Birkenstock and Fanie van Jaarsveld. In van Jaarsveld’s living room, he showed us bullet holes in his leg – he had been recently attacked and beaten outside his front door. If it were not for his boerbul dog, he would have been killed. As it was the three men who assaulted him shot the dog who miraculously survived. The bullet holes through the brave animal’s head can be clearly seen, and he is none the worse for wear! Steve van Jaarsveld told us he had lost many head of cattle. “Every year they burn you out”, he declared. “There was no grazing”.

Johan Birkenstock confirmed he had to put out fires 33 times over one winter. “We can’t move the squatters. The police can’t do it, and it takes too much money and heartache. Dirk Kotze’s farm was also burnt out. The fences were simply taken away. They stole all his cattle. They steal each month, and every year they burn him out. How can we farm under these circumstances? Where in the world do you find such a situation?”

Van Jaarsveld told us other farms were being invaded: Mr. Bonnie Hills' Mooifontein, Brakspruit belonging to Mr. Koos Scheepers, and Mr. Heinrich Hegeler's farm Nellie's Rust.

Action

Letters were also sent by organized agriculture to the Minister of Safety and Security about the situation, but despite high level meetings between MP Jan Slabbert, provincial agricultural minister Narend Singh and Traditional Affairs Minister Nkosi Nyanga Ngubane, no action was taken. Instead, the farmers were told they should institute a civil action. Thus, farmers have to spend small fortunes retaining attorneys to seek redress because the police are not doing their job. (Perhaps they should institute a class action to sue the Minister of Safety and Security for dereliction of duty!)

Thus starts the endless cycle of litigation as orders served on certain squatters are rendered invalid because they have left and are replaced by other squatters. In one case, an eviction was granted and the squatter refused to move. He was then evicted (more costs!) but simply moved back into his house and has increased his building activity.

In January 2003, Vryheid attorney Bertus van der Merwe wrote to the Senior Prosecutor at the Magistrate's Court in Vryheid that "a very dangerous situation is developing" along the Vryheid-Babanango road where properties are being invaded by "people who seem to have the impression that the authorities will not step in to take the necessary steps to protect the rights of owners".

The Department of Land Affairs wrote to attorneys representing the affected farmers on 27 March 2003, declaring that they do not support land invasions and that "the landowners should act as soon as possible. They should lay trespass charges with the police in order to avoid legal costs". Farmers know that, but the lack of activity by the police forces them to institute privately-funded civil actions.

The police say they can do nothing about land that is "under dispute". But all they have to do is check with the local municipality to find out who owns what land. This is a lame excuse, and the SA Police's lack of action is probably the main cause of this terrible rash of land invasions occurring throughout South Africa.

In June 2003, Jabulani Mdlalose was arrested and charged with illegally selling plots on commercial farms. He was granted bail in mid August 2003. Further fraud charges are building up against him.

The court has also restrained him from purporting to be chief of the Othaka Tribe and allocating land on private farms. This restraint order came only after civil action was taken by local farmers, one of whom was Jaco Duminy, chairman of the Vryheid Farmers' Association.

He showed us copious correspondence addressed to the Minister of Safety and Security, the local member of Parliament, the KwaZulu/Natal premier, the Department of Land Affairs and the letter that started it all, from Jabulani Mdlalose to the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) dated February 2003 where he declares he is head of the Othaka Tribal Authority.

This letter "informs" the DLA that land which was given to him "by the former government in 1986/7" will now be used "for farming from 1 April 2003". (Of course Jabulani's version of "farming" is somewhat different from that of commercial farmers in the area).

He then attached a list of the commercial farms which he says were given to him – there were nineteen in all.

The wires on Jaco Duminy's farm gate had been cut as we drew up to his farm. Some of his cattle were already drifting on to the road. Duminy told us he had also been visited by a delegation from Jabulani who stated they would take his farm. The restraining order on Jabulani has, however, put a damper on the visiting delegations, but it is a Pyrrhic victory because it cost the farmers more than R80 000 to get that restraining order, and the fraud case against Jabulani is not yet completed.

Once again, complaints about the police abound. A local farmer noticed his fencing wire was cut. Members of the police's Stock Theft Unit came to help. They traced the cattle, and found the culprits but the police didn't arrest them. This farmer says the Stock Theft Unit is "a joke".

It has been reduced from 30 to ten people while the area of jurisdiction has doubled in size over the last 15 years. "They don't even have vehicles", said the abject farmer. He doesn't blame everyone within the SAPS – many are desperately trying to do their job under impossible circumstances.

Gwebo

A serious scandal of lost farmland and waste of taxpayer's money greeted us in the Gwebo area. Three farms totalling around 4 000 ha - Kromellenbog, Eerstepunt and In Memoriam - were handed over to none other than Johannes Mdlalose. We were told that Eerstepunt had been one of the finest farms in the district – "it had the best cover of grass I've seen in a long while" said a local farmer. The owner really looked after the farm, he said – the camps and feeding troughs were in tip top condition for the more than 200 beef cattle which thrived on the farm. After the handover, agriculturalists were called in to give advice, and foremen were appointed so that the new owners had all the help they needed.

Consultants drew up a business plan which was extremely comprehensive. It showed prospective occupants how to run the farm, explained the use of the tools and the farming equipment – the tractors and the ploughs – which were included in the deal. There was a big "handover" party for more than 300 people who ate and drank at taxpayers' expense.

It later transpired that the local indunas (local chief) threw out the qualified people, and ignored the business plan. Fearful of any threat to their authority, their actions resulted in the three farms "falling back into the stone age", according to one observer.

We traveled through these lands. Grazing grass was high – this was during the height of the 2003 drought – because there were no beasts – certainly not in the numbers which would constitute a profitable beef operation. The farmhouse had been occupied by the Zulu VIP's, and squatter huts had been constructed. It looked like a picture from some old South African historical picture of Zululand. The occupants stripped the farm fences and used this to fence their own squatter houses. There is no water-born sewage. There appeared to be abundant water. As we approached one group of buildings, shots rang out in our direction and we quickly turned tail. There are plenty of guns in the beloved country.

"Babanango is one of the best cattle areas in South Africa" said our farmer driver "Now look at it!" He continued, his face etched with stress: "I have to count my cattle every day".

We saw two farms which had turned into squatter camps – the farm Lisbon which used to be a successful dairy and grain farm of 2 000 ha and which was given to the Xhambeni Tribal Authority, and the once-productive dairy farm Wanbestuur, around 200 ha, now belonging to LandbouKrediet. Jabulani Mdlalose has already sold a good portion of this farm, which he doesn't own, to squatters. The crime emanating from these farms is endemic, said our farmer driver. He said that LandbouKrediet has yet to lay a charge with the police about the squatters on this farm.

The farm Mooifontein was in even worse condition than the previous two. The fencing had completely vanished. The house was vandalized and what could be taken away was removed. The owner did not live on the farm, but the manager moved off because of the intimidation. Here again, Jabulani sold plots for R1 500 each. The outbuildings had been stripped. This farm under normal circumstances – that is in a normal law-and-order society - would fetch R2 000 per hectare. Today it is worthless.

