'You Cannot Make the People Scientific by Act of Parliament': Farmers, the State, and Livestock Enumeration in the North-western Cape, c. 1850 – 1900

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the tensions surrounding livestock enumeration in the Cape Colony in the late nineteenth century. The study situates livestock statistics in an historical context which is intended to provide some indication of what these statistics meant for contemporary actors.

This study looks at the significance of the enumeration of livestock by the state, both for the state and for farmers, and focuses specifically on the semi-nomadic 'trekfarming' population of three districts of the Cape Colony – Clanwilliam, Calvinia and Namaqualand – referred to for the purposes of this study as the North-western Cape. Livestock enumeration was considered a central component of the officially-sanctioned fund of 'knowledge' on the colony's livestock that was used as the basis of state policy and pastoral reform interventions. Livestock statistics were also a contentious issue in the colony during this period. While certain sectors of the inhabitants of the colony viewed statistics as an indispensable aspect of 'modern' life and put pressure on the colony's civil service to provide more reliable statistics, other sectors of the population viewed enumeration with suspicion. This thesis looks at the tensions surrounding agricultural statistics, and argues that this contest had its roots in the fact that statistics had come to be regarded as a symbol of the 'progressive' agriculture that was sweeping the colony during this period. Ultimately, however, the effectiveness of state knowledge on livestock throughout this period would prove to be constrained by the state's particular preoccupation with the growth of 'progressive' agriculture. Gaps existed in official knowledge on agriculture in the colony which would allow farmers in outlying regions such as the North-western Cape a degree of liberty in their farming practices and use of natural resources.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED FOR SOURCES

AGR	Department of Agriculture
Agric. J.	*Agricultural Journal of the Cape of Good Hope*
C.C.	Civil Commissioner
CO	Colonial Office
Col. Sec.	Colonial Secretary
CSS	Archives of the Executive Officials charged with Census and Statistics, Colonial Secretary's Office.

Introduction

It was in a discussion on the need to provide scientific education for the Cape colony's farmers that Professor MacOwan told a Select Committee in 1882 that '[y]ou cannot make the people scientific by Act of Parliament.'[1] I have used his comment as the starting point for this study because it hints at three of the key themes about the development of agriculture in the Cape in the latter half of the nineteenth century that I intend to explore in this thesis. Firstly, that men like MacOwan and the other members of the Select Committee, believed that 'scientific' farming was crucial to the success of agriculture in the colony. Secondly, that there was not as much interest in scientific farming as they would have liked. Thirdly, that it was ultimately up to the colony's farmers to decide to take up scientific farming. By way of illustrating these themes, this thesis looks at a sector of the colony's farming population – the trekfarmers of the North-western Cape, notoriously antagonistic to the suggestions of scientific experts. My entry into this discussion is livestock enumeration. The official enumeration of the colony's livestock constituted a significant point of interaction between farmers and the state, and was at the centre of discussions about all three of the issues I have derived from MacOwan's observation – the enthusiasm for scientific farming, the apparent lack of interest of many of the colony's farmers in scientific farming methods, and the difficulty, often the futility, of the state's attempts to convince many farmers to farm along the 'scientific' lines they prescribed.

The nineteenth-century statistical series collected by authorities in the Cape has been used by historians in analysing and discussing various aspects of the development of an agrarian economy in the colony during this period.[2] I had initially intended to investigate how these statistics had been compiled, and hoped ultimately to be able to develop some understanding of their reliability. Given the complaints of contemporary observers regarding the inaccuracy of livestock enumeration in the colony generally, and more specifically for the North-western Cape —with its large livestock herds, nomadic population, and relatively weak state presence— expected to find that the statistics for this region did not present an accurate reflection of the development of the pastoral economy. But statistics are not purely a means of description, they

[1] C.2-'82. *Report of the Select Committee appointed by the Legislative Council to Consider and Report upon the Appointment of a Minister of Agriculture*, p. 8.

[2] A. J. Christopher uses livestock statistics as part of the basis for his discussion on the economic aspects of the spread of white settlement in South Africa. A.J. Christopher, 'Towards a Definition of the Nineteenth Century South African Frontier', *The South African Geographical Journal*, 64, 1984. Livestock statistics have also become central in the debate over veld degradation in the semi-arid interior, see for example, W.R.J. Dean and I.A.W. Macdonald, 'Historical Changes in Stocking Rates of Domestic Livestock as a Measure of Semi-Arid and Arid Rangeland Degradation in the Cape Province, South Africa', *Journal of Arid Environments*, 26, (1994).

may also be treated as a social *process*, and the question I eventually found myself asking was not so much 'what do the statistics mean', but 'what does it mean to collect statistics?' This question is particularly relevant when one notes that during the period under discussion, livestock enumeration was not linked to taxation as it had been earlier in the history of the colony, and as it would be again from the beginning of the twentieth century. Why was it then that the Department of Agriculture collected regular statistics on the colony's livestock herds? State officials argued that 'accurate' statistics on livestock were needed to assist farmers in understanding and combating problems of agricultural production. The use of statistics for this purpose was linked, however, to the way in which statistics operated and continue to operate as a discourse of knowledge. Statistics became linked to a particular conception of how to understand development in the colony. The employment of statistics, as a process, but also as a rhetorical device, not only helped to privilege this understanding of development in civil society, but also functioned to underpin the state's authority in terms of the pastoral reform interventions it would make.

In an effort to derive some understanding of how statistics operated in this context, I have attempted to treat them not merely as the descriptive output of the state's statistical inquiries, but instead as a process which I define broadly as the operation of descriptive, numerical information—in this case, on livestock—in the public realm. Looking at statistics in this manner, places the various groups involved back at the centre of discussion on livestock enumeration – the state that collected the figures, the farmers who apparently wanted them, and the farmers who fell largely outside of the immediate debates surrounding them, but who were nonetheless affected by statistics and the broader swell of 'progressive' farming with which they were being associated.

While development in the Cape colony was occurring in fits and starts throughout the nineteenth century, in the minds of many contemporary observers, the North-western Cape was, by comparison, showing very little sign of progress. Some of them feared that conditions in the region were actually causing its inhabitants to degenerate into further lawlessness and ignorance and they complained bitterly that the farmers of the North-western Cape were failing to embrace the spirit of 'improvement' that was sweeping the rest of the colony. Their wasteful farming practices, lack of education, adherence to doctrinal Calvinism, and their stubbornness, stood in the way of progress, they argued. While many districts elsewhere in the colony were showing signs of impressive agrarian development, commercial agriculture and most notably, wool production, developed much less rapidly in the North-western Cape. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the number of wool sheep in the region was actually declining.[3] Moreover, while the rule of law – albeit with all the contradictions of a racialised colonial society – was making inroads

[3] CSS, vol. 4/1/1, Registrar General of Statistics – Civil Commissioner of Calvinia, 17.07.1893. (Unless otherwise specified, all archival sources are from the Cape Archives Repository, Cape Town.)

throughout the rest of the colony, the North-western Cape region was notorious for its lawlessness. Civil Commissioners in the Northern Cape told authorities in Cape Town throughout the nineteenth century that they were virtually powerless to stem the violence that seemed a pervasive feature of the region. In addition to this, they argued, various state measures affecting the use of land and other resources, and the movement of livestock were simply ignored by the farmers. The Dutch-speaking farmers of the North-western Cape would rise against authority twice before state control finally became manifest with the dousing of the rebellion of 1914. The North-western Cape was not merely a region that was slow to evince signs of progress; it was a region in which a whole sector of the population seemed to *resist* progress. The North-western Cape was, it seemed, simply different. It was the land of the 'backward' Boer with his Bible in one hand and his rifle in the other, trekking with his wagon and his livestock across the dusty plains of Bushmanland, fiercely suspicious of progress and all it entailed. But while this characterisation held contemporary sway, and has since formed the central icon of the frontier thesis, it is one which, I would argue, requires more investigation than saying simply that these trekfarmers had some sort of natural disinclination towards the modern age.[4] At the centre of my argument is the belief that these farmers in fact had a very clear perception of what 'progress' meant, and found that progress – in the form it was presented – had very little to offer them. Their apparent lack of interest in 'progress', meant, however, that they would be characterised as essentially non-progressive, non-scientific and constituting a frustrating block of ignorance, unmovable by the logic and promise of the progressive ideal. Their response, however, is better understood when it is contextualised in relation to the discourse of progress employed by the state and contemporary self-proclaimed progressives. This discourse is what underlay the statistics-gathering project of the state as it took on a new role in agrarian development in which statistics were a central component of its activities, both as the basis of state intervention and as a reflection of development.

State officials and other proponents of progress were united in their understanding of how development in the colony should be taking place, and this understanding would have significant implications for the way they viewed the farming practices of the trekfarmers of the North-western Cape. 'Progress' is a particular understanding of development which is culturally specific, and may be constructed differently at different times. It is not simply economic growth, although the growth of export-orientated commercial agriculture formed a central component of how it was understood. Commercial agriculture—market-driven and characterised by accumulation and the

[4] This image of the trekfarmer with his 'love of freedom and of the veld with its wide open spaces' was a pervasive theme in South African historiography for many years, and in which the frontier experience was seen as constituting *the* decisive influence in the development of an Afrikaner identity and a racially-ordered society. See for example F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism*, (Cape Town, 1961), pp. 9-17, the quotation is from p. 11.

drive to improve production—was, until the discovery of minerals, the colony's main economic activity. Even after the Mineral Revolution, commercial agriculture remained significant and profits from the mines flowed into agricultural production. An important aspect of the development of commercial agriculture along progressive lines was the application of scientific agriculture and investments in 'improvements' – that is, those infrastructural technologies intended to increase productivity.

Progress was also about the moral development of society. Settlement, education, liberal principles of justice and citizenship, were to lay the basis of a moral, rational and—in the Cape—racialised society.[5] Progress was also inexorably linked to the notion of linear societal development, at the end of which was the ideal of an enlightened society, governed in all aspects by rationality. In this context, any actions or thinking which failed to proscribe to the dictates of commercial and scientific rationality constituted a barrier to progress. The question of what 'progress' meant in the context of the Cape colony in the nineteenth century forms the focus of Chapter 4 and I hope to outline the lineaments of progressive farming, against which the practices and responses of the trekfarmers of the North-western Cape would be measured.

While Chapter 4 looks at the centrality of rationality and science to progressive agriculture, Chapter 5, looks at the flip-side – the 'irrationality' that was the supposed obstacle to progress in the North-western Cape; why the trekfarmers of this region continued to farm as they did; why they responded as they did to state attempts to encourage progress as they did; why they were suspicious of livestock enumeration by the state. (Chapter 3 provides some historical perspective on the conditions of the North-western Cape, which to some extent, explain the development of trekfarming, as well as providing some background to the nature of the relationship between the farming population of the region and the central state.)

The distinction I make between progressive farming and the trekfarming of the North-western Cape should not, however, be construed as a further enunciation of the frontier thesis which provided the historiographical framework for interpreting the rural interior for so long. As William Beinart and Peter Delius point out, one of the features of the frontier thesis in South African historiography, was that it characterised the frontier as having produced 'an inward looking, unadaptive and deeply racist individualism... in sharp contrast to the highly commercial and vigorous frontier culture of other settler countries.'[6] While two of the central chapters of this

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[5] The racial stratification that increasingly characterised civil society in the Cape is eloquently articulated in Mahmood Mamdani's discussion on the development of the categories of 'citizen' and 'subject'. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, (Kampala, Cape Town and London, 1996), see also Timothy Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1996).

[6] William Beinart and Peter Delius, 'Approaches to South African Agrarian History' in William Beinart, Peter Delius and Stanley Trapido, (eds.), *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and*

study set up the very division referred to in this dynamic - the trekboers of the Cape interior *versus* 'progressive' farmers - I employ this distinction precisely because I wish to show how each of these terms was constructed. The notion of the 'inward looking, unadaptive trekboer' was one that had its roots in a particular understanding of how development should take place and which viewed it in terms of a linear progress from pastoralism to commercial farming.

Much of what I say about the trekfarmers of the North-western Cape in Chapter 5 might also be applicable to other parts of the colony where many Dutch-speaking farming communities seemed reluctant to embrace progress. I have, in fact, drawn considerably on Jean Du Plessis' analysis of 'countryside conservatism' in the Paarl district in the South-western Cape in the mid-nineteenth century.[7] The conservatism of the Van der Lingenites of Paarl offers a unique insight into rural responses to progress because it was one of the few occasions where this response was articulated in a public sphere. This brings me to one of the problems I faced with sources for this study.