Farmer Jan Hattingh (not his real name) told us he practically gave away his top farm for R1 000 a hectare to a black farmer who obtained a loan from the Land Bank. The farmer farms a few of his private cattle and uses the farm as a taxi repair operation. He said no white farmer would buy his farm because they simply cannot produce.

We asked a land claims expert in the area what was the basis of the land claims on these farms. His reply was that the Mdlalose community were “landless”. We didn't have time to count how many farms the Mdlalose clan had already been given in the area, but they have claimed – and received - at least ten farms that we know of.

We drove back to Vryheid with heavy hearts. What can farmers do, we were told. With government allegedly supporting NGO's who instigate and support land claims (even if the claims are not valid, which happens in many cases!), and with the police literally turning a blind eye, there is no other way than for a farmer to pack his bags and leave the heartache, the fear and the stress.

One reads of successful and happy farmers in South Africa's agricultural magazines. These are the ones who do not live near squatter camps and traditional areas. But as farmers near these areas leave, the cancer invades further into commercial farmland. Will anyone eventually be safe?

The Klipfontein Dam

As we neared the town, a squatter camp on a hill came into view. On the other side of this camp, 500 m away, lay the Klipfontein Dam which supplies the town with its drinking water. So where is the sewage arrangement for these people, we asked. There's nothing at all. When it rains the sewage runs down into the dam. The squatter camp land belongs to the State, we were informed by the Department of Water Affairs. And once again, the Mdlalose's are involved. We were told that Johannes is the “agent” and is selling plots in the squatter camp. Agent for whom we could not ascertain. The Department of Water Affairs says they have received no complaints about the dam, so they cannot investigate the claim about run-off sewage. So where does the sewage go to, we asked? Upon enquiries to the local municipality, we were informed they were “aware of the problem”.

This leads us to water, and the “projects” which are being lavishly funded throughout the country. An interested party told us of the Hluhluwe Water project where a purification plant costing R11 million was installed at the Hluhluwe Dam. The water is supplied to a nearby community. Consultants were brought in to monitor

the project. After December 2002, the contracts ended and the community was supposed to run the project themselves.

By March 2003, there was no water in the system. The water was cut off because the community didn't pay. They paid when the consultants were running the project but as soon as they left, there was no payment. In April 2003 the consultants were appointed again to come and sort out the mess. The contract expired in December 2003 . . .

Said one farmer: "They all want this and that but they cannot manage anything." Another R40 million is allegedly being pumped into this project, but it still won't work unless the consultants are there. (We discovered the same problems in the Eastern Cape. Doubtless these situations are endemic throughout the country). This story ends with the report of a bizarre happening – trench warfare in KwaZulu/Natal. Farmers have built trenches 2m wide and 2m deep for more than 200 km in the Winterton/Estcourt area to stop cattle theft. It is working, they say, because the thieves can only slaughter at most one or two beasts and throw the meat over the trench.

Do people in the city who enjoy the best steaks in the world realize what farmers endure to put those steaks on South African plates?

Chapter Four

THE EASTERN CAPE

VOYAGE TO SOUTH AFRICA

“We sailed out of Simon’s Bay on 10th May with a brisk gale from the NW which carried us round Cape l’Aguillas. On the 12th at day break, we found ourselves almost becalmed, opposite the entrance to the Knysna, a fine lagoon which forms a beautiful and spacious haven.

During the two following days, having scarcely any wind, we kept tacking off and on within a few miles of the shore. This gave us an excellent opportunity of surveying the coast scenery of Auteniqualand and Zitzikama, which is of very striking character.

As we passed headland after headland, the sylvan recesses of the bays and mountains opened successively to our gaze, like a magnificent panorama, continually unfolding new features or exhibiting new combinations of scenery, in which the soft and the stupendous, the monotonous and the picturesque, were strangely blended. The aspect of the whole was impressive, but somber; beautiful, but somewhat savage. There was the grandeur and the grace of nature, majestic and untamed; and there was likewise that air of lonesomeness and dreary wildness which a country unmarked by the traces of human industry or of human residence seldom fails to exhibit to the view of civilized man.

Seated on the poop of the vessel, I gazed alternately on that solitary shore, and on the bands of emigrants who now crowded the deck or leaned along the gangway.....

Late in the afternoon of the 15th, we came to anchor in Algoa Bay.....

The whole scene was such as could not fail to impress deeply the most unconcerned spectator. To us, who had embarked all our worldly property and earthly prospects, our own future fortunes and the fate of our posterity, in this enterprise, it was interesting and exciting to an intense degree.

It being too late to go ashore that evening, we continued gazing on this scene till long after sunset – till twilight had darkened into night, and the constellation of the southern hemisphere, revolving in cloudless brilliance above, reminded us that nearly half the globe’s expanse intervened between us and our native land – the homes of our youth and the friends we had parted from for ever.

And that here, in this farthest nook of Southern Africa, we were now about to receive the portion of our inheritance, and to draw an irrevocable lot for ourselves and for our children’s children.’

- From the publication **Narrative of a Residence in South Africa** by Thomas Pringle, in which he tells of the trip to South Africa of the settler ship Brilliant which arrived in Algoa Bay, in the Eastern Cape, on 15 May, 1820, as quoted in **The Story of the British Settlers of 1820 in South Africa** by Harold Edward Hockly, Juta and Co., Cape Town, 1948.

This South African province is the most potentially

productive and fertile of all the provinces. The climate is one of the most attractive and productive in South Africa, with mean summer temperatures varying around 22°C.

In the mountainous areas, rainfall averages 1000 mm and along the coast it is as high as 1 300 mm, diminishing to 625 mm in the area in between.⁽¹⁾ The irrigation

prospects of the area's perennial rivers, as well as the fact that the soil compares with the best in South Africa, point to the considerable potential for agriculture in the area.⁽²⁾ Surface water is abundant.

What used to be known as Transkei and Ciskei became independent homelands under the old National Party government, and considerable money and effort was put into developing the region which, in the years before this initiative, was essentially a subsistence agricultural area.

The irrigation, crop and stock schemes implemented were numerous, and we have tried to follow up on at least a few of them to find out what happened to these developments. Political ideology aside, large amounts of taxpayers' money went into the development of a serious agricultural sector in what is now the Eastern Province.

An examination of publications of the "homeland" era reveals the diversity and breadth of projects introduced to the Eastern Province – irrigation schemes, dairy, beef and sheep farming projects, the construction of dams, crop farms including maize, wheat, lucerne and vegetable plantings, as well as sorghum and legumes grown under dry-land farming conditions. Up to 1975, 61% of the old Transkei was agriculturally planned. There were 14 agricultural cooperatives, with 16 600 members. By June 1975, more than 1 300 dams had been built and 1 100 successful boreholes drilled. More than 600 soil conservation schemes covering an area of 2 300 000 ha had been approved by March 1975, and 922 dipping tanks had been provided for livestock.

At that time, the region was one of the biggest cattle-producing areas in South Africa.⁽³⁾ Maize had to be imported – only around 200 000 tons were produced while there was a potential of approximately five million tons.⁽⁴⁾

Agricultural Crops

The Magwa Tea Estate had been established at Lusikisiki, where 1 500 people were employed by 1975. Coffee projects were established at Lambasi and a smaller scheme was created at Intsimbini. The potential of the land was exceptional. Said the Africa Institute in 1976: "It has been estimated that the Transkei can produce enough tea to supply half of South Africa's demand. In all, 137 000 ha of land is available on which fibre and industrial crops can be cultivated, and another 15 400 ha is suitable for coffee production. There are 43 000 ha suited to the production of cotton and an equivalent amount available for sugar growing. The potential monetary value of the fibre crops, coffee, cotton and sugar cane is estimated to be more than R40 million."⁽⁵⁾ (These were 1976 figures – Ed.)

In the old Ciskei, only 837 ha owned by black farmers were under irrigation by 1975. Of the total surface of about 520 000 ha, 81% consisted of pasturage and agriculturally non-productive land, and only 15% of arable land.⁽⁶⁾ The story of the old Ciskei is even worse than the old Transkei in terms of agricultural development at the time of the 1976 Africa Institute report. For example, the total number of fruit trees planted by black farmers up to 1975 amounted to 48 100. (On one Letsitele commercial farm alone, there are more than 100 000 trees.)

Details of various agricultural schemes in progress and planned are given in the report. Other publications at the time more or less confirm the establishment of these developments, with detailed tables of the number of cattle and other beasts, the size of the crops, and the potential for the area.

What happened to these projects? We chose a few to follow up and the results were alarming.

The Magwa Tea Project

In May 2003, a South African agricultural magazine alerted readers to the fact that the Eastern Province MEC for Agriculture Max Mamase was budgeting R20 million for a “turnaround strategy” to salvage what once was a successful tea project.⁽⁷⁾ Democratic Alliance agriculture spokesman Athol Trollip declared that the corporation was ailing and “doomed to financial failure”.

In July 2003, another press report declared that workers on the estate hadn't been paid for six months and “years of gross mismanagement” had led to the torching of the Magwa Estate's offices by thousands of workers.⁽⁸⁾ Fifteen offices, a boardroom, computers and financial records succumbed to the flames. “The fate of an entire rural economy is balanced on a knife edge”, said the article. “Workers children have been pulled out of school to plant vegetables as their parents can no longer make ends meet.”

The 2 500 ha estate has the potential to produce more than 3,5 million kilograms of good quality tea per year. Last season, output was budgeted at 2,3 million kilograms, but only 955 000 kilograms were produced. To remain viable, the operation needed to produce at least 2,4 million kilograms of tea. It is the only tea estate in South Africa that is not irrigated.

In October 2003, the DA's Athol Trollip issued a press statement declaring that certain creditors had foreclosed on Magwa. One of the creditors had already begun attaching tractors computers and office furniture. The debt dated back to 1998!

Trollip said he and DA MP Stuart Farrow had brought the plight of “this magnificent tea estate” to the attention of MEC Max Mamase and the Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs in September 2002. R20 million was appropriated in April 2003 to effect a turnaround to save the estate. Seven months had passed and no management company had been appointed.

“Magwa lies idle as workers are not paid and the estate is now faced with liquidation, a classic case of ‘too little, too late’.”⁽⁹⁾ If nothing is done, “Magwa will follow the path of other failed parastatals” said Trollip. It later transpired that R15 million was owed to the Land Bank and others, and these debts would have almost swallowed up the R20 million “turnaround” money. Further, Magwa workers had taken management to the Labour Court over disputes arising out of non-payment of salaries.

The history of the tea estate follows a pattern now becoming apparent: when the new government came to power in 1994, they moved to rid many old “homeland” structures of personnel from the old regime. Affirmative action candidates and political comrades replaced what was an efficient band of people, whatever their political affiliations. Thus the rot set in. The plantation was already in trouble in 1997 and was liquidated. The state pumped in R10,6 million to get it back on its feet, and in 1998, the workers became co-owners of the estate in a land reform initiative, funded by South Africa's taxpayers.

The Magwa estate would cost in excess of R1 billion to re-establish. In his letter to the Minister of Land Affairs dated 19 September 2002, MP Stuart Farrow said the estate's production levels had fallen dramatically; husbandry practices were not being implemented, professional tea management was deficient and there was low worker/owner participation, with reliance more on casual workers.

A “top secret” memorandum dated 21 April 2003 to the Eastern Cape Cabinet Committee from the Head of Department, Department of Agriculture – EC, entitled

“Magwa Tea Estate Restructuring”, refers to persistent labor disturbances, low productivity, and frequent requests for working capital since the “takeover of the company by the workers”.

Says the top secret report: “A fundamental agreement was reached at the time the workers purchased the company (in 1998) that the *organization should be turned around and transformed into a shining example of a worker-owned and managed company.*” (Italics ours).

“Productivity has dropped to unprecedented levels and all the parties involved (workers, management, board of directors) are accusing one another of mismanagement, non-communication, weak leadership and, in some instances, sheer laziness”. The report goes on to catalogue lists of problems, and there is copious finger pointing. Suffice it to say the whole project collapsed into a management and financial shambles, and this occurred over a period of at least three years.

The report makes mention of the further amount of R20 million set aside by the province to implement a turnaround strategy. But the socio-political factors inherent in the failure of management are frankly admitted to: that “the failure of a project of this magnitude will have great negative implications politically”, and that “other struggling enterprises such as North Pondoland Sugar, the TRTC Bus Company, etc” could also have “a political fallout”. The report also includes letters from top estate employees resigning in protest at the mismanagement of the company.

These professional and dedicated people had to implore the company’s board to pay their six-month salary arrears.

The Department of Agriculture, Bisho

An oral reply in the Parliament of the Province of the Eastern Cape in May 2003 sheds some light on government mentality in that province vis a vis land redistribution and transformation.

In reply to the DA’s Athol Trollip about the R20 million budgeted for the “turnaround” of the estate in April 2003, the MEC for Agriculture declared that “Magwa Tea Estate is a private enterprise that was transferred to the management and workers during the process of transformation of the parastatal for a reasonable consideration.”

“Government assisted the workers in this purchase through their grants of R16 000 each. It was therefore expected that the management and the board should operate the estate like any other business without any interference or intervention from government”.

But it is taxpayers’ money which financed this transformation, so it was government’s duty to see that the estate prospered. Like so many other examples of the government’s land reform policy, the recipients are left to fend for themselves. Clearly, as it was not the Department of Agriculture personnel’s private money, they simply didn’t check up on the progress of this scheme. It was only after creditors began attaching computers and furniture that the Department woke up to the shambles, or so it appears. If they did know beforehand that things were awry, they did nothing to salvage a national asset.

Derek Hanekom

In December 2002 already, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Land Affairs in the province (SCALA) reported that the previous DLA minister Derek

Hanekom had promised the estate's workers "R11 million" but since then nothing had been received.

In January 2003, matters became chaotic. Workers/shareholders invaded the Chief Financial Officer's office and assaulted him. In a confidential internal memo, the situation was referred to as "total anarchy".