The group I am primarily interested in—the trekfarmers of the North-western Cape—is largely absent from the official sources for this period. This partly reflects their social and political marginalisation, but is also due to the mere fact of the difficulty of communication in the sparsely populated and arid North-west. Mordechai Tamarkin's suggestion, that withdrawal from dialogue with the state was a response of rural communities who felt disempowered in their interaction with central authority, offers us a way of appreciating this silence.[8] Certainly, it seems that the weakness of the state's presence in the North-western Cape meant that the farmers of this region had more scope to continue farming as they pleased than the state and progressives would have liked. Land records and census data ultimately offer a poor account of a nomadic population with every reason to be suspicious of many of the state's inquiries. Many of the activities of the farmers of the region also simply fell outside of the parameters of official discourse. It is for these reasons, that despite the focus given to livestock enumeration and statistics in this thesis, I decided to make very limited use of official statistics. I felt that using state statistics to discuss the region was invariably to be limited to the progressivist gaze implicit in state statistics, and which would keep hidden from us some of the workings of livestock enumeration. Despite my initial interest in the accuracy of state livestock statistics, I have significant reservations about the merits of such an exercise. Firstly, as it would imply that we continue to look at a region largely in the terms defined by statistics. And consequently, because this exercise would ultimately be more of an

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Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930. (Johannesburg, 1986), p. 7.

[7] Jean Du Plessis, 'Colonial Progress and Countryside Conservatism', an Essay on the Legacy of Van der Lingen of Paarl, 1831-1875', (MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1988.)

[8] Mordechai Tamarkin, *Cecil Rhodes and the Cape Afrikaners: The Imperial Colossus and the Colonial Parish Pump.* (Johannesburg, 1996), pp. 17-34.

indication of the state's proficiency at accumulating information of a particular sort.

Nonetheless, statistics dictated the temporal focus of this study. There were a number of factors which threw the collection of livestock statistics into new significance during the period under discussion – the development of export-orientated commercial agriculture; Representative and then Responsible government, and the growing political power of commercial farmers; and the growing dominance of the ethos of progressivism. The archival records which might refer to the collection of statistics on livestock for much of the period under discussion, including most of the material surrounding the two early censuses of 1865 and 1875, appear at some stage to have been removed from the records of the Cape Town Colonial Office and were most probably destroyed.[9] The fact that the information contained in these records was published in the annual Blue Books of Statistical Returns or in the Census reports has been suggested as the reason that these records were not considered worthy of preservation. It was only when the collection of livestock statistics was placed under the Department of Agriculture in 1887, that any of the correspondence on the issue appears to have survived and it was at this point too that there was considerable discussion about the Department's need to collect figures on livestock. As such, my discussion on livestock statistics and the state's role in agriculture more generally, is heavily weighted towards the last few decades of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 1 offers a background discussion on some aspects of the rise of the discourse of statistical thinking and is intended to provide a context for my arguments regarding the use of statistics in the Cape. Chapter 2 is a brief discussion on the writings of some of the early travellers to the North-western Cape. By showing some of the ways in which their writings – also known as 'statistical' accounts – differed from the state statistical series which developed later, I hope to make some suggestions about the treatment of local understandings about livestock farming in the North-western Cape as 'statistics' became increasingly the prerogative of the state.

The nineteenth-century colonial state had a particular understanding of how agriculture in the colony should be developing – profit-driven, competitive, and scientific. Chapter 6 looks at the state's interest in statistics. I use the term 'state' throughout this thesis to refer to the organised political structure that – through the workings of Parliament and the Government – formulated policy which was implemented by the official bureaucracy and ultimately through the medium of its functionaries at the level of district. The progressivist ethos echoed strongly through all the levels of this structure throughout the nineteenth century. The development of agriculture along progressive lines was merely *one* of the preoccupations of the state during this period. One of the state's central concerns was 'the Native question', easily re-articulated as 'the labour question',

[9] P. Wernich, 'Inventory of the Archives of the Executive Officials Charged with Census and Statistics, Colonial Secretary's Office, 1865-1911.'

and certainly, much of the work on agrarian history in South Africa has had at its centre, the issue of the labour requirements of white capital.[10] The processes of dispossession and proletarianisation that provided the answer to the 'Native Question', will not be covered to any great extent in this study, however, as I have chosen to focus on issues relating to the management of natural resources and more particularly, resources directly associated with pastoralism. The growing use of racial categorisation in official statistics is nonetheless, a poignant reminder of the racialisation of South African society, and the processes by which black South Africans would be assigned the role of labourers in the developing economy that came with progress. MacOwan's words - 'you cannot make the people scientific by Act of Parliament' - imply an understanding of the necessity for consensus in state agricultural policy making, but as Mahmood Mamdani has pointed out, colonial authority worked not through consensus for many of its subjects, but through control. It is important to keep in mind that the progressivist ethos linked farming capital and the state in a relationship that would ultimately result in the undermining of the productive potential of African producers. Once scientific agriculture was seen as the only way forward, generations of disenfranchised South Africans would learn through forced removals, forced culling, compulsory dipping and market restrictions - all in the interests of 'progress' - the painful lesson that some of the people in fact *could* be made 'scientific' by Act of Parliament.

While this study has a regional focus in that it has as its central concern, the farmers of the North-western Cape, it will not contain the sort of detail that might be expected of a regional study. I will make use of examples from a number of debates about resource management in the region, without offering a detailed account of the background to these issues. Ultimately, this study is not about the operations of the state, the development of progressive farming in the North-western Cape, or the trekfarmers of this region. The focus of this thesis is conceptual; it is an attempt to understand the operation and significance of livestock enumeration in the context of the North-western Cape in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

[10] For discussions on agrarian historiography on Southern Africa, see Beinart and Delius, op. cit, Martin J. Murray, 'The Origins of Agrarian Capitalism in South Africa: a Critique of the 'Social History' Perspective', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* vol. 15, no. 4, October 1989.

1
Statistics and Authority: A Background to the Use of Statistics by State Bureaucracies

This chapter is primarily concerned with what it was about statistics that made them useful to governments; why it is that a government should concern itself with collecting information on livestock at all. This chapter is by no means intended to offer a comprehensive account of the history of statistical thinking. Because it focuses specifically on the developments that made statistics a central preoccupation of state bureaucracies, there are a number of significant aspects of the broader development of statistics and statistical thinking that will receive only passing mention.[11]

Quantification as a method of description was growing in prominence in the course of the eighteenth century, but by the early nineteenth century, had reached dazzling heights as not only governments, but scientists, men of commerce, sportsmen and concerned citizens produced an 'avalanche of printed numbers' as they sought to describe their worlds.[12] The preoccupation with quantification became one of the defining features of 'modern' state bureaucracies, as statistics seemed to provide the 'accurate' information that bureaucracies needed in order to act in civil society.[13] The production of statistical information became a feature too of the colonial administrations of these bureaucracies. While the flow of statistical information had been a feature of imperial states prior to this, with the development of new understandings of control, permanent settler societies, and a new economy of Empire in the nineteenth century, statistics began to move into new realms of enquiry. They no longer merely traced the flow of trade between

[11] The broader developments and debates surrounding the evolution of statistical thinking in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been covered in considerable detail in Mary Poovey, 'Figures of Arithmetic, Figures of Speech: The Discourse of Statistics in the 1830s' in *Critical Inquiry*, 19 (Winter, 1993) and in Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1830-1900,* (Princeton, N.J., 1986) and *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*, (Princeton, N.J., 1995).

[12] The phrase 'avalanche of printed numbers' is from Ian Hacking's article on the rise of statistical enthusiasm, 'Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers', *Humanities and Society,* 1982, vol. 3, no. 4. My understanding of the use of statistics during this period is drawn principally from the reading of Thomas Porter's *Trust in Numbers: the Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life.* (Princeton, N.J. 1995) and also, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900,* (Princeton, N.J., 1986), Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire,* (London & New York, 1993), John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783,* (London, 1989.) John Mackenzie discusses the growing use of statistics in hunting texts of the nineteenth century. MacKenzie, 'Chivalry, social Darwinism and ritualised killing: the hunting ethos in Central Africa up to 1914' in David Anderson and Richard Grove, *Conservation in Africa: People, Politics and Practice*, (Cambridge, 1987), pp.54-55.

[13] Nicholas Eberstadt, *The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule.* (Washington, D.C., 1995), pp. 9-15.

countries and colonies, but began to describe new things—populations, wages, criminal activity, livestock—as the state administrative structures took on new roles and as preoccupation with control was superseded by a preoccupation with *progress*.

Knowledge, Observation and Enumeration

The use of statistics by state bureaucracies was reflective of an epistemological shift in the eighteenth century that allowed mathematical and statistical methodology to be seen as effective procedures for understanding the world. By the eighteenth century, knowledge was understood to be derived by establishing natural objects as visually accessible, and, as classificatory systems were developed to order the observable, 'total knowledge' became both possible and sought after.[14] The significance of this epistemological revolution was the placing of man's rationality at the centre of understanding and laid the basis for the secularisation of knowledge and an unbridled confidence in man's ability to 'know' the world completely.[15] Thomas Richards outlines two epistemological concepts which became co-joined and which informed European understandings of knowledge by the nineteenth century: *Positive knowledge* which asserted that knowledge was the sum of objectively verifiable facts, and *comprehensive knowledge*, by which knowledge was understood to be singular and not plural, complete and not partial, global and not local.[16] The methodological manifestation of this transformation was the birth of Empiricism, with its distrust in hypothesis and its understanding of knowledge as derived purely from the precise observation and description of phenomena.[17] Statistics, it seemed, provided a valuable accompaniment to Empiricism as they facilitated the ostensibly objective collection of data on large-scale phenomena.[18] While Theodore Porter argues that statistics were a central component of the growth of empiricism, Mary Poovey suggests that it was in fact the other way around.[19] She says that statisticians in the early nineteenth century struggled to establish statistics as a science and to prove that statistics were free from *a priori* assumption. The organisers of the Statistical Society in London in 1839 were at pains to point out that, 'Like other sciences, that of Statistics seeks to deduce from well-established facts certain general principles which interest and affect mankind, it uses the same instruments of comparison, calculation, and deduction: but its peculiarity is that it

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[14] David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration.* (Durham & London, 1993), pp. 21-26. Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things,* (New York, 1973) offers a detailed account of how classification came to form the basis of a system of knowledge.

[15] Richards, op. cit., p. 4. Robert Darton notes that it was this interest of the literate classes in 'complete description' which led to the prodigious flow of guidebooks and almanacs from the eighteenth century, Robert Darnton, 'A Bourgeois Puts His World in Order: The City as a Text', *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History,* (London, 1988), p. 105.

[16] Richards, op. cit., p. 6.

[17] Robert M. Martin, *Scientific Thinking,* (Peterborough, Ontario, 1997), pp. 7-27.

[18] Porter, *Trust in Numbers,* p. xi.

proceeds wholly by the accumulation and comparison of facts, and does not admit of any kind of speculation; it aims, like other sciences, at truth, and advances, *pari pasu,* with its development.'[20]

It was, however, the collection of statistical information on social conditions that was at the centre of the growth of statistical societies in Britain during the 1830s and 1840s.[21]. In the context of concerns about the 'betterment' of the working classes, statistics apparently provided the means to tabulate their condition as the first step to ameliorating it.[22] However, while statistics provided a useful way of collecting such data, its focus on the purely observable and enumerable drew considerable criticism, as many contemporary observers were sceptical of the ability of environmental conditions to explain all aspects of human society.[23] They argued that statistics focused merely on the trivial and in the end could say nothing meaningful about society. It was primarily this feature of statistics too, which explains why the workings of statisticians were not uncommonly a source of ridicule.[24] A commentator on French theatre noted in 1885 that 'as soon as a statistician comes on the stage, everyone prepares to laugh.'[25]

But while the narrow focus and highly structured nature of statistics could form the object of criticism and ridicule, it also constituted one of its greatest strengths. Theodore Porter argues that the distinctly useful feature of quantification is the fact of it being what he calls a 'technology of distance' – a disciple that because of its highly structured nature, is suited for communication that reaches beyond the boundaries of locality and community precisely.[26] Statistical description had its most significance in its claims to objectivity and these claims to objectivity were of central importance to its practitioners.[27] Porter argues that statistics became so central to the work of state bureaucracies and professionals because, in an environment where decision-makers such as scientists and bureaucrats were vulnerable to outside censure, *objectivity* had become inseparable from expertise.[28] The expertise of professionals, administrators, and scientists was not reliant on their social standing or long career, but was derived from their application of sanctioned methods of understanding and reaching conclusions. Their recommendations were dependable because they

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[19] Ibid., pp. 3-5, Poovey, op. cit., pp. 256-258.
[20] Cited in Poovey, op. cit., p. 261.
[21] Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking,* pp. 27-38, cf. Stuart Woolf, 'Statistics and the Modern State', *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 31, 4, 1984, p. 595.
[22] Hacking, op. cit., pp. 279-286, Woolf, op. cit., p. 595.
[23] Poovey, op. cit., pp. 269-271.
[24] There are numerous examples in the novels of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain. In Rudyard Kipling's short story 'Pig', a district official in the British civil service in India gains revenge on one of his subordinates by requesting increasingly detailed and meaningless statistical information on pigs, Rudyard Kipling, 'Pig' in *Plain Tales from the Hills,* (London, 1937). This scepticism of the work of statisticians was not without parallel in the Cape either, see for example the satirical article I quote from *The Uitenhage Times* in Chapter 6.
[25] Cited in Porter, *Trust in Numbers,*. p. 83.
[26] Porter, Ibid., p.ix.
[27] Poovey, op. cit., Porter, *Trust in Numbers,* pp. 6-7.

had been based purely on a consideration of the 'facts'. This ostensibly objective, scientific basis to expertise and decision-making was something that would be of particular significance to state bureaucracies as they entered new realms of involvement in civil society.