Sri Lankan Henry Galahitiyawa is one of the world's top tea experts and has been employed at the estate since 1989. In June 2003, he told the press "hardly any work is being done – and it is being done at a very slow pace."⁽¹⁰⁾ For some time he had not felt safe and feared for his family. Ransacking of houses had occurred and he concurred that there were clear signs of anarchy within the estate. He chronicled the woes of the estate since the workers/shareholders took over. He said strikes, mismanagement, incompetence, fraud, corruption, nepotism, and even liquidations could not kill Magwa until now, "but even immunity has to have an end."

This dedicated non-South African world expert declared that the "inevitable demise of Magwa" can be attributed to the "too rapid transformation from a government-owned plantation to a people's cooperative in 1997, which change precipitated all the other woes. None of those placed at the top possessed the required qualifications or knowledge to transform effectively and to motivate all those who are involved in production."

Yet again, a multi-million rand project which the present government inherited from the previous administration has bitten the dust, due mostly to the arrogance of the ignorant and the misguided belief that they need answer to no one, especially to the taxpayers whose money they use with impunity.

Nowhere in the world has this type of worker "management" succeeded – in socialist countries it failed spectacularly, yet the South African government either did not learn from history, or refused to learn. Threats to destroy the "legacies of apartheid", and wild promises to bring "the people" into management to "share the wealth" have almost destroyed this showcase project.

Some observers say the workers/shareholders "were set up for failure". The estate is a national asset and has the potential to show massive profits and provide thousands of jobs.

The Ncora Irrigation Scheme

The Ncora or Tsomo River Irrigation Scheme was reported upon in 1975 by the Africa Institute as "the biggest in the Transkei which will irrigate 5 700 ha of the Ncora Flats."⁽¹¹⁾ The scheme cost R19,5 million at the time. A reduced 3 600 ha of irrigated land was handed over to the Ncora Trust in 1994, and at most only 500 ha is under irrigation today. Basic cash crops are now being produced. The scheme's dam is only 30% full because 60% to 70% of the water within is leaking into the ground. The 900mm irrigation pipes leak 24 hours a day, and have been leaking non-stop for years now. One observer saw 15 leaking pipes in a row. Although the authorities have known about the leaks for a long time, nothing is done to repair the holes in the pipes.

(The mind boggles at the number of cattle already dead in the 2003/4 drought in other areas of South Africa, many belonging to black farmers who could not find water for their animals. Then there are the Bronkhorstspruit irrigation farmers who were banned in August 2003 from using local river water.

The ban came into effect without any warning whatsoever. The farming group McCain had just spent R1,4 million on a new pumping system and center pivots.⁽¹²⁾

The system has been standing unused ever since the ban was declared, with interest on the capital investment running at over R200 000 a year.)

Originally there were three dairies at Ncora, with three 42-cow turntables. Now none of them work. The back-up generators have been plundered, hit with hammers according to an observer. All the copper wire from the milk cooler tanks has been damaged or stolen.

There were originally 20 to 30 milk and dairy product storage tanks, but they do not function now.

The original scheme ran more than 1 200 head of cattle, “the best Holstein genetics in the Southern Hemisphere”, according to a local. After the handover, these cattle were sold off. The dairies were top producers of yoghurt, maas and so forth.

“When you go to the dairies now”, a local told us, “it looks like a bomb hit them. Fires have been built in the yoghurt processing section. The lorries belonging to the dairies have been burnt out, and two disparate groups within the Trust are squabbling almost every day.”

We are told that the government is planning to spend another R10 million on this project. But if management is poor, the same situation will prevail again after a few years.



The total absence of any farming activity in the Tabankulu region of the Eastern Cape – which has great agricultural potential and was previously prime farming territory – is evidenced by the growth in the shack and squatter community.

The Qamata Irrigation Scheme

The old homeland books say that this scheme “will cover 3 600 ha by 1977 and 1 200 farmers will be settled on it when it is fully developed”. It cost R8,2 million to set up in 1975.

Today, no more than 500 ha are irrigated, and are planted with cash crops. Contractors recently planted 500ha of maize for government at a production cost of R10 000 ha. The selling price of the maize was R800/R900 a ton which works out at around R8 000 per ha.

Thus this particular operation made a loss of R2 000 per ha. The Eastern Cape government spent altogether R5 million on this maize project, and managed to produce R400 000 worth of maize. "One might just as well have imported R5 million worth of maize and have been done with it", said a farmer nearby.

"After 1994, the people on the land were mobilized to destroy everything that belonged to the boer or the homelands government", we were told by a source. "Tractors, irrigation systems, furrows, dams and so forth were trashed", he said. "The promised new revolutionary tractors and irrigation systems never materialized. The people who live on this and other such schemes which used to produce crops for export, now live in abject poverty."

He continues: "The government is now ploughing millions into resuscitating these schemes. However, most of these millions go to consultants or failed former commercial farmers. Such people now masquerade as agricultural development professionals and/or fundis."

The Shiolo Project

This was in the old Ciskei, a 600 ha intensive farming project of mainly fruit. It costs today around R40 000 per ha to establish a fruit orchard.

Many of the trees in this project were cut up for firewood and for use in building houses. The government is now ready to pump another R10 million into this scheme. There was also a small dairy operation within the project, plus a small-plot development.

After 1994, the whites were removed and the budgets "were frittered away" according to a person we spoke to. There is no production at all at Shiolo. All the machinery, the tractors and so forth, is lying around, broken and rusted.

Cala

A beautiful peach tree project with gravity irrigation was established at Cala in 1999. However, the trees were not looked after and one third of the orchard has burnt down. The irrigation nozzles and pipes were burnt and have not been replaced. A weir was built and the government brought experts in to help with the planting, and the orchard was fenced off. The beneficiaries were given R500 000 to maintain the trees until maturity. It was all on a plate. All they had to do was open and close the valves. However, within seven months, the land around the trees was burnt.

The weir is now clogged up. It was positioned to take advantage of gravity irrigation, but now steel pipes and rubbish have been dumped in the weir.

We were advised that the beneficiaries of this peach tree project attended management and technical courses. Despite this, they call the Department of Land Affairs at the drop of a hat when even the smallest thing goes wrong. Technicians have to drive 200 km to undertake a 10-minute repair job.

Farm Handovers

As in the rest of South Africa, there is no end of examples of farm handovers in this province which have failed. We need only mention a few. Farms Deeside, Drummond, Spes Bona, Ensam, Kanuna, Mt. Hopley and Poplar Grove were all sheep and cattle farms in the Queenstown area. They have now become squatter camps. Some pit toilets have been built. The residents overgraze the land, and their cattle are dying because of this and the drought.

A nearby farmer tells us the new owners of these farms are unable to make a living and steal his irrigation equipment and his sheep. (Sheep farming in the Eastern Cape has been drastically reduced over the past five years). This farmer loses around R27 000 to R30 000 a year from theft.

An example of injudicious and unplanned farm transfers is the farm group Thornhill, Koffiefontein, Middelploas and Waterval in the Dordrecht area. They were transferred to beneficiaries a year ago, under the R15 000 per recipient scheme, but the farms have already lost 50% of their potential, and the farm dwellers have applied to the Land Bank for more funding.

The farm Koffiefontein is 400 ha in size, and accommodates 30 families. The carrying capacity of one cow in the area is 6.1/2 ha which means the farm can only carry 61 head of cattle, that is two head of cattle per family. One needs a farm of at least 1 500 ha to make it a viable commercial unit, according to farmers in the area. The families on Koffiefontein can hardly live on two cows each. What about money for their children's education, food, transport, medical bills and other expenses? Where was the forward planning in these handovers?

A Sunday Times lead article on 20 October, 2002 (two thirds of a page) is headed "Sowing the Seeds of Hope". We often see the word "hope" used in these eulogies to the latest land reform transfer. While hope springs eternal, it is usually discovered to be ephemeral. So it is with the handover of the 780 ha farm Merino Rust to Mr. Felix Mtwa and his 17 village compatriots who "became commercial farmers last month, having bought the property from a white rancher on a Land Affairs grant", according to the Times. (Someone should tell the Times that one just doesn't "become" a commercial farmer overnight. It's a highly skilled business, and it's not for those who are easily discouraged!)

The article proceeds to describe the success of the Department of Land Affairs' Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) scheme which is funded, inter alia, by USAID (the US Agency for International Development) in cooperation with the AgriLink project. Have these two organizations been back to see how Mr. Mtwa fared on this expensive piece of land, paid for by taxpayers?

A local farmer who knows this land well tells us "nothing is going on there, nothing". The property was a mixed-farming operation, with a sizeable beef herd, a small dairy and good crop production. There was flood irrigation from two dams, but now the canals or furrows are not cleaned, so the water doesn't come so easily.

There are "a few families" on the property but there's no real production, says the neighbour. "I was there four months ago and nothing much was happening". The new arrivals moved into the house and they appear to be living off grants.

General

The editor of the *Farmer's Weekly* is from Indwe in the Eastern Cape. In 2002 the town was given the dubious honour of being voted the poorest town in the country.

His neighbour's farm was bought by the government and handed over to a group of families to administer. "The new neighbours are trying their best, with no guidance whatsoever", he says. "This is despite my personal attempts at convincing senior officials in the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, the Land Bank and a smattering of development agencies that our neighbours need a hand with farming operations. I even supplied them with names of farmers who were prepared to mentor

– all they needed was for someone in authority to tell them and the new farmers what the deal would be. Everyone is still waiting”.

He continues: “So it was with some reservation that I got the news that Guba, arguably the best farming ground in the district, was to be handed over to a group of black communities. My father was among the farmers whose ground was expropriated back in the 1980s. For the next 20 years, the ground lay fallow, and when I recently visited the farm I grew up on, I couldn’t remember the land looking better. What’s more, the huge town dam is situated on the border of this area, making it possible to irrigate quite extensively.

“But when I met one of the new land beneficiaries in the post office, and asked him enthusiastically what they would be farming, he replied vaguely – we will farm big. Further queries about whether there was any plan or not didn’t yield much, so I assumed there wasn’t much of a plan. Which in my book is nothing short of criminal, especially when farmers who farmed that ground are still living in the district and could quite easily be pulled in by the government to come up with ideas on how the land could be used optimally. The water available to these new farmers could mean hundreds of new jobs. But instead, when the Minister of Agriculture and the Deputy President leave on Sunday morning after the handover party, nothing much will have changed. And it will never occur to anyone how much it could have changed”.⁽¹³⁾

Grahamstown dairy farmer Peter Wylie is besieged. In September 2003 he had to sell part of his land after losses from continual theft and trespassing on his grazing land “that were too much to bear. We are under total threat all the time”, he said. “Stock owners from the township don’t brand their stock. There’s over-grazing. Fences are being trampled. There’s no law.”⁽¹⁴⁾

DA spokesperson Professor Michael Wisson told us Wylie is “almost totally surrounded by what is, in effect, uncontrolled commonage. He tries to run a dairy herd whose produce he transforms into excellent yoghurt, but with 6 000 or more uncontrolled cattle from the Grahamstown East herd roaming the area, he is having very serious problems of fence stealing, cattle theft and, probably the most dangerous, cattle diseases. His father was murdered on the farm.” Wylie’s sick father was shot in his bed, while Wylie escaped another bullet in the room by a whisker. “They took R220. My father was killed for R220! This killing changed our lives forever.”

Wylie told the DA’s Athol Trollip and Stuart Farrow that he was being “invaded” and stolen blind. The adjacent “commonage” (communal land) is appallingly run/managed and those who graze their cattle there are a law unto themselves, says Trollip.

It seems there is complete grazing anarchy on these Grahamstown commonages. Professor Whissom says the area is becoming known as the place where animals can roam free. Rural stockowners have persuaded the Makana Council to acquire farms adjacent to the old commonage, through the DLA’s land acquisition policy, and they have “nudged the process along” by removing all the fences along the National road, and on the farms on which they desire to graze their animals.

Farmer Willie Fourie, who used to own Glen Craig, a substantial farm adjacent to the commonage, had his fourteen camps vandalized and his water system wrecked – naturally, he sold to the Department of Land Affairs.

Only Peter Wylie and one or two others have resisted the pressure. He says people shouldn’t excuse the behaviour of certain people because of their race. “There is no excuse for lawlessness. We live on our nerves here. The public doesn’t understand the effect this siege has had on our attitude to life”.

His neighbour across the road is reeling under the pressure. “It’s terrible to see a man’s life, everything he believes in and dreamed about, shattered by unmitigated crime”, says Wylie. “Our dreams for the future are in ruins. Everything is stolen – peaches, cabbages, other vegetables. The young thugs come with bags and simply take, not to eat but to sell. They steal our cattle. We have put up electric fencing at great cost. We now plant chicory because that can’t be stolen. This theft and crime is affecting the economy enormously. The authorities will regret their lack of action in the future, when there’s nothing left.”

Wylie continued: “We try to farm with nature. We appreciate this beautiful country. I don’t like burglar bars but I had to spend R22 000 electrifying our house and also the workers’ farm houses. After doing this, they did not come to work! At Christmas, absolutely nothing gets done. And Christmas is not even part of their culture. What’s wrong here? It’s unfathomable.”

“The main road to Johannesburg is swarming with cattle. Nobody pays for grazing in this area,” says Wylie. “Urban dwellers have herds of cattle. They invade my farm and other areas. I often wonder what would have happened in the homelands if the Israelis or the Thais or the Malaysians had got hold of those regions and farmed them. Today, those regions would be a paradise. It’s all about attitude, the work ethic, an approach to life.”

Conclusion

There are scores of projects we could not investigate because of time and funding limitations. But somehow the results seem predictable. Checking up on old press reports of handovers inevitably results in the conclusion that things didn’t work out. Even mentorship and joint ventures, which look like admirable solutions, have severe drawbacks. Who will recapitalize the project? Will some partners be the workers and others the drones? Who has the authority to make decisions, and what if they are not agreed to?

A *Rapport* newspaper article in July 2001 says “Wit en swart boere vat hande”. (“White and black farmers take hands”).⁽¹⁵⁾ It is a glowing story of a kind farmer who wants to help, and grateful black farmers who need it. This Elliot commercial farmer was lauded by none other than President Thabo Mbeki for his attitude towards his black neighbours. The president even mentioned this farmer’s name in Parliament. The 51 black farmers soon experienced trouble after they had bought the neighbouring farm, and asked the commercial farmer for assistance. Both sides were pictured chatting and smiling over the fence.