Statistics and State Bureaucracies

Bernard Silberman argues that the rationalisation of the state bureaucracy in Britain during the nineteenth century, and the growing centrality of objective and rational decision-making to governance, had been driven by the broadening of the electorate in Britain during this period.[29] He argues that an environment of political uncertainty – which he stresses, has nothing to do with the psychological or cognitive states of the actors, but relates purely to the presence or absence of rules governing role behaviour which have the capacity to predict the outcomes of the choices made by the actors – leads to an emphasis on the utilisation of rules of decision-making that are presented as being objective.[30] A reliance on custom as a means of decision-making was replaced in the late eighteenth century by an emphasis on rational deduction. This allowed relatively high levels of predictability with regards to the outcomes of decision-making by placing constraints on how decisions would be made.[31] State statistics could operate in this way because they were not viewed as simply part of the state's administrative agenda – even the most instrumental knowledge was produced under the 'Enlightenment rubric of objective science'.[32]

Statistics were, therefore, to provide the basis of a new enlightened form of governance. As J.R. McCulloch—a vigorous promoter of statistics in Britain in the early nineteenth century—argued at the time, 'the accumulation of minute and detailed information from all parts of the country would, at length, enable politicians and legislators to come to a correct conclusion as to many highly interesting questions that have hitherto been involved in the greatest doubt and

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[28] Porter, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

[29] He does not suggest anything as direct as politicians being held directly responsible to an electorate, but argues that the unpredictability of voting had led to the removing of some areas of administration from the public arena and placing them under the authority of career administrators who were considered to be 'objective'. Bernard Silberman, *Cages of Reason: the Rise of the Rational State in France, Japan, the United States and Great Britain.* (Chicago and London, 1993).

[30] Silberman notes that uncertainty is related to the concept of risk employed by economists, that is, 'a state in which complete information is not available, but sufficient information is present to assign probabilities and select the best outcome.' Silberman, op. cit., pp. 22-23, 31-34 (quote from p. 34).

[31] Ibid., pp. 41-42. Mary Poovey points out that despite this, (or maybe because of this) statistical publications in Britain were often greeted by charges of political interest in the mid-nineteenth century, op. cit., p. 263.

[32] David Ludden argues that the scientific, objective basis of the state's knowledge constituted the increasingly dominant component of colonial discourse, 'Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge' in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia,* (Philadelphia, 1994).

uncertainty.'[33] And, as Poovey points out, at the centre of the attentions of legislators was the consideration of *progress*; which by the 1830s, had replaced *improvement* as the term most generally considered applicable to the nation's development.[34] Statistics had been described by Sir John Sinclair in his *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99) as an 'an inquiry into the state of a country, *for the purposes of ascertaining* the quantum *of happiness* enjoyed by its inhabitants, and the means of its future improvement.'[35] By the mid-nineteenth century, the happiness of the inhabitants was understood to be an outcome of *progress* that incorporated not only material, but also moral development.

The collection and use of statistical information had, in fact, become a reflection of progress itself, as it signified an orderly society based on rational and informed decision-making. In the 1830s, there was considerable concern amongst the proponents of statistics that Britain was lagging behind in the collection of statistical information on its population and resources; this concern was to be echoed in the Cape colony throughout the nineteenth century.[36] In a context where accurate information was to form the basis of decision-making, these warnings could hardly be ignored and state bureaucracies in both countries began to set up structures for the more systematic collection of statistical information.[37]

The formulation of policy was, however, not the only imperative to the production of statistics. John Brewer points out that with the expansion of state structures, state information-gathering also provided a way of monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of state activities. For one thing, the collection of information was important in terms of the scrutinization of state employees and for this reason, records were kept which could be correlated against the independent accounts of other officials.[38] The expansion of the state during this period had resulted in a growing desire to have information on the government's activities, and the broader public, politicians and interest groups all had an interest in access to information.[39] Access to information was a central component of the activities of occupational groups and special interests,

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[33] Cited in Poovey, op. cit., p. 263.
[34] Ibid., p. 263.
[35] Cited in Woolf, p. 591.
[36] Poovey, op. cit., p. 264. Stuart Woolf says that 'the economic interests and moral preoccupations of educated elites whose strength, autonomous cohesion, and close relationship with the administration, in terms of social identity and political participation' partly explain the official acceptance of the need to collect statistics, Woolf, op. cit., p. 590.
[37] Martin Shaw and Ian Miles, 'The Social Roots of Statistical Knowledge', *Demystifying Social Statistics* , (London, 1979), pp. 33, see also Woolf, p. 598.
[38] Brewer, p. 222. Thomas Richards refers to this feature of administration as 'keeping track, and keeping track of keeping track', op. cit., p. 3.
[39] Eberstadt points out that the growth of the state into new realms of involvement in civil society should not be understood as a reflection of popular enthusiasm for statism. The growth of the state, he argues, was driven by the demands for services by those who viewed themselves as the proper customers of what the government should be providing, Eberstadt, op. cit., p. 14.

and the strength of a lobby group depended largely upon its access to information, that enabled it to put pressure on Parliament. Brewer notes that an important aspect of the rhetoric employed by interest groups was the elaboration of a 'general picture of the economy' by way of portraying the private interest of the lobby with a more broadly-defined concern for the public good.[40] And *public good*, as we have noted, was largely understood and articulated as *progress*.

Statistics and Control?

Statistics in the public realm have been closely linked to the new forms of social control that developed in the nineteenth century.[41] Historiography which employs a Foucaultian conception of the relationship between power and knowledge, has encourage us to take note of the importance which information-gathering had in the relationship between the state and its subjects.[42] Statistics formed an integral part of this system of surveillance and it is no coincidence that statistical enquiry was focused most strongly on those on the margins of society - the sick, the poor, the criminal – and ultimately contributed to the construction of those categories as 'Other'.[43]

Statistics also accompanied the reach of European bureaucracies to the distant corners of Empire, and, as European administrative centres huddled on the edges of 'unknown' continents, a constant flow of statistical information from the distant district offices of the interior was a reassuring acknowledgement of the presence of colonial authority. Anne Godlewska argues that information-gathering about colonial territories and people was one of the discursive mechanisms employed to make the colonial territory appear to be a mere extension of the home country.[44] Thomas Richards argues that the flow of information between the colonies and the metropole had its greatest significance in the way in which it operated to help overcome the anxieties of ruling a distant and large Empire:

> They took censuses, produced statistics. They made vast lists of birds. They shoved the data they had collected into a shifting series of classifications. In fact they often could do little other than collect and collate information, for any exact civil control... was out of the question. The Empire was too far away, and the bureaucrats of Empire had to be content

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[40] Brewer, op. cit., p. 223, 245-6.
[41] Hacking, op. cit.
[42] My understanding of this is drawn principally from Spurr, op. cit;, Clifton Crais, *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865.* (Johannesburg, 1992), Arjun Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination' in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia,* (Philadelphia, 1994)
[43] Appadurai, op. cit., p. 317, Hacking, op. cit.
[44] She traces how the discipline of geography redefined itself in Imperial France as it became concerned with the problem of annihilating 'greater and greater geographic and cultural distances.' Anne Godlewska, 'Napoleon's Geographers (1797-1815): Imperialists and Soldiers of Modernity' in Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (eds.) *Geography and Empire.* (Oxford, 1994.) pp. 33-34.

to shuffle papers.[45]

Disruptions in the flow of information were a major source of anxiety, precipitating what Bayly refers to as 'information panics'.[46] Yet despite all the information collected by the colonial state, it appears that the reassurances offered by information were often misplaced and the information offered very little in terms of effective control. As Bayly points out, for all the information it collected, the British administration was taken totally by surprise by the Indian Mutiny of 1857.[47] He says that because the flow of bureaucratic information was limited to certain topics, 'striking social changes were often not reported to the administration because it did not ask'.[48] In the end, he says, it remains uncertain to what extent the enormous volume of information collected was ever used for anything.[49]

The significance of the collection of statistics by colonial states is therefore not so much in the extent to which it enabled control in military terms, but in the way in which statistics enabled another form of control. Statistics operated in this way to position colonial subjects in relation to the state and within the emerging colonial society. David Ludden outlines three formations of Orientalism – academic scholarship, the set of images in the visual art and literature, and authorised data and research techniques.[50] The last one, and of which statistical information formed an important component, became widely accepted as 'true' and its apparent objectivity constituted the basis upon which theory and decisions about the colonial territories could be made.[51] This formation of Orientalism also took precedence over the other forms in the course of the nineteenth century and is a reflection of the extent to which 'knowledge' came to be underwritten and directed by the state.[52]

Yet despite the claims of state information to 'truth', it had always been infused with the understandings of bureaucrats, and as such the information was ultimately more a reflection of the

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[45] Richards, op. cit., the quotation is from p. 3.
[46] CA Bayly, 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India', *Modern Asian Studies,* 27,1, (1993), pp. 3-19.
[47] Ibid., pp. 3-4.
[48] Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that selective nature of statistical enquiries is in itself an important reflection of the state's preoccupations. The information collected about factory workers in Calcutta was, for example, ultimately more of a reflection of the concerns of factory owners, and shifted in response to the changing concerns of the owners of capital, Chakrabarty, 'Conditions for Knowledge of Working-Class Conditions: Employers, Government and the Jute Workers of Calcutta, 1890-1940' in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies,* (New York and Oxford, 1988).
[49] Bayly, op. cit., p. 38. Thomas Richards explains the apparent impotency of state statistical enquiries in terms of the distinction between *information* and *knowledge,* Richards, op. cit., pp. 114-139, 144-145.
[50] Ludden, op. cit. Appadurai builds upon this, saying that in British India the apparently objective application of the scientific and universal structure of statistics provided an important empirical ballast for the descriptivist thrust of the colonial gaze found in other works of Orientalism, Appardurai, op. cit., pp. 315-326.
[51] Ludden, op. cit., p. 251.

state's understanding of the colony than of any colonial historical reality.[53] Benedict Anderson observes, for example, how the British state applied racial classifications on to the population of India in ways which often had very little grounding in real social relations.[54] Anderson says of the British censuses in Malaysia that, '[i]t is extremely unlikely that in 1911, more than a tiny fraction of those categorised and subcategorised would have recognised themselves under such labels.'[55] These categories had very real social consequences, however, as they determined the position of individuals within the public sphere and as the colonial state built 'the new educational, judicial, public-health, police, and immigration bureaucracies' 'on the principle of ethno-racial hierarchies.'[56] As Mahmood Mamdani has argued in his discussion on the notion of civil society in colonial Africa, citizenship in colonial states was racially defined and certain groups were defined not as citizens but as *subjects* and liable to a 'regime of extra-economic coercion and administratively-driven justice'.[57] The classificatory projects of state bureaucracies were therefore hardly insignificant and it is worth noting, that when people were defined as subjects, the state's statistical queries were much more closely linked with the need for direct and coercive control.

But while state statistical queries operated to exclude some sectors of the population entirely from the public sphere, they operated specifically to *include* others, and whole sectors of colonial populations were drawn closer to the state specifically because of their role in collecting information.[58] As Ludden argues, as an attempt to subordinate any alternative perspectives, the production of knowledge on colonial territories became tightly linked to political structures.[59] Similarly, Bayly points out that one of the driving forces behind the British colonial administration's efforts at establishing an information system throughout India, was its fear of clandestine information.[60] Appadurai argues that statistics were 'not just a matter of providing the numerical grist for a policy apparatus ... It was also a matter of disciplining the vast officialdom of the colonial state... as well as the population that these officials wished to control and reform, so

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[52] Richards, op. cit., p. 74.
[53] See Richards, op. cit., pp. 1-57.
[54] Benedict Anderson, 'Census, Map, Museum' in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* (London, 1983), pp. 164-165.
[55] Ibid., p. 165, cf Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia', *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays,* (Delhi and Oxford, 1987). The growing racial categorisation of the Cape population throughout the nineteenth century would, of course, offer fertile ground for similar observations.
[56] Anderson, op. cit., p. 69.
[57] Mamdani, op. cit., pp. 15-19, quoted from p. 19.
[58] See Bayly's discussion on the role of local Indian elites in the British colonial state's information system, CA Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870.* (Cambridge, 1996).
[59] Ludden, op. cit., p. 253.
[60] Bayly, C.A. 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 27, no. 1 (1993), pp. 3-4.

that numbers could become an indisputable part of its bureaucratic practices and style.'[61] The operation of statistics was important in the attempts of central authorities to forge a national identity, which Stuart Woolf describes as the act of 'cataloguing the innumerable variations bequeathed by environment and history within the national boundaries.'[62] Central to this process was the accumulation of local knowledge and the mobilisation of local informants for the purposes of the central state. 'Statistics in the service of the state epitomised the political process in which decentralised local enquiry –to supply knowledge as the basis for action - was the necessary route for the reinforcement of central authority. Statistics, from the choice of the field of enquiry to the conceptual classification of the questionnaires and the collection and re-elaboration of data, was indelibly marked with the imprint of Authority.'[63]

But there was another way in which statistics operated in society, one which was also linked to notions of identity. This was the way in which statistics functioned to assign roles for individuals in society by constructing certain standards against which people are judged. 'Numbers create and can be compared with norms, which are among the gentlest and yet most pervasive forms of power.'[64]

The interest in 'useful knowledge' is a baffling one for contemporary observers precisely because it does not appear to us to be all that *useful.*[65] Not only do the almanacs and statistical registers of the nineteenth century hardly make for enthralling reading, but their content - preoccupied as it is with the enumeration of seemingly disjointed categories of interest - is difficult to understand as 'useful.' The key to appreciating the nineteenth century interest in 'useful knowledge', is the context of progressivist ethos during this period. Notions of progress had a strong educative thrust and Dipesh Chakrabarty draws on Marx's discussion of industrial discipline to show how this operated to discipline the workforce. Industrial discipline had two components to it – it entailed a 'technical' subordination to the regularity and 'precision', and 'supervision', which used and produced documents. It was the nature of capitalist authority says Chakrabarty, that it operated by forming 'a body of knowledge' about its subjects and this knowledge was under-written by the apparently objective processes of information collection. The configuration of authority that accompanied 'progress' was dependent, Chakrabarty argues, on the notion of equality, before the law and the market. *Citizens* (as opposed to subjects) could act of

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[61] Appadurai, op. cit., p. 320.
[62] Woolf, op. cit., p. 599.
[63] Ibid., p. 602.
[64] Porter, op. cit., p. 45.
[65] By no means the entire population was convinced of the usefulness of statistical information. See Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking,* p. 5, Mary Poovey, op. cit., pp. 269-275 and Woolf, op. cit., p. 602.

their own volition, but were also provided with guidelines on how to act.[66] The dissemination of statistical information operated in this context to define what are appropriate ways of understanding the world. Firstly, it implicitly reinforced the notion that the world could best be understood through numbers and that because of its employment of numbers, the state was the holder of 'true' knowledge. Secondly, by picking out specific things for consideration, it implied that these are the relevant things to know to understand the world. If statistics were meant to be a reflection of progress, they also operated to show how progress was to be understood and measured.

As John Brewer argues, the demand for this sort of information was not simply a function of its usefulness to the individual. 'Useful knowledge', he says, 'was a type, a category of knowledge, not necessarily of immediate use value to those who acquired it, but helped in giving individuals ways of viewing and analysing the world, and placed their roles as individual farmers or shopkeepers or whatever, within a much larger context.'[67]

Statistics, National Wealth and Progress

The British state's statistical enquiries had initially focused almost purely on trade and commerce, and as they were seen as one of the chief indicators of England's success in an era of mercantile expansion, statistics on commodity prices and trade were being prepared in Britain as early as the late seventeenth century; long before statistics on production and employment.[68] As the state began to envisage national wealth in new ways, however, the collection of statistical information expanded to other areas of enquiry and began to include resources and potential resources conceptualised on a national scale. One of the major categories of information became the various resources of a country and Brewer explains this in terms of prevailing ideas regarding the connection between profit and power which meant that 'if a government were to evaluate its performance against that of its principal rivals it needed quantitative information ...about the economic activity in the nation at large.'[69] As Anne Godlewska points out with reference to Napoleonic France, '[o]ne of the characterisations of the state's growing awareness of its realm had also been an evolution in the understanding of what constituted national wealth and, thus, what merited the attention of the government.'[70] In a country which had colonies and which was

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[66] Ray Thomas argues that intra-organisational statistics are not so much a tool of hierarchical control, but operate as an instrument of self-management, Ray Thomas, 'Why Have Government Statistics? (And How to Cut their Cost), *Journal of Public Policy,* 4, 2, 1985.

[67] Brewer, op. cit., p. 228.

[68] Ibid., p. 224. See also Martin Shaw and Ian Miles, 'The Social Roots of Statistical Knowledge', *Demystifying Social Statistics,* (London, 1979), pp. 27-31.

[69] Ibid.., p. 224

[70] Godlewska, op. cit., p. 37.

competing with other colonial powers, this interest would, of course, extend to the resources contained in its colonies. As population growth, agriculture, wage levels and poverty all became linked to the conception of the well-being of the nation, the enumeration of these things became increasingly important.

It was often the issue of the potential wealth of a region that formed the focus of interest as Europeans colonised new parts of the world. When the British took control of the Cape in 1795, John Barrow was sent on an extensive tour through the colony to provide a 'Statistical Sketch' of its resources. This was, however, at a time when statistics meant something slightly different.

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'Statistics', Travellers and the Changing Face of Information

In writing about the short expeditions undertaken prior to beginning his longer journey of exploration into the interior in 1823, George Thompson said that these preliminary excursions had enabled him to collect 'much statistical information'.[71] Barrow had similarly referred to his description of the colony's climate, population, vegetation, administrative system and agricultural practices as a 'statistical sketch'.[72] What these writers had in mind when they used the term 'statistics' was, however, somewhat different from what the term would come to mean later in the century when employed by state bureaucrats. As the informational requirements of Empire were influenced by developments in the empirical sciences, there had developed a different understanding of how 'accurate' information was conveyed.[73] While the statistical enquiries of European states had formerly been intimately linked to the scientific endeavours of travellers and natural scientists, changes in understandings of information meant that these states became more reliant on their own bureaucracies for information. Colonial bureaucracies became orientated around the flow of information and as colonial rule began to require more systematic, and increasingly structured information, new, permanent administrations facilitated it. While the systematic statistical series that appeared later were, in a sense, a development of the descriptive projects of earlier travellers' accounts, the new understanding of statistics became linked to fresh ways of evaluating colonies and countries. Initially statistical enquiries were concerned with the describing the territory, but by the mid-nineteenth century, these statistics were primarily concerned with charting and enabling progress.

The North-western Cape did not, of course, suddenly and dramatically enter the consciousness of Empire with the production of statistical series in the nineteenth century. Observations of the coast line of the North-western Cape had been recorded by European sailors for some time, and as Mary Louise Pratt notes, European preoccupations with the coastlines of continents were soon replaced by a desire to explore and describe their interiors.[74] The first inland

[71] George Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa*, (London, 1827), p. viii.
[72] John Barrow, *Travels into the Interior of South Africa,* (London, 1801. Reprint, London, 1968), specifically p. 324.
[73] Thomas Richards discusses the influence of scientific thinking on understandings of information and control in and argues that these developments allowed for an understanding of Empire 'united not by force but by information', Richards, op. cit., quoted from p. 1.
[74] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation,* (London, 1992), pp. 20-24. A. J. Christopher notes that the early assessments of the region's coastline by Portuguese and Dutch sailors were not particularly favourable, *Southern Africa – Studies in Historical Geography,* pp. 17-19,

expedition consisting of a party of Dutch East India Company employees under the direction of Van Riebeek, explored northwards to the Oliphants River in 1660 and seven years later, Namaqualand was visited by Pieter Crytlhoff.[75] The observation and cataloguing of nature was one of the central preoccupations of European travellers, and scientific, and particularly botanical interest, had accompanied European travellers already in the early seventeenth century.[76] Richard Drayton says that knowledge of the people, fauna and flora of distant lands added indispensable intellectual fuel to the unfolding Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment in Britain and he notes that the British disciplines of botany, zoology, geology, would have been 'inconceivable outside the context of British empire.'[77] British travellers to foreign climes were encouraged by the Royal Society to collect specimens and observe natural phenomena by a set of instructions drawn up in 1666.[78] The botanist, Carolus Clusius had used his influence with the directors of the Dutch East India company to encourage ships' captains to collect plants and samples, and illustrations of Cape plants began to appear in Europe in the early 1600s.[79] While early Dutch expeditions into the North-western Cape had been largely preoccupied with the lure of copper, they also certainly reflected an interest in natural history and many of the expeditions were accompanied by a botanist or natural scientist.[80] There was no real distinction made during this period between information collected for the purposes of imperial insight and for scientific enquiry, as the statistical enquiries of states and mercantile companies were generally undertaken by naturalists who collected a broad range of information.[81] Grounded as they were in the

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(Hampden, Conn., 1976)

[75] Mary Gunn and L.E. Codd, *Botanical Exploration of Southern Africa,*(Cape Town, 1981), p. 24.

[76] Gunn and Codd, op. cit., p. 30. Mary Louise Pratt gives a detailed account of the developing scientific interest of early travellers, but argues that it was the publication of Carl Linneaus' *Systema Naturae* in 1735 that marked the change in the nature of European travel and travel writing, pp. 20-27. David Miller suggests, however, that the centrality given to Linneaus' classificatory system may be overstated as the works of other natural scientists, and notably Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, rejected classification and focussed instead on precise description, David Miller, 'Introduction' in David Phillip Miller and Peter Hanns Reill (eds.), *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature,* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 2-3. Richard Grove also offers a critique of arguments that European classificatory systems were simply imposed on colonial territories. He points out that indigenous knowledge was a significant informing influence on the developing Western natural sciences, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism,* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 73-94.

[77] Richard Drayton, 'Knowledge and Empire', (Copy obtained from the Author), pp. 231-233. Richard Grove also discusses the impact of both indigenous botanical knowledge and plants on developing European understandings of the environment, op. cit.,pp. 90-93.

[78] Richard Drayton, op. cit., p. 233

[79] Gunn and Codd, op. cit., pp. 12-15.

[80] Ibid., pp. 32-33. Reports of copper in Namaqualand evoked considerable interest and Simon van der Stel, then Governor at the Cape, conducted an expedition into the region in 1683 to investigate the potential for copper-mining in the region. He was disappointed, however, by the apparently insurmountable problems of extraction and transportation., Gunn and Codd, op. cit., pp. 32-33 and Christopher, op. cit., p. 20.

[81] See Marika Vicziany's discussion on the statistical enquiries of Francis Buchanan in 'Imperialism,

burgeoning interest of Western science in describing the world, 'statistics' were understood at this point to be descriptions of landscapes and local inhabitants which, together with the labelled grids of maps, and lists of fauna and flora, aimed at a comprehensive description of new territories.[82] Underlying this scientific interest, however, was always a recognition that indigenous plants, practices, animals and commodities had potential commercial and medicinal use, and increasingly, the focus of traveller's accounts would be the potential of an area for European settlement.[83]

In conjunction with their scientific concern, European descriptions of 'new' lands focused on exploitable resources of the new territories - initially on the easily exportable, such as the fabled and highly sought-after mineral resources of new territories and, then later, resources which could be of use to European traders and settlers. George Thompson complained in 1824 that the preoccupation of earlier travellers to the North-western Cape - the 'Country of the Bushmen, Korannas, and Namaquas' – with missionary work meant that their travel accounts 'did not afford much information that could throw light on the geographical features, or commercial resources of the country.'[84] Thompson went on to conclude his travelogue with a chapter on the future prospects for European settlement in the colony.[85] Benedict Anderson notes with reference to William Scott's work on class structure of the pre-Hispanic Philippines, that categories were imposed on the landscape and on colonial subjects by European observers long before formal enumeration.[86] In other words, enumeration or 'census' imaginings preceded the actual enumeration of the colonised terrain and these imaginings were largely a reflection of the preoccupations of the observer. Given the dominance of pastoralism in the region and the anxiousness of authorities and traders to supply the ready Cape Town market with livestock, it is perhaps not surprising that the livestock herds of the inhabitants of the North-western Cape were something which appeared often in the accounts of early travellers.[87]

In this sense, travel accounts during the period shared their focus on regional resources with the statistical series which appeared in the nineteenth century. Both promised to provide a thorough account of the region that offered, in particular, a reflection of the economic potential of the region. But statistical series developed in a context where they had become more closely linked to the administrative practices of governing authorities and consequently became more particular in their focus than travel writing. Livestock enumeration became directly linked to fiscal

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Botany and Statistics in Early Nineteenth Century India: The Surveys of Francis Buchanan (1762-1829), *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 20, no. 4, (1986).

[82] Pratt, op. cit., p. 30

[83] Drayton, op. cit. ,p.232 and Christopher, op. cit., pp. 19-21.

[84] Thompson, op. cit., pp. 217-8.

[85] Ibid., p. 408.

[86] Anderson, op. cit., pp. 166-168.

[87] See for example Thompson, p. 301; James Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Mauritius and South Africa,* (London, 1844), pp. 525-528.

considerations as local Dutch authorities began taxing inhabitants of the colony on livestock holdings. Even by the mid-nineteenth century, when livestock enumeration was no longer directly linked to taxation, authorities still collected information on livestock and on other aspects of the colonial economy in specific formats. The regional social and environmental context that could be found in travel writing was missing in these new statistical series as information was restricted to tabulations on the level of administrative district, and to concerns about the growth of commercial agriculture.