We recently telephoned the commercial farmer, more than two years after the press article appeared. How were the neighbours faring, we enquired. Not so good, he said. They have already split into two groups and are fighting and arguing. Things have regressed. They were told by the Department of Land Affairs to plant orange trees. I told them this was sheep farming area and that orange trees would not survive. They received R435 000 as an overseas grant. I told them to buy sheep and goats.

“A smart DLA consultant arrived on the scene and tried to sell the black farmers a computer. I advised them to spend their money on stock, but they purchased the computer instead. Their current stock is dying because they don’t have money for fodder and lick.”

“I don’t want to be involved any more” said the farmer. “If anything goes wrong, then they blame me”. He said many farmers in the district are wary of

mentoring. They don't mind giving advice on an ad hoc basis, but don't want to become involved on a regular basis.

"A promising dairy project is improving the fate of a community" declared a Farmer's Weekly headline in January 2003.⁽¹⁶⁾ What has happened to the 859 ha Melkspruit Farm in Aliwal North since then? Sixty hectares are under irrigation, and the 40 new farmers get their water from the Orange River. But their pump station has been vandalized, and the cables have been stolen, only six months into transformation. The dairy farm cost taxpayers around R800 000 but there seems to be a dearth of operating capital, according to a local official we spoke to. "Their land claim was not based on their being a tribal community. They were just a group, and none of them are farmers" declared the official "The group was too big for this farm (They have 21 ha each). They've split into two factions, and they are fighting. They cannot manage the farm, and a mentoring program has been embarked upon. Local farmers have offered their help on a voluntary basis."

The official blames the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) for pumping up people's expectations. The new farmers have been badly shaken by the problems of farming. Their dairy cows do not have enough nutrition, and there's little milk. The drought didn't help.

We have to leave the Eastern Cape there. Many questions remain unanswered. What has happened to the state land granted to seven black farmers in May 2001 in the Port St. Johns district? We are busy investigating the fate of the Ulimocor projects of the mid eighties. More than two years ago, officials at the Kat River Cooperative said many black farmers "were being a bit laid-back and were not putting in the same effort as their white counterparts."⁽¹⁷⁾ What has happened since then?

What happened to the black farmers on Isidingo in Stormberg. Jim Tukani and 14 others were given R16 000 each and bought the farm in December 2000. They received loans from the Land Bank. They were being helped by a white farmer.

And the Lambasi Project near Lusikisiki where more than R1,5 billion was spent on infrastructure, and the first harvest netted R127,000? There's also the 1 400 ha farm Pilgrimsrest near Steynsburg where the farm operation turned from "a dream to a nightmare", according to *Rapport* newspaper⁽¹⁸⁾. Eighteen black families bought the farm with government grants, and two months later abandoned it, returning to town with their cattle. The working capital provided by the state disappeared. We wonder if this farm has been salvaged.

The farm Farmerfield in the Salem area near Grahamstown was a restitution claim in 2001. Fifty seven families were given 760 ha, or 13 ha each. What eventually happened to this handover?

The province falls down in the social interaction department. There are serious shortfalls in the attitudes and cultural expectations of most of the people, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations. In its report on irrigation technologies in the Eastern Province in December 2000⁽¹⁹⁾, FAO's IPTRID says "irrigation scheme management and operations were centralized and done by the government. In many places this has resulted in unsustainable poorly performing small-scale irrigation schemes with a high level of dependency among the farmers and cultivators."

"At some sites following the withdrawal of government support services, communities have not had the wherewithal to repair and manage the infrastructure they have been given. What was given in the past has now become a burden. Farmers were waiting for "government" in some form or other to fix a problem, repair a pump, build a canal, plough a field or provide more money".

In their summary of the Eastern Cape's social environment, the FAO's IPTRID concludes that expectations that "government will still do everything" in the minds of many lead to strong dependency, and farmers are unwilling to take action on their own.

There is a long list of further reasons why things don't work in the Eastern Cape, including lack of resources in provincial agricultural extension services, immature NGO's, complicated political processes and poor communication between different government agencies. In other words, there is scant praise. The Eastern Province is racked by deep poverty (in the country's most fertile agricultural area), unemployment, incompetence, corruption and profligacy. (The province gave more than R1 million to help fund the royal wedding of a Thembu chief to Zulu King Goodwill Zwelethini's daughter).⁽²⁰⁾ Money is pumped into "projects" but there's not much to show for it.

The Eastern Cape is beset with cholera (275 water tanks were brought in during mid 2003 to Qumbu to prevent its spread)⁽²¹⁾, and an old lady tells the *Sunday Times* the "new generation" doesn't want to farm. "They do not want to work. They just go up and down, drinking all the time".⁽²²⁾

The human capacity is not up to scratch, according to an interim management team appointed by President Mbeki to look into the woeful service delivery in the EC. R240 million is being put into a "turnaround plan". "Our assessment is that a change of behavioural patterns is lacking. The assessment established that managers are not taking responsibility and they are not displaying a strong sense of accountability."⁽²³⁾

In February 2003, it was reported that the Eastern Cape failed to spend more than an eighth of its budget in its last audited financial year – because it didn't have the managers to spend it, or the planning to know how to do it.⁽²⁴⁾ However, in some sectors the province spends with alacrity.

The EC Department of Agriculture has "excess staff". In 2000 already, MEC Max Mamase said there were 4000 "superfluous" staff and they swallowed up nearly 25% of his department's budget ⁽²⁵⁾.

Yet people are "starving to death on arable land. There are vast stretches of arable farming land in the EC, but people do not have seeds or implements to plant and plough."⁽²⁶⁾ Once again, the human capacity aspect is mentioned. "There is a government skills shortage and a lack of development". The government's land reform program in the Eastern Cape can never be successful under present circumstances. Mentoring, joint ventures and lease-backs are plan "B" contrivances which are not solutions, only short-term palliatives to restless political pressure groups. Rural poverty in the Eastern Province is growing.

People want jobs and a roof over their head, not land. People should not be dumped willy nilly on to land from which they cannot make even a basic living. It should be borne in mind that 90% of whites don't know how to farm either. Landlessness isn't the problem, unemployment is. Why not allow those who can successfully produce food for the whole country to get on with their job?

Postscript: **WHAT CAN HAPPEN TO A SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCHER**

In October 2002, two researchers set out to conduct a study on the challenges surrounding land and agrarian reform on former white-owned farmland in the old Ciskei, now the Eastern Cape. Ms. Michelle Cocks from the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, Eastern Province and Dr. Ilsa Grundy from the University of Stellenbosch, Western Cape were found the following day severely injured and left to die on

an isolated piece of land about two km from a primary school near Bell. One woman had been tied to a tree.

Ms. Cocks, married to Mr. Tony Dold, was pregnant at the time. She and her husband had tried for two years to conceive. Despite her pleas to her attackers, they savagely kicked her in the stomach and her baby died. Both women were cruelly beaten and kicked. At one stage doctors feared that they would not survive their ordeal.