Part of the explanation for the more holistic gaze of the early European travellers lay in their positivist ambitions of comprehensive description, but it was also partly the result of their reliance on local informants and their proximity to the geographic and social matrix in which they were travelling. While many of the travellers during this period were trained in, or at least had an interest in, empirical science, and many were anxious to map the terrain according to the grid and scale of European cartographic systems, they were also in direct contact with, and interested in, local systems of understanding. As William Beinart points out, settlements, farms and farmers provided the social and geographical map of the Cape.[88] Travellers received their information from local informants who in turn explained *founteine* (springs), farms and roads in terms which were most useful to them - by relating them to the landscape and to other *founteine* and farms. James Backhouse, trying to get from the Bushmans River to the Kamiesberg, noted that '[t]he path on which we were travelling, was so little known, that when people gave us information respecting it for a short distance westward, they usually concluded their observation by saying, "Verder is onbekend"...' [89] At another point he was given a rough sketch of the approximate path he should take and a list of the names of the farmers who lived along it.[90]

The reliance of European travellers on local informants had significant implications. As William Beinart points out, we should not underestimate the extent to which local understandings informed European conceptions of the local environment.[91] He says that the interaction between local and Western scientific knowledge in writing on the South African landscape in the eighteenth century has previously been overlooked. In the eighteenth century, he argues, science was less specialised and 'self-consciously scientific understandings were in their infancy and were not initially developed in separation from other forms and fonts of knowledge.'[92] While European

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[88] William Beinart, 'Men, Science, Travel and Nature in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Cape'. Paper given at the Conference on 'Masculinity in Southern Africa', University of Natal, Durban, 2-5 July 1997, p.6. Beinart mentions Carl Thunberg as a possible exception because of his more systematic focus on botanical classification.
[89] Backhouse, op. cit., pp. 503-4
[90] Ibid., p. 506
[91] Beinart, op. cit.
[92] Ibid. p. 3

travellers set out to provide accurate information in the forms usual and useful to European science, they also assimilated aspects of local understanding about the environment. They learnt about local vegetation, animals and farming practices, and when they arrived at the Linnean classification for a plant, they also gave its local name and described it in the context of local land-use and farming practices. Thompson, for example described 'a poisonous plant called jackal's-bush', which he was told, 'is apt to be browsed upon by the sheep' in dry seasons and which 'frequently destroys multitudes of them.'[93] Travellers also became aware through their own experience of the landscape, of how farming practices in the region were particularly adapted to suit local conditions. Beinart notes that a number of the eighteenth-century travellers in the region commented on the advantages of Khoi farming practices, noting for example how they moved their livestock to take advantage of better grazing land or to avoid livestock disease. The Danish scientist, Anders Sparrman had concluded that because of their well-adapted farming practices, the 'cattle of the Hottentots, in some measure, keep up to their original standard whilst, on the contrary, those of Christians degenerate to a smaller race.'[94] Travelling in the 1820s, Thompson too, reflected upon the constraints on farming in the region. He noted that in Namaqualand 'such are the peculiarities of the soil and climate, that it seems extremely doubtful whether the wandering habits of the people can ever, to any extent, be overcome.'[95] In Thompson's comment on the prospects of 'further colonisation', he said that the North-western Cape was

> totally unfit for the subsistence of any considerable population. The great inclined plain, leading from the Nieuwveld to the Gariep river, is subject to almost continual drought; and the mountain ranges, and their immediate vicinity, though admirably adapted for the pasturage of cattle, are yet quite unfitted for the subsistence of any but a pastoral and partly wandering race.[96]

European travellers of the nineteenth century thus (perhaps sometimes inadvertently) portrayed the lifestyle and activities of local livestock farmers in a way that was accommodating of an economic rationale not necessarily commensurate with the notions of 'progress' which colonial officials would certainly later be concerned about. Andrew Steedman who travelled through the Cape interior in the 1830s encountered a farmer named Breda, whom, he added, was thought to be 'one of the richest Boors in the Winterveld, having a flock of ten thousand sheep besides other cattle', but who lived with 'his wife and family in tents; and [was] constantly migrating from one place to another for the sake of water.'[97] When Backhouse spoke to a Boer farmer in the Kamiesberg he

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[93] Thompson, op. cit., p. 230.
[94] Beinart, op. cit., p.8
[95] Thompson, op. cit., p. 289
[96] Ibid., p. 408.
[97] Andrew Steedman, *Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of Southern Africa,* (Facsimile reprint, Cape Town, 1966), p. 13.

noted that the farmer,

> estimated the fruitfulness of the Kamiesberg much more highly than I could see ground for. When there is plenty of rain, the land may yield abundance but abstractly considered, a poor, granite sand is far from a fruitful country.[98]

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the information requirements of the state had begun to change - both as a reflection of broader scientific developments, and of the state's own changing administrative requirements.

Natural science was becoming increasingly technical as increasingly rigorous standards of argument and proof were being required, and it was at this point that nature writing was expelled from science.[99] Michael Adas has observed that whereas previously European observers had used a wide variety of gauges in their understandings of foreign territories or peoples, in the course of the nineteenth century, empirical observation had become the dominant form of description.[100] He ascribes this largely to the general Victorian penchant for 'statistical reductiveness', and adds that advancements in mass printing and in graphic and statistical representation had reinforced the preference for evaluative criteria that were 'tangible and testable'.[101] The significance of this new emphasis was two-fold: Firstly it provided the basis for a sense of intellectual superiority. Adas quotes John Seeley – champion of British nineteenth-century imperialism – as arguing that British knowledge was simply 'better trusted and sounder'.[102] And secondly, it instilled confidence in the ability of European observers to acquire complete knowledge of any region through description and enumeration.[103]

As part of the broader trend of the rationalisation of state bureaucracies, authorities had increasingly turned to scientists for advice on all aspects of administration, and scientists 'began to be annexed to, if not absorbed within, the life of the state.' [104] 'People had to be counted, if taxation and conscription were to be planned rationally. Land had to be mapped and measured, and its natural resources inventoried, to allow its best defence and exploration.'[105] This information was also authoritative because it had been produced under the general rubric of empirical science and as such, constituted the basis of knowledge.[106] While the format of the

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[98] Backhouse, op. cit., p. 521.
[99] Porter, *Trust in Numbers,* pp. 5-18.
[100] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measures of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance,* (New York, 1989).
[101] Ibid., p. 144. The phrase 'statistical reductiveness' is Richard Altick's, *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature,* (New York, 1973).
[102] Adas, op. cit., p. 144.
[103] Richards, op. cit., pp. 45-73.
[104] Drayton, op. cit., p.247
[105] Ibid., p. 246
[106] Ludden, op. cit., Nigel Penn, 'Mapping the Cape: John Barrow and the First British Occupation of the Colony, 1795-1803', *Pretexts: Studies in Writing and Culture,* vol. 4, no. 2, Summer 1993, pp. 22-23.

state's informational requirements was to a certain extent determined by its administrative needs, David Ludden has pointed out that the collection of information in specific formats was part of the process by which information-gathering by the state was constructed as knowledge. 'It was important', he says, 'that facts and investigations in India could intersect and be integrated with facts from around the world in political economy and world history.'[107] As specialisation became a feature of the development of the natural sciences during this period, however, geographers and other scientific experts began to distance themselves from the overseas travellers of an earlier period as they drew themselves closer to the state.[108] When John Barrow ventured into the Cape interior in 1798 and 1799, he was certainly not undertaking the mission for purely scientific or personal interest, but was acting in his capacity as a state official with the specific task of conducting a statistical survey of the colony. Thomas Richards points out that by the mid-nineteenth century, 'the problems of the disorganisation of knowledge came to replace the problems of the organisation of knowledge'.[109] It was at this point, he says, that there developed an obsessive concern with accuracy, and the British state attempted to force a criteria of performance on Britain's informal state institutions of knowledge.

Barrow's expedition into the Cape interior on a fact-finding mission for the new British administration at the Cape (1795-1803) provides an illuminating indication of the way in which the informational requirements of the state would change between the beginning and the end of the nineteenth century. His intention was not to write a travel narrative for public consumption, and indeed as Nigel Penn points out, it was only in accounts of his travels published later that the narrator was inserted into Barrow's text.[110] But even while operating with an explicit official prerogative, Barrow still, as Penn says, 'saw himself as a producer of information whose task it was to incorporate a particular reality... into a series of interlocking informational orders: geographical, mineralogical, botanical, agricultural, economic...'[111] In other words Barrow's account of the interior was still employing the older definition of 'statistics' as being a general picture of the state of the country - interspersing the social relations of the colonists with descriptions of landscape, rock formations, and weather conditions. The information requirements of the state would however, be somewhat different by the mid-nineteenth century.

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[107] Ludden, op. cit., p. 258.
[108] David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise*, (Oxford, 1993), pp. 167-220.
[109] Richards, op. cit., pp. 76-77.
[110] Penn, op. cit., p. 116.
[111] Ibid., p. 115

The Changing Face of Statistics:

When the British occupied the Cape permanently and began to orientate the colony's administrative structures increasingly towards central government, they began collecting statistical information as part of the annual Blue Books of statistical returns which were a feature of colonial administration throughout the Empire. By the 1840s, statistics were no longer linked directly to taxation, but state officials continued to see livestock enumeration as an important reflection of the development of agriculture in each district, and the 'progress' of the colony as a whole. These statistics, like the 'statistical information' of earlier travellers were designed to offer knowledge on the state of the country, but instead of offering merely a detailed snapshot of the country, statistical series were designed specifically to chart change, or development over time. Statistical data provided a convenient way of charting development as the mathematics of statistical description allowed for easy comparisons, both temporally and between districts and countries. The numbers that allowed for this comparison, however, invariably limited the focus of what could be known through the lens of the statistics. Description was now largely limited to what would fit in the columns of a Blue Book.

Another important difference between the descriptive projects of travellers and state statistical series, was their respective methods of collecting information. The information-gathering of travellers was to a certain extent, dictated to by the vagaries of travel. As many travellers to the North-western Cape were well aware, they could often not be certain of their route, and were often forced to alter their plans according to the condition of their cattle or horses, the availability of water, and the willingness of their guides.[112] State statistical series, however, were designed around the systematic collection of data, and permanent bureaucratic structures were in place to facilitate the collection of information on a regular basis. Clanwilliam received its first British-appointed Civil Commissioner in 1828, while Namaqualand and Calvinia received Civil Commissioners in 1858. These Civil Commissioners were expected to provide annual returns on livestock numbers for the Blue Books and, from 1887 onwards, more frequent returns of livestock and harvest statistics. They were expected to submit information in a specific format and information beyond the scope of the requests from officials in Cape Town was not required and usually not particularly desired either. In instructions to census enumerators in 1891, they were reminded, for example,

> that the object of filling up the schedules is to enable the information to be tabulated with a view to its being stated numerically under a fixed scheme. Whilst none of the particulars called for should be omitted, any superfluous information, i.e. information not provided for in the Schedule or the instructions, would be redundant and embarrassing,

[112] Both Backhouse and Thompson were unable at various points on their travels to secure the assistance of guides. Backhouse, op. cit., p. 506, Thompson, op. cit., p. 232.

and should, therefore be carefully avoided.[113]

While the writings of travellers were either specifically intended for public consumption, or a reflection on the traveller's experience which was later published, state statistical series were produced primarily as a reflection of the workings of its own administrative processes. As noted in Chapter One, however, one of the features of statistical information that made it so useful was that it promised to offer 'objective' as opposed to subjective information. With the increasingly institutionalised science of the nineteenth century, it was formal scientific description and statistics that constituted *knowledge*, while narrative merely offered opinion.[114] It was in this way that colonial discourse was made objective; as David Ludden says, 'as a set of factualised statements about a reality which could be known independently of any subjective, colonising will.'[115] By the mid-nineteenth century, colonial state bureaucracies were relying almost solely on their own bureaucratic structures for knowledge, which now included its own scientific bureaucrats.[116]

[113] AGR, vol. 1/27. Circular no. 3. January 1891.
[114] The subjective angle of a travel account offered was not, however, merely a regrettable by-product of the descriptive project, it constituted an important component of the way in which knowledge was imparted to the reader, as the narrative was as much an opportunity for the reader to engage with the personal experiences of the writer as to gain knowledge of the terrain they were travelling through. See Stephen Gray for a discussion on the authorial presence in hunting narratives, 'Rise and Fall of the Colonial Hunter', *Southern African Literature*, (Cape Town, 1979), pp. 102-3.
[115] Ludden, op. cit., p. 252.
[116] Ibid, pp. 251-252.

3
The North-western Cape: Pastoralism and Power until c. 1850

The aim of state statistical series is the systematic collection and flow of information in specific formats. A condition for this flow is the willingness as well as the ability of state functionaries to provide this information in the form required by central authorities. To develop some understanding of the dynamics of state information-gathering and more specifically, its relation to agrarian policy and intervention during the latter half of the nineteenth century, it is important to understand something of the context of the North-western Cape. State officials would later complain that gathering information in the colony was difficult, and the districts of the North-western Cape were by no means the easiest. The environmental conditions and farming practices which characterised the region, as well as the social relations and the nature of the state's presence on the ground, would all affect the way in which information was collected, perceived and used, as the development of the pastoral economy was played-out later.