Mr. Dold was naturally bitter. "Unfortunately we live in South Africa. We must protect ourselves against these savage animals. These attackers must have seen my wife was pregnant but that didn't deter them. It is nonsense that poverty is always used as an excuse. I have been in twelve African countries much poorer than here, but crime is under control there. Our country has changed. It is no longer what it was ten years ago."

In the meantime, Dr. Grundy went to stay with her brother in Australia where she is recuperating.

Dold has decided never to allow his wife to conduct research "in these dangerous areas" by herself again. "We must employ someone to accompany my wife in future. This is clearly what one must do in South Africa if one is to survive."

Eight young men from Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape were arrested and appeared in court on 24 February 2003 where they were charged with assault and attempted murder.

Chapter Five

KRANSKOP

Kranskop farmer Günther Gathmann has lost a total of four members of his family to farm murders. His brother Walter was killed three years ago, a second attempt on his life. His aunt, his cousin and his uncle were all victims of a pandemic which places South African farmers as the world's most murdered group, outside of a war.

At the age of 88, his mother was beaten, pistol whipped and shot at during the first attack which narrowly missed Walter. The Gathmanns farm in the middle of a battleground where their community, mostly descendants of German missionaries who settled in the area in 1854, has decreased from 56 farming households to 14 over the past 28 years.

Eleven farmers have been killed in the area, and no robberies occurred.

Kranskop in the KwaZulu/Natal midlands, is of particular interest to those who are watching South Africa's commercial farmers reel under the myriad assaults on their livelihoods which have become daily occurrences. In some instances, Kranskop farmers have simply abandoned their farms. Others committed suicide under the stress.

If those who perpetrate the theft, the intimidation and the murder have as their agenda the intention to drive farmers off their land, then they can be judged successful.

Sixty two farms in the Kranskop area have been claimed under South Africa's land claims legislation. In September 2002, a highly-charged meeting was held to try and calm the tension which had built up after a protest march the month before: a memorandum was handed to authorities which gave "all white people" one month to leave the area. Four days earlier, security guard Sibongiseni Duncan Ndimande had shot and killed 19-year-old Njabulo Bhengu in self-defence. Bhengu had been part of a group caught poaching on Manfred Surendorff's Druten Ranch.

This killing simply brought to a head the simmering edginess and anger which had been brewing for years in the area. Günther Gathmann told us a story of cattle and crop theft, intimidation, arson, murder and land invasions – his story was no different than those recounted in other parts of rural South Africa. Gathmann says land claims go "hand in hand" with intimidation.

Gathmann grew cash crops next to the road on his farm. He cannot any more. Along the six kilometers where the road runs past his farm, his crops were stolen and stripped with regularity. In one night, more than 36 thieves took away one acre of his potatoes, a crop worth R8 000. (He and the police counted the footprints of 36 people!).

Like all farmers, Gathmann cannot obtain insurance for theft. Now he grows only soya beans near the road. The thieves have not decided what they can do with these beans – yet! Whatever else he plants is stolen overnight.

One of his farms has been claimed. He and the 13 other farm claim recipients in the area are fighting the claims. They have been advised by experts that there were no blacks in their area when their forefathers arrived in the mid 1850s. And no blacks were forcibly removed from the area by the previous government. The first whites

came to the area in 1824 and were given land grants by the British government, says Gathmann. It has cost the farmers more than R100 000 in legal fees so far to contest these claims.

Taxes

Gathmann says he and his fellow farmers are being taxed “into extinction”. They pay taxes for the Joint Services Board (JSB) which, says Gathmann, provides services for blacks in town, such as sporting and other upliftment projects. The farmers see nothing for their JSB payments which are .3% of salaries and .2% of turnover.

There is also a pending municipal tax due to come into operation next year. Greytown, with around 5 000 whites, supports a mayor on a R600 000 a year salary. Farmers will soon have to contribute to this.

Gathmann says the farmers had to give details of their properties to the authorities and must pay tax on the value of their farms, whether or not the farms make any profit.

Thus farmers will be taxed as urban residents are taxed – on the value of the land and the improvements. But the land is their business, their livelihood, and if there is a drought, they must still pay, and receive nothing in return! This they see as a ruse by the government to bail out bankrupt municipalities.

There is also the water tax which, on the face of it, seems punitive. Gathmann says he has a 212 ha forest and he must pay for the rain on his forest. He is taxed on his catchment dams, whether they are full or not. This “rain” tax comes to R36 000 per annum.

South African foresters were billed for the first time by the Department of Water Affairs (DWA) in February 2003 for the water they “used”. From April 2002, a water resource management charge was introduced to recover some water management costs, as South Africa does not have enough water.⁽¹⁾

According to DWA, foresters need to pay because afforestation is concentrated on 10% of the land that produces 60% of the country’s water resources. (South Africa’s major metropolitan areas lose billions of litres of piped drinking water annually.

This is a direct result of “poor management and control by local authorities” according to DWA’s director general Mike Muller.⁽²⁾ The City of Johannesburg was unable to account for 42% of the water it paid for in 2001. The difference between the amount it bought and sold at the time amounted to 165 billion litres which was “lost”.)

“And what do we get for all these taxes?” asks Gathmann. “We must pay for our own security - R3 400 per month.” After R15 000 of sugar beans were stolen last year, he advised the police but they could do nothing. A farm worker and his friends stole a complete verandah worth R25 000, on Gathmann’s property.

The employee sold the verandah, but only received a suspended sentence. He is still on the farm because Gattmann cannot get rid of him. It cost Gathmann R6 000 for the court order against the thief.

His cattle are regularly stolen, and his fencing is cut or removed. He and his fellow farmers are forced to impound the cattle from the Zulu areas which wander onto their properties. These trespassing beasts cause tremendous problems, says Edsel Hohls, vice president of the KwaZulu/Natal Agricultural Union. They carry tick-borne diseases. They are in poor condition and are not inoculated and if a dairy farmer’s

herds catch a disease, contagious abortion can occur in large numbers within the herd. After that, a farmer can “pack up and leave” according to Hohls.

Hohls himself had to leave one of his farms. He has farmed for 22 years in the region but had to leave because of safety reasons. His 150 head of cattle were continuously stolen.

What of Gathmann’s neighbours?

Recounting the conditions under which the Kranskop farmers now live is to reveal how intimidation is used to drive down the value of farms which have been claimed.

The farmer on whose farm the shooting debacle of August 2002 occurred – Manfred Surendorff – has left his farm. According to Hohls, the Surendorff farm was a very productive entity. 3 000 ha in extent, it produced high-quality beef. It has now been abandoned. Even the manager has fled. It borders the KwaZulu traditional area, and the cattle theft and intimidation drove the young man and his family out. It was a family farm – Surendorff inherited it from his father.

At one stage, foreign investors were prepared to pump millions into a tourism project on this farm. “Africa Venture” was an enterprise built around the concept of how to survive in Africa. Big companies from Durban were also interested, but the operation never got off the ground when hundreds of squatters invaded the land. Naturally the investors fled, never to return.