'A dry and desolate country': farming practices in the North-western Cape and the natural environment[117]

Pastoralism had been practised in the North-western Cape region for centuries before the arrival of European settlers, and was characterised by a system of seasonal transhumance which had been developed by Khoi pastoralists in response to the summer/winter rainfall divide in the area. The Roggeveld, Hantam and Kubiskow mountain ranges roughly demarcate this summer/winter divide - with the area to the west of the mountain ranges being characterised by winter rainfall which provides grazing for five to seven months of the year, and the area to the east of these mountain ranges characterised by summer grazing land.[118] The Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand in the 1860s described this area of summer grazing land, known as Bushmanland, as a huge expanse of grassland approximately 5,000 square miles in extent. The grass, he said, 'grew in tufts with a yard or two or perhaps more of bare ground between the tufts, and the soil instead of being baked hard, was soft and sandy.'[119] He also noted that the summer rainfall in this region was

[117] A 'dry and desolate country' is how George Thompson described Namaqualand in the 1820s, op. cit., p. 287.
[118] P. J. van der Merwe provides a detailed discussion on the transhumant cycles in this region, *Trek: Studies oor die Mobiliteit van die Pioniersbevolking aan die Kaap,* (Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, 1945), pp. 182-205, Andrew Smith, *Pastoralism in Africa: Origins and Development Ecology,* (London, 1992), Nigel Penn, 'Pastoralism in the Northern Cape Frontier Zone during the Eighteenth Century'. Paper presented at the Workshop on Precolonial History, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 14-15 July 1986.
[119] EA Judge, Untitled Manuscript, (D68/332, University of Cape Town, Manuscripts Collection), p. 82.

unpredictable, and described it as consisting 'entirely of thunderstorms'. The rainfall conditions in the region had significant consequences for the availability of grassland and meant that pastoralists had to maintain considerable mobility in order to take best advantage of the grazing in the region. A report in 1909 observed that grazing in Bushmanland might be available for all twelve months of the year or 'there may be none for even a day.'[120] The North-western Cape also has few permanent rivers and the availability of water from periodic streams, springs and pools, provided the cynosure of transhumant movements.[121] When Dutch-speaking colonists—of both European and mixed descent—moved into the North-western Cape in the early eighteenth century, they learned about livestock farming in the region from the Khoi and followed a similar pattern of seasonal migration with dramatic and significant consequences for the indigenous pastoralists.[122] Out of the convolutions of resistance and assimilation and the tragedy of the ultimate dispossession of the Khoi, developed a pastoral economy dominated by a self-conscious class of Dutch-speaking pastoralists - *'trekboeren'* or trekfarmers.

The egalitarian rhetoric of Afrikaner nationalist historiography has tended to elide class distinctions within frontier settler society and to obscure the motivations of those people who moved into the interior, explaining it in terms of the availability of 'free land' and a 'love of freedom'.[123] The considerable cost of the annual rent on a loan farm by the mid-eighteenth century, in fact meant that land-ownership was something that was by no means easily available to everyone.[124] The nature of regional environmental conditions, however, meant that even farmers

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[120] G.11-1909. *Report on the Scab Acts and the Administration in the North-western Districts of the Cape Colony*, p. 1

[121] Andrew Smith points out that recent arguments linking the carrying capacity of the land and soil nutrients, suggest that with the low soil nutrient status of the Western Cape, pastoralists had to maintain considerable mobility in order to maintain their herds, Smith, op. cit., pp. 6-14, p.128. Seasonal or sporadic outbreaks of stock disease also influenced migration. For comments on the movement of stock to avoid disease, see Backhouse, op. cit., p. 527. Reverend Schroeder of De Tuin mission station in Bushmanland told a Select Committee that families at the mission station were obliged to move their cattle due to periodic outbreaks of *bloedziekte* in the area. A.8-'66. *Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider and report on Petition from Bastaards and others at the Rhenish Mission Station,* p. 3.

[122] The processes of Khoi dispossession have been expertly covered elsewhere. See Penn, 'The Northern Cape Frontier Zone, 1700-c. 1815', (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1995) and 'Land, Labour and Livestock in the Western Cape during the Eighteenth Century' in Wilmot G. James and Mary Simons (eds), *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape*, (Cape Town and Johannesburg), Leonard Guelke and Robert Shell, 'Landscape of Conquest: frontier water alienation and Khoi strategies of survival, 1652-1780' in *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 18(4), December 1992.

[123] For some historiographical background on this topic see Timothy Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order,* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1996), pp. 15-36 and Penn 'The Northern Cape Frontier Zone', pp. 20-75 and also Dorian Haarhoff, *The Wild SouthWest: Frontier Myths and Metaphors in Literature set in Namibia, 1760-1988,* (Johannesburg, 1991) for a comparative discussion of representations of the frontier in American, Australian and South African historiography, pp. 7-29.

[124] Penn, 'The Northern Cape Frontier Zone', pp. 74-75, Robert Ross, *Beyond the Pale: Essays on the History of Colonial South Africa,* (Hanover and London, 1993), pp. 17-47.

who owned or rented land, still generally migrated seasonally with their livestock; sometimes owning a farm in the winter-rainfall area and migrating in summer to an area of *trekveld* elsewhere which they either rented, or more commonly it seems, held by usufructuary right. In 1875, John Noble described the Bushmanland region as follows -

> until very lately it was regarded as a desert and left for the free occupation of migrating squatters and their flocks... The squatters consisted of white and coloured people of two classes, - some of whom had no farms, and led a purely nomadic life, and others who had farms in the adjoining districts which they occupied during the greater part of the year, only moving into this open country after the periodic rains had fallen, for the sake of rich pasturage.[125]

In an environment where access to land in different parts of the region was crucial to successful farming, the cost of land was argued to have discouraged farmers from purchasing land.[126] As access to land became increasingly subject to state regulation and market pressures, even wealthier farmers urged the necessity of keeping areas of unalienated *trekveld* open; P. J. van der Merwe's seminal study of trekfarmers in the colony shows that significant numbers of farmers were reluctant to make what they saw as unnecessary investments in land.[127] When Reverend Schroeder of the Rhenish mission station at De Tuin described farmers in Calvinia in 1866, he said, '[a] good many of them are poor, but there are also many who are rather rich. But many of those farmers have no farms; they are *trek-boeren.*'[128] Migrating farmers with enormous herds of livestock were a pervasive feature of the North-western Cape throughout the nineteenth century. A colonial official camped at the Hartebeest River in the Calvinia district saw several farmers passing through the area with their flocks when he arrived: 'Their flocks', he said, 'amounted together to Twelve thousand. How many cattle and horses they had I cannot say. But doubtless the number was considerable.'[129]

The context of a farming system orientated around transhumance, together with the equivocacy of local land occupancy, and the continued availability of unalienated *trekveld*, made it

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[125] Noble, op. cit., p. 88. A system of negotiated land occupancy determined rights of access to trekveld. The Civil Commissioner of Worcester in 1858 observed that:

> All the proprietors of loan places in the Bokkeveld, Middle and Klein Roggeveld, being graziers, [had] each their legplekken in the Karoo... [And] [it] appear[ed] that, at the first settling of the said elevated parts, a friendly understanding [had] existed among them that the one should not dispossess the other of the spot selected by him in the Karoo. (A.18-'59. *Papers relative to the Disposal of certain Vacant Crown lands in the Division of Worcester.)*

[126] As Andrew Smith argues, in an environment where there exists such unpredictability, transhumant pastoralism is the most sustainable form of agriculture, Smith, op. cit., p. 5.

[127] P. J. van der Merwe, op. cit., pp. 48-55.

[128] A.8-'66. *Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider and report on Petition from Bastards and others at the Rhenish Mission Station,* p. 8.

[129] CO, vol. 4414. 1 April 1862. See also, CA, CSS, vol. 4/1/1, Colonial Secretary (henceforth Col. Sec.) – Civil Commissioner (C.C.) Calvinia, 17.07.93.

possible for a large group of people who did not own land to practice livestock farming.[130] As Nigel Penn notes, records of land-ownership are a poor reflection of access to land during the eighteenth century as they, for one thing, do not reflect the presence of people who had access to land through various forms of tenancy arrangements.[131] Nor do land revenue records reflect the significant population trekking between areas of unalienated Crown land.[132] P.J. van der Merwe observes that a comparison of *opgaaf* returns and records of land ownership, provides some indication of the relatively small proportion of farmers paying tax in a district who also owned the land they were farming.[133] Van der Merwe also shows that as rural populations grew in the early nineteenth century, *increasing* numbers of people farmed without owning land.[134] These farmers either occupied Crown Land or became tenants, and as Robert Ross has shown, the proportion of tenant-occupied farms in the pastoral interior in the 1840s was quite considerable.[135]

The farming practices which characterised the North-western Cape - the large farms and, perhaps more significantly, the seasonal movement of farmers with their livestock - meant that the region was characterised by a dispersed and highly mobile rural population. In 1850, the fieldcornetcies of Onder Nieweveld, Hantam and Onder Roggeveld had no permanent occupiers, being visited only seasonally by migrating families of trekfarmers.[136] When Reverend Schroeder was asked how many inhabitants there were at the his mission station in Bushmanland in 1866, he said that '[t]he number fluctuates a good deal; they are not regular residents.'[137] By the mid-nineteenth century, the region had very few towns - several small mining towns in Namaqualand, the small market towns and administrative centres of Clanwilliam and Calvinia, and the Atlantic shipping places of Lamberts Bay, Port Nolloth and Hondeklip Bay, which were also attached to the copper mines. The poor roads in the North-western Cape and the susceptibility of horses and oxen to the incessant droughts, meant that the inland parts of the region were notoriously isolated. Transport problems were perceived to be the principal stumbling-block to the development of commercial farming in the region. The costs of transporting agricultural produce meant that farmers tended to favour produce which, as George Thompson put it, 'possesses, within itself, the power of locomotion.'[138] Farmers generally sold livestock to butchers agents or traders who

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[130] In 1864 there were for example 'at least' 2,000,000 acres of unalienated Crown land in the Namaqualand district. A.3-64. *Select Committee Report on Crown Lands, 1864.* pp. 1
[131] Penn, 'The Northern Cape Frontier Zone', p. 75, n.134.
[132] Van der Merwe, op. cit., p. 55.
[133] Ibid., pp. 54-55.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ross, op. cit., pp. 58-61.
[136] CO, vol. 2867, C.C. Clanwilliam - Col. Sec. 24.07.50.
[137] A. 8 –'66. *Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Consider and Report on the Petition from Bastards and Others at the Rhenish Missionary Station,* p. 1.
[138] Thompson, op. cit., p. 408.

travelled from farm to farm.[139] Many farmers also seem to have supplemented their incomes by selling other pastoral products such as hides, tallow and soap which they sold or exchanged as they met up with other farmers at various times of the year.

We should also not ignore the difficulties which seasonal migration and population dispersal posed for communication in the district, especially communication between the central authorities and farmers of the interior. In 1850, the inhabitants of Namaqualand complained of their distance from the nearest fieldcornet, saying that 'in consequence of this great distance, your Memorialists rarely receive Government notices and are also debarred from the advantages of a post Communication.'[140] Communication between local government officials was also not easy. In 1853, the Civil Commissioner of Clanwilliam complained that he had no regular postal communication with some of the Field-cornets of his district.[141] In the 1860s, it was a six day journey from the district capital of Namaqualand—Springbokfontein—to Clanwilliam.[142] The difficulty of transport would have a significant influence on the direction of the growth of commercial farming, but would also have important implications for state authority in the region, and the relationship between the central state and the trekfarming inhabitants of the North-western Cape.

State Authority in the Cape pastoral interior

The highly dispersed population of the rural interior had meant that Company rule throughout the eighteenth century had been characterised by a significant degree of local autonomy. Although *landdrosts* - district magistrates - maintained close correspondence with authorities in Cape Town, they were given significant liberty in judicial, military and fiscal matters, and operated in conjunction with the local boards of *heemraden.*[143] Field-cornets, who were responsible for administrative, judicial and military matters at the level of ward or fieldcornetcy, were elected by local farmers and as such provided a representative aspect to the relationship between district authorities and inhabitants.

As Nigel Penn argues, in the eighteenth-century Cape interior, local power was manifested

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[139] Philippus Lodewikus Scholtz, 'Die Historiese Ontwikkeling van die Onder-Olifantsrivier, 1660 – 1902' in *Die Argief Jaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis,* (Cape Town, 1966). Scholtz claims that the shortages of currency, which were not uncommon in the region, were a result of the low prices paid by these agents. The non-appearance of stock buyers in 1863 due to depressed prices was a significant source of frustration for farmers of the Clanwilliam district, *Blue Book*, 1863, p. JJ5.cf. van der Merwe, op. cit., p. 264 and G.1-'94, *Report of the Scab Commission, 1892-1894,* p. 576.

[140] CO, vol. 2873, Inhabitants of Namaqualand - C.C. Clanwilliam, 01.07.1851.

[141] CO, vol. 2891, C.C. Clanwilliam - Col. Sec., 01.02.1853.

[142] Judge, op. cit., pp.123.

[143] L.P. Green, *History of Local Government in South Africa,* (Cape Town, 1957),pp. 1-4.

in the authority of the nearest *landdrost* or fieldcornet.[144] The scope which this devolution of judicial and military authority held for abuse received a considerable amount of attention in John Philip's *Researches* (1827) which was written at approximately the time that a Commissioner of Inquiry was reviewing the colony's administrative structure.[145] The report of the Commission of Inquiry agreed with Philips' observations and argued that under the current system, district authorities were 'constantly exposed to the influence of local partialities, of hereditary prejudices, and of family connections', and the Commission proposed significant changes to the colony's administrative structure.[146] The sovereignty of local authorities was no less unmistakable in the more mundane issue of taxation. *Landdrosts* and *heemraden* had the authority to determine all local taxes.[147] The only tax paid by rural inhabitants on a regular basis to central authorities was their annual land rent. Revenue for the central government at the Cape came largely from customs revenues, transfer duties, land rents and duties on public sales collected by the vendue department.[148] The difficulty of collecting land rent was a reflection of the weakness of central state administration in the outlying and expanding pastoral districts during this period.[149] Because *opgaaf* taxes were assessed partly on livestock holdings, local authorities had an avid interest in the livestock numbers of the district's farmers, and farmers were called upon to give an annual account of their livestock holdings along with other information on their property so that tax assessments could be determined. The local fieldcornet was generally on hand to confirm the farmer's return, but it appears that under-enumeration was not uncommon and suggests why the authorities during the First British Occupation made farmers swear an oath confirming the

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[144] Nigel Penn, 'Anarchy and Authority in the Koue Bokkeveld, 1739-1779: The Banishing of Carel Buijtendag', *Kleio,* vol. xvi, 1985. cf. Jeff Peires, 'The British at the Cape, 1814-1834' in Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee, *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840,* (Cape Town, 1992), pp. 493-494.

[145] For specific examples, see John Philip, *Researches in South Africa.* (London, 1827), p. 103, pp. 129-130, p. 166.

[146] 'Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry to Earl Bathhurst upon the Administration of Government and Finances', Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony,* vol. xxvii, (Cape Town, 1905), pp. 364-5. Jeff Peires provides a discussion on the far-reaching effects of the changes they instituted, Peires, op. cit., pp. 496-499. cf. Keegan, op. cit. , p. 186.

[147] Local taxes differed from district to district, but all districts had in common the *opgaaf* tax – a tax assessed on the basis of individual property. These taxes were administered at a local level and intended for expenses of a local nature such as the building of bridges and the repairing of roads. Governor Cradock's proclamation of 1814 attempted to bring some uniformity to local taxes, and from 1828 they were collected by the Cape central government and then finally abolished in 1838. Selbourne Ngcobo, 'Taxation of Africans in South Africa, 1849-1939', (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1964), pp. 44-49, Basil Leverton, 'Government Finance and Political Development in the Cape, 1806-1834', in *Archives Yearbook of South African History, 1961,* (Cape Town, 1963), pp. 313-317.

[148] Leverton, op. cit., pp. 314-6.

[149] By 1802 there was approximately 78,000 *Rijksdaalders* owed to the government in the form of land rent, Leslie Duly, *British Land Policy at the Cape, 1795-1844,* (Durham, N.C., 1968),pp. 24-31. cf. Penn, 'Anarchy and Authority', pp. 35-36.

veracity of their return.[150] The considerable disparity between the number of farmers who paid land rent to central authorities and the number who submitted *opgaaf* returns locally, offers some indication of the greater proximity of local authorities to the rural inhabitants of the colony.[151] Certainly when the Batavian authorities wanted to encourage wool production in the colony at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they stressed the importance of employing the co-operation of local district authorities.

The establishment of a Pastoral Commission in 1804 was the first significant official intervention in the development of pastoralism at the colony. The Commission's proposals to encourage the breeding of woolled sheep and Dutch cattle, required a considerable degree of state intervention, which centred around the maintenance of tight control over the breeding of sheep and cattle in the colony.[152] The aim of the Commission was to reorientate the Cape pastoral economy towards wool production for export, and it envisaged the North-western Cape as one of the main growth points of the new industry.[153] Regarding the administration of the regulations of the Commission, Willem Van Ryneveld noted that 'de Commissie door Landdrosten, Heemraden en VeldCornets in de Buiten-Districten merkelyk zonde kunnen worden geadsisteerd.'[154] The Commission introduced a number of measures and had begun distributing breeding stock, but seemed to have problems convincing all farmers of the merits of switching to wool.[155] Perhaps the Commission's most far-reaching proposal – the introduction of tax disincentives for indigenous Cape sheep – was, however, thwarted by the disbanding of the Commission by Lord Charles Somerset in 1815.[156]

During the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the nature of local administration

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[150] Penn, 'Administrative and Financial Reform, 1798', in Maurice Boucher and Nigel Penn, *Britain at the Cape, 1795 – 1803,* (Houghton, 1992), p. 129. British officials writing later in the century certainly did not consider these returns to be very accurate. For remarks on the alleged inaccuracy of livestock figures collected during the Dutch period see CO, vol. 4647,29 January 1858, G.20-'66. *Census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 1865,* p. 3, G.6 – '92. *Census of the Cape of Good Hope – Final Report,* pp. ii-iii.

[151] The inhabitants of the interior were known to travel considerable distances to pay their *opgaaf.* Backhouse mentions meeting a 'Hottentot' in the Kamiesberg who has just sold four oxen and who was making the considerable journey to Clanwilliam to pay the opgaaf for himself and others, Backhouse, op. cit. p. 584.

[152] Willem Van Ryneveld, *Aanmerkingen over de Verbetering van het Vee aan de Kaap de Goede Hoop, 1804,* (Cape Town, 1942), p. 87-89.

[153] Ibid., p. 89, cf. H.B. Thom, *Die Geskiedenis van die Skaapboerdery in Suid-Afrika,* (Amsterdam, 1936), pp. 280.

[154] Ibid., p. 117. ('The Commission will rely considerably on the assistance of *Landdrosts, Heemraden* and fieldcornets in the outlying districts.')

[155] Thom points out that some of the criticisms of the Commission were from wool farmers who viewed the Commission's activities as interference. The *Departement der Bataatsche Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* – an organisation comprised of 'progressives' which aimed to encourage 'all branches of industry at the Cape', feared that its own activities would be stifled by state intervention, Thom, op. cit., p. 284.

[156] Ibid., pp. 292-296.

was also undergoing significant changes as British authorities attempted to mark judicial, military, and fiscal matters with the stamp of central control.[157] On the advice of the Commissioners of Inquiry, boards of *heemraden* were abolished, and *landdrosts* were replaced by British Resident Magistrates and Civil Commissioners, who now also collected all local taxes on behalf of the central government.[158] Fieldcornets were stripped of their military and judicial authority and placed under the direct control of Civil Commissioners and Resident Magistrates.[159] This change in the nature of local authority was to have a significant effect on the relationship between rural inhabitants and the state, as many rural inhabitants expressed feelings of disempowerment as they witnessed how decisions affecting their lives were increasingly being made by authorities far-removed in Cape Town. Andries Stockenstrom, commenting in 1828, noted that rural inhabitants complained that '[e]verything is becoming so English, that we, with our old Dutch habits, feel as if we are no longer in our own country'. They also said that they could no longer rely on the advice of the 'voorstanders van't volk' in their dealings with the government, 'for our oldest and wisest men know as little of the Government as we do.'[160] J. Van Ryneveld, who had been the *landdrost* in Clanwilliam prior to being appointed Civil Commissioner, embodied a style of local authority that was changing: One of the fieldcornets in Clanwilliam explained that he 'always guarded our interests; and we trust that you will continue to do so as a father.'[161]

The British administration at the Cape was infused with what William Freund called 'the cult of the energetic and enlightened ruler', and saw its role in terms of bringing about the 'colonial progress' that the Cape was apparently in so much need of.[162] The Civil Commissioners appointed to rural districts shared this vision of 'progress' in the colony, which for one thing, included a disdain for transhumant pastoralism. Governor Cradock had earlier told state officials that 'to encourage grazing and an indolent... Life in the Individual is not the public object of His Excellency.'[163]

State presence was thin on the ground in the Northern Cape for much of the nineteenth

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[157] Penn argues that claims that the British were reluctant to alter administrative structures at the Cape due to cost may be overstated, 'Barrow', pp. 108-110, cf. William Freund, 'The Cape Under the Transitional Governments, 1794-1814' in Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840.* (Johannesburg, 1992), p. 344.

[158] The functions of administration and revenue collection and judiciary were officially split with Resident magistrates in charge of the latter and Civil Commissioner of the former. Due to an attempt to reduce the costs of administration however, Resident Magistrates and Civil commissioners were usually the same person

[159] Freund, op. cit., p. 336, Ordinance no. 9 of 1845. *For Regulating the Duties and Remuneration of Fieldcornets.*

[160] Keegan, op. cit., p. 186.

[161] A.113-'61 *Correspondence on the Subject of the Trekvelden near the Zak River*, W. Burger - Civil Commissioner, 20 June 1848.

[162] Freund, op. cit., p. 343.

[163] Cited in Leslie C. Duly, *British Land Policy at the Cape, 1795-1844: A Study of Administrative*

century, and *de facto* control by district officials was often, it seems, quite tentative. Louis Anthing in 1862 described how two Commandos organised against the San by farmers in Bushmanland, and which had been halted at his insistence, were likely to be resumed as soon as he left the vicinity.[164] He described the authority of the Civil Commissioners of the North-western districts of Namaqualand, Calvinia, Fraserburg, Victoria and Hope Town during this period as 'merely nominal' in some areas.[165] The vastness of these districts and their distance – both geographical and social - from Cape Town came through in the incessant complaints of the Civil Commissioners of these districts of isolation and even at times, disquietude, regarding their relationship with the local farming inhabitants. In 1860, the Civil Commissioner of Calvinia complained that a group of trekfarmers submitting a memorial regarding the use of trekveld, had used 'indecorous language', 'uttered in the heat of argument, but now, ten days afterwards, still held forth as a sort of intimation to the Government.'[166] In 1861, the embattled Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand, Louis Anthing complained that

> [t]he views I entertain on different questions affecting this Division being at variance with the wishes and views of others, I am placed in a position of apparent antagonism to them. ... A person newly appointed who would not have the disadvantage of being in ill-favour, would be able to conduct the administration of the affairs of the Division with less difficulty.[167]

Particularly in the 1860s and 1870s, there appears to have been considerable resentment of intrusions by 'meddling' district officials as they tried to put an end to the extermination of the San and the ongoing conflict amongst the trekfarming populations in the region.[168] In a period noted for the constant outbreaks of hostilities amongst the farmers who migrated in and around the vast expanse of Bushmanland, local district officials tended to live in uneasy ignorance of happenings in their districts. Civil Commissioners relied heavily on the co-operation of fieldcornets and other state functionaries for information about their districts, but this was by no means always forthcoming.[169] The fieldcornets that Civil Commissioners relied on were elected by local

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Procedures in the Empire, (Durham, N.C, 1968), pp. 47-48. Cradock-Liverpool, 10.06.1812.

[164] CO, vol. 4414. 01.04.1862.

[165] CO, vol. 4414, Anthing- Col. Sec., 10.08. 1862.

[166] CO, vol. 2992, CC. Calvinia. - Col. Sec. 03.01.1860.

[167] CO, vol. 3017, C.C Namaqualand - Col. Sec., 19.07.1861.

[168] In 1866, the Civil Commissioner of Calvinia complained of the 'crying irregularities now being committed with impunity in the totally unprotected portion of this immense district known as the Achterveld', *Blue Book*, 1867, JJ5. See Deborah Findlay's thesis on the extermination of San in the region by trekfarmers, 'The San of the Cape Thirstland and L. Anthing's "Special Mission"', (Honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 1977)

[169] In 1891, for example, the Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand complained of the repeated failure of his Chief Constable to obey his instructions CO, vol. 3674, C.C. Namaqualand - Col. Sec., 20.07.91. E.A Judge similarly had earlier complained that his clerk was 'unwilling to render me more assistance than he could possibly help giving me', Judge, op. cit., p. 84. In 1861, Louis Anthing complained that,

> When I came here, to a Division where everything was strange to me and where I found

inhabitants and were subject to local censure which cast some doubt on their ability and willingness to cooperate with central authorities. James Backhouse explained how a Colesberg farmer, who shot one of his labourers was not apprehended because,

> A Field-cornet was sent with a warrant to apprehend the Boer... but the other Boors who were in association with him, laughed at the Field-cornet, who returned without the man. The Lieutenant Governor also sent to demand him, but without success.[170]

This incident alludes to the degree of self-assurance of the farmers that a fieldcornet would not act against them. The degree of complicity between local farmers and fieldcornets appears to have been no less evident in the North-western Cape: While Backhouse was in the Kamiesberg he noted how local *Bastards* and Khoi were reluctant to take their grievances to their local fieldcornet 'who is himself a Boor, and generally ready to defend his fellow'.[171]

The large extent of territory that made up the districts of Clanwilliam, Calvinia and Namaqualand did certainly not make it any easier for Civil Commissioners, and it was not uncommon for them to draw attention to the size of their districts as they admitted to knowing little of what was going on in their districts.[172] Until the establishment of Namaqualand and Calvinia in 1858, the administrative district of Clanwilliam constituted an estimated area of 22,111 square miles. The information submitted by Civil Commissioners was, by their own admission, often little more than guess-work. When Louis Anthing submitted an estimate of the population in Bushmanland in 1862, he said, 'I may be under or above the mark - I speak indeed quite at random.'[173]

For many of the reasons mentioned above, the position of Civil Commissioner in these districts did not seem to be a particularly sought-after one. Civil Commissioners consistently complained of their isolation and their difficulties in administrating these districts, and begged to be given posts elsewhere. In 1856, for example, the Civil Commissioner asked to be transferred because

> [t]he village of Clanwilliam in which your Memorialist is compelled to reside is the smallest and most wretched in the Colony, and consists only of a few small Houses and huts, its Climate is prejudicial to health, [and] it is situated nearly 170 Miles from Cape Town.... Your Memorialist is entirely without Society.[174]

> everything different from what I had been accustomed to in other Divisions, I found myself standing quite alone.. There was not even a Constable of any time of service who could give me any the least information.