Another young farmer conducted a trading store on his smallholding, as well as a flourishing flower operation, using tunnels. He was relentlessly intimidated for two years – his house was ransacked and he was shot at with AK47s.

The police never managed to apprehend the perpetrators, and the young man and his family abandoned the farm.

Olifantshoek farm, 1 200 ha in extent, was a flourishing cattle farm bordering on KwaZulu. Farmer Edwin Meyer was married with small children, but he eventually committed suicide after his cattle were stolen almost every week. His fences were regularly cut and 200 families moved on to his property.

These squatters threatened to kill him, and murdered his induna. He went to the police but nobody was apprehended. His wife tried to run the farm on her own after her husband’s death but eventually gave up and left. This farm now stands abandoned, a home to squatters.

Farming in South Africa

This is what farming in South Africa has been reduced to under the present government. In a lengthy article on Kranskop in February 2003, Farmer’s Weekly quotes one Gertrude Mkize saying “All the land will be ours soon, I believe”. Indeed, this will happen if things continue as they are now. When four members of your family have been murdered, for how long is it worth while continuing?

Says Farmer’s Weekly: “Make no mistake: what is happening in this part of the aptly-named Battlefields Route is happening all over the KwaZulu/Natal midlands – from Dundee to Utrecht, the amakhosi are raising their voices to demand land, while the white farmers grow increasingly nervous.

“Even before Bhengu’s death (on Surendorff’s farm), the temperature had been rising at Kranskop. Farmers were impounding cattle that constantly wandered on to their lands and destroyed their crops. Farmers were demanding that local people ask their permission to walk across their properties, and they were insisting that police

remove hundreds of squatters from their farmlands. Security guards were rigidly enforcing the farmers' wishes – sometimes at gunpoint.”⁽³⁾

This security blitz precipitated an angry reaction from within the tribal areas and resulted in the August 2002 march and the “whites must go” demands.

To his credit, Nyanga Ngubane, KwaZulu MEC for safety and security was unequivocal: “Land invasions are illegal and what is happening in Zimbabwe will not be tolerated”. He set up a task force consisting of various government departmental representatives and farmers, but it fizzled out.

As in the case of the Dunns of northern KZN, words have no meaning unless they are followed up with concrete and sustained action, and this has not happened. The squatting, the intimidation and the violence is now worse than ever.

According to South Africa's Institute of Security Studies (ISS), 37 chieftancies surround about 200 farmers in the Greytown district, of which Kranskop forms part.⁽⁴⁾ More than half a million people live in the area in extreme poverty. Their land is completely overgrazed so they push their animals into commercial farmland. As soon as the ANC took over in 1994, land encroachment began. Claims were lodged on farms, and once it became known that a farmer was leaving, cattle and goats from traditional areas invaded his land.⁽⁵⁾

Years later, the Department of Land Affairs still had not purchased the property (this happens with regularity throughout South Africa), so the farmer decided to use the land again but found it populated by squatters.

Encroachment

Local people slowly and quietly take possession of a small part of a farm. (This pattern was repeated for example in the Dunns' properties in northern KZN.) Once the farmer retreats from this part, then the invaders advance deeper into the farm. As Mary de Haas says in her ISS paper on land invasions⁽⁶⁾, if the police do nothing, then invasions become virtually unstoppable.

As well, this midlands district has been wracked by political violence between the ANC and the IFP, and is awash with weapons.

Farmers have been impounding cattle since the early 1900s, while the Zulus retaliated by slaughtering the farmers' animals. Thus began the antagonism which has waxed and waned ever since.

In February 2003, Hohls estimated that his fellow farmers in the province abandoned at least 250 000 ha of prime commercial farmland since 1995. Today, it could be more, but nobody's calculating these days.

“Encroachment is the right word”, he says. “They put their cattle in, then they cut the fences, then they start stealing your crops, forcing you to leave your land. And then they say: ‘Oh well, there's vacant land, let's move on to it’. It's a very subtle way of stealing land”.⁽⁷⁾ In Kranskop alone over the past few years, 14 commercial farms of more than 10 000 ha have been abandoned to masses of squatters.

Hohls says that in the Underberg, Swartberg and Himeville districts, the amount of sheep being farmed has been reduced from around 200 000 to less than 5 000 today.

Farmers in KZN pay security companies R60 million a year to watch over their farms. Two years ago, stock theft amounted to R120 million a year.⁽⁸⁾ Millions of rands per annum are lost to wildlife, crop and farming equipment theft. Hohls says the government loses around R100 million a year in lost taxation as a result of besieged and abandoned farms.⁽⁹⁾

Murder

More than 7 000 people are murdered in KZN per year. The 1998 murder of farmer Friedel Redinger is linked directly to a land dispute, according to the ISS. In 1997 a chief lodged a claim on his land, and Redinger agreed to donate some land and began negotiating. In the spring of 1998, three young men stopped Redinger's bakkie on his way home. He recognized them as members of the local Community Policing Forum and got out of the vehicle.

He was shot in the back of the neck, on his knees, point blank, says his brother Walter. "It was a clear execution".⁽¹⁰⁾

The young men who killed Mr. Redinger were neither aspirant farmers nor community representatives, said ISS. "They appeared to be animated by a wild and disturbing political identity".⁽¹¹⁾ Young black men are responsible for the crime, blacks and whites agree. They are the real rulers of the tribal areas. They live outside the parameters of the law. Walter Redinger says their biggest threat is from the youth. "They have no respect for age".

Death threats are endemic. Hohls has been threatened many times. Friedel Redinger was threatened before his death. Hohls has laid several charges of intimidation with the police, but nothing has materialized. Farmer Andre Swanepoel also received threats because he tried to stop people from illegally settling on his farm.

A security company was brought in, much to the chagrin of those who used to move across farms with impunity. A security employee's killing of a poacher was the cause of the threatening march against the farmers. Farmers' attitudes have hardened, while the youth are more and more belligerent.

And once again, as in many parts of KwaZulu/Natal, a chief appears to be behind the campaign to drive the whites out, according to farmers.

Some describe Joseph Khathi as The Great Instigator and The Terror. He was heard saying at a meeting that "it is an accepted fact that the white man hates the black man", and this has incited racial tension. (The Dunns of northern Natal complain of exactly the same thing).

Although Khathi denies saying those words, he admits helping to write the memorandum calling for the removal of the whites. He has been caught poaching.

These men of the midlands live in two different worlds. Versions of history differ markedly and, it seems, never the twain will meet. It is an insoluble problem when commercial farmers (who supply the food for South Africa's 45 million people) are harassed off their farms by people who cannot even feed themselves.

There seems no logic behind the campaign of hatred against white farmers, but then what is logic if it is not culturally defined? Is Robert Mugabe logical? Is it logical to place hundreds of squatters on a productive farm, when nobody wins? Is subsistence farming logical in this day and age?

And is it logical that the SA Police Service, so desperately needed to stem crime not only in the rural areas but right throughout South Africa, should be so emasculated and overwhelmed, while money is spent on private jets and arms deals in a country not at war with an outside force?

When power is in the hands of those who encourage this destruction of the commercial farming sector by its inability or unwillingness to act, or even its passivity which condones the lawlessness, then what will happen to the beloved country?