CO, vol. 3017, C.C. Namaqualand – Col. Sec. 31.10.1861

[170] Backhouse, op. cit., p. 346.

[171] Ibid., p. 519.

[172] See for example, CO, vol. 2883, CC. Clanwilliam - Col. Sec. 27.04.52 also CO, vol. 2899, 16.01.54 and 20.05.54. See also CO, vol. 2883, CC Clanwilliam-Col. Sec., 27.04.52 also CO, vol. 2899, C.C. Clanwilliam - Col. Sec., 16.01.54 and 20.05.54. Also CO, vol. 2954, C.C. Calvinia - Col. Sec. 04.08.58

[173] CO, vol. 4414, Anthing-Col. Sec. 01.04.62.

[174] CO, vol. 2924, CC. Clanwilliam-Col. Sec. 18.03.56.

In 1891 the Civil Commissioner of Clanwilliam also asked to be transferred for similar reasons, adding that he had difficulty in communicating with the local inhabitants as he was unable to speak Dutch.[175] In such circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine district officials being not exactly enthusiastic about the prospect of having to collect information on the livestock herds of a suspecting and sometimes hostile population of trekfarmers. It is likely that the figures they returned to Cape Town were born of a compromise between wanting to fulfil their duty adequately, and not having the means and perhaps too, the desire, to obtain the sort of information the government wanted. The difficulties experienced by Civil Commissioners also only served as further evidence of the backwardness of the region they were dealing with and the urgent need for 'progress' in the North-western Cape.

[175] CO, vol. 3667, CC. Clanwilliam-Col. Sec., 07.02.91 See also CO, vol. 3665, CC. Calvinia-Col. Sec., 26.06.91. TRH Davenport notes that some of the commonest objections to the British local authority from Dutch-speaking rural inhabitants was that Civil Commissioners and Resident Magistrates could not speak Dutch and that all official correspondence and court proceedings had to be conducted in English, Davenport, *The Afrikaner Bond: The History of a South African Party, 1880-1911.* (Cape Town, London and New York, 1966).

4
Progressive Farming and the Ethos of Progress in the Cape

Progress as an ethos of economic and social development was directly associated with the rise of the 'Triumphant Middle Classes' in industrialising Europe and it became the dominant defining ethos as these classes emerged in the colonies and began to forge a role for themselves in the economy of Empire.[176] The roots of the progressive ethos lay deep in European thought, but had crystallised in the Enlightenment as a secular, linear understanding of societal development which was conceived to be the goal of all nations. And as Britain extended its rule across the globe, Empire had as its manifest destiny, the bringing of progress to the world. With the ending of the Dutch East India Company's mercantilist rule at the Cape and the reorientation of the Colony's economy towards the free-trade environment of the global market, a class known broadly as 'progressives' began to emerge and Progress became the new banner under which the colony was governed and by which its development was measured. This chapter outlines what progress meant in the context of the nineteenth-century Cape colony, specifically in relation to ideas about the development of agriculture and livestock management. The ethos of progress - with its basis of rationality and moral and material 'improvement' - was what underlay the interest in statistics and it was also what would ultimately define agrarian development in ways which would have significant consequences for the manner in which the state would interact with the trekfarmers of the North-western Cape.

Science and State Intervention in Agriculture

State interventions in the pastoral economy had, by the 1820s, not met with all that much success. The Pastoral Commission set up during the period of Batavian rule at the Cape had practically declined into insignificance by the time it was finally abolished in 1815.[177] Developments in the next few decades would, however, propel the state back into an involvement in the pastoral economy as never before. With the growth of the colony's exports of agricultural products and particularly the rapid rise of the wool industry, a self-conscious class of progressive farmers emerged and began to make demands on the state.[178] The granting of Representative government

[176] My understanding of the nineteenth-century ethos of progress has been drawn principally from Richard Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas,* (New York, 1973), pp. 238-261, C.A. Bayly, *The Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830,* (London and New York, 1989), Du Plessis, op. cit., pp. 36-37, Ronald Robinson (et. al) *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism.*(London, 1961).

[177] Thom, op. cit., p. 64.

[178] While there was already a significant number of wealthy farmers in the Cape prior to this, the altered

in 1853 and then finally Responsible government in 1874 meant that the employment of state resources towards furthering the development of progressive farming was almost inevitable.[179]

Progressive farming had as its focus, an orientation towards the global market, and as its defining ethos, a coalescence of scientific theory, practical experience and solid commercial acumen. Progressive farmers saw themselves as businessmen, and farming was to them something which should be carried out according to principles of science and the dictates of the balance sheet. The Department of Agriculture's *Journal,* in 1892, expressed the principles of progressive farming when it said that 'Agricultural Science [was] the necessary complement of agricultural practice' and added that '[n]ow-a-days the farmer must keep his books and make his calculations as well as the merchant or manufacturer.'[180] Walter Long, President of the Board of Agriculture in Britain, in 1900 said

> They [farmers] had got to learn how they could put the best article on the market at the lowest price they could to yield a profit. Was it not to science that they must turn if they were to solve these problems satisfactorily? The farmer had realised what a gigantic industry was the one in which he was engaged, and how much he had to learn if he was going to prosecute it in a successful manner.[181]

The nineteenth century had marked the development of scientific agriculture in Europe as the arguments that agriculture needed to be rational and scientific became linked to understandings of progress. Underlying this, says Charles Rosenberg, was the contemporary understanding that 'productivity was the essence of an index to progress'.[182] The detailed and 'accurate' measurement and recording of information on agricultural production became one of the things that set scientific farmers apart from the rest.[183] In response to the question 'What is an Acre?', a reader of the *Agricultural Journal* argued that to farm using 'happy-go-lucky' estimates and not to consider the costs, and specifically the labour costs, of production, was 'business without book-keeping, and one can only guess the relation between the cost of raising a crop and the profit it

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economic environment and the context of the British progressivist ethos created the conditions for the rise of a class comprised of farmers, professionals, merchants - both English and Dutch-speaking - all calling themselves 'progressives'. See Thom, op. cit., pp. 158-169 and Robert Ross, op. cit., pp. 17-36 for discussion on the development of a wealthy class of farmers in the Cape in the eighteenth century.

[179] Du Plessis argues that there were few state interventions in the agrarian economy prior to Responsible government. op. cit., p. 192. Responsible government finally made the colony's executive directly accountable to Parliament.

[180] *Agric. J.*, vol. 4, 28 January 1892, pp. 170-171.

[181] *Agric. J.*, vol. 17, 20 December 1900, pp. 799-800.

[182] Charles Rosenberg, *No Other Gods: On Science and American Social Thought,* (Baltimore, 1997), p. 141.

[183] It was not only the government collecting statistical information. Echoing the general burgeoning of interest in statistics in the nineteenth century, Farmers' Associations and Stock Breeding Associations collected and kept their own statistical information. See, for example, *Agric. J.* vol. 17, 5 July 1900 in which an article discusses the recording of information in stud books, and which contained amongst other things, a record of 'every fleece shorn.'

brings in.'[184] A farmer who did not operate using accurate and reliable information was operating at best in the realm of guess-work and at worst in the realm of superstition. A commentator in 1898 complained that the various theories put forward by farmers to explain the low wheat yield in the colony were

> based on no reliable and complete knowledge of the subject. Remedies based on such opinions are mere quackery. If reliable data were collected there would be a better basis upon which to build an improved system.[185]

A letter from the Stellenbosch Agricultural School in 1893 noted the growing importance of standardised measurement in agriculture and complained that many a farmer had

> little knowledge of weights, measures of capacity and square-measure, but merely [spoke] of a "morgen" as x strides long by x strides wide and measures his corn by the bag, his potato crop by the basket or muid and other articles by the load.[186]

Measurement was central to scientific farming because it facilitated the accommodation of local information into a universal framework of scientific understanding. As Witold Kula has argued with regard to grain measurements in Europe in the eighteenth century, measurement was discretionary, and negotiated and disputed in the context of the local social environment. But as Kula argues, these qualitative, discretionary forms of measurement posed an administrative problem to central control.[187]

And it was in this environment that the state took on a role as the collector and disseminator of scientific information aimed at improving production. Statistics formed a central component of this information, and were expected by progressives as part of the states role as the supporter of scientific agriculture.[188] The aim of agricultural science was to come up with answers to problems of productivity. Progressive farmers had a keen interest in the work of scientific experts because of the advice they could offer, but were also very quick to criticise them and their institutions if they failed to prove concrete results – that is, cost effective ways of improving production.[189] While not uncommonly criticising the work of state experts, they were nonetheless convinced of the merits of science in improving agricultural productivity and they conducted their own experiments and came up with their own theories. The *Agricultural Journal* regularly carried

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[184] *Agric. J*, 12 May 1898, vol. 12, p. 593.
[185] AGR, vol. 2, 7/1, 5 April 1898.
[186] AGR, vol.2, 7/1, 6 May 1893.
[187] Kula's argument is discussed in Porter, *Trust in Numbers,* pp. 24-26.
[188] See, for example, the request of the Stutterheim Farmers' Association for regular statistics on Scab disease, *Agric. J.*, 1 March 1900, p. 291.
[189] State spending on scientific initiatives and institutions regularly came under fire in discussion on the Department of Agriculture's annual vote. See for example the debates over the work of the Bacteriological Institute in Grahamstown. *Cape Hansard*, 1895, p. 508 and 9th(5th session), 1898, p. 173. See also the discussion on state trout-breeding experiments, *Cape Hansard,* 1899, p. 583, and for a similar discussion on a the state-run stud farm, *Cape Hansard,* 1890, p. 153.

letters and articles with the suggestions and observations of its readers.[190] The considerable interest of some farmers in the Department of Agriculture's request for statistics on crop yield for wheat, reflects this same interest in finding scientific explanations to agricultural problems.[191] Agriculture was an environment in which the opinions of scientific experts were particularly vulnerable to criticism as farmers had developed understandings of how to farm based on their own observations. As Rosenberg argues with regard to the work of agricultural scientists in America in the nineteenth century, farmers had to be trained to accept the opinion of the scientist.[192] Nonetheless, a common educational background and a shared understanding of what progress entailed, provided the foundation for a dialogue between state experts and progressive farmers. State experts, in acknowledging some of the Cape's particular farming conditions, welcomed these observations by 'intelligent farmers'.[193] And while there could often be disagreement, the dialogue was always undertaken in the discourse of scientific rationality and with a confidence that science could provide the 'true' solutions.[194]

Competition in the global market had provided an urgency to questions of agricultural productivity. In 1899, in the midst of concerns about the quality of wool being produced in the colony, the Chief Inspector of Sheep urged farmers to take note of the pressures of global competition:

> If the Cape Colony was the only wool-producing country in the world, if the wool manufacturers were dependant upon our export of the raw material for their annual supplies, there would exist a lamentable absence of healthy competition, and farmers in the colony might possibly offer this as an apology for the inferiority of the article they produce. But this is not the case. The rivals we once had have outstripped us in the march of progress, and there are other competitors, who are surely and rapidly leaving us in the rear ranks. At the present time our wool, when offered on the London markets, is looked at askance, buyers shrug their shoulders, and like the Pharisee pass by on the other side...The natural result is that the prices offered decline, and will still further decline, until we, by our own supineness and lack of energy, allow our wools to be shouldered altogether from the markets of the world.'[195]

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[190] A reader in 1895, for example, argued that the decline in sheep numbers in the old sheep-farming districts was due to overstocking and added that 'I know that the Veterinary surgeons attribute the disease prevailing in these parts to other causes.' *Agric. J.* vol. 8, 30 May 1895, p. 266, see also vol. 16, 15 February 1900, p. 247.

[191] *Agric. J.*, 3 November 1892, p. 224. There is also a large amount of correspondence on these returns in AGR, vol. 2, folio. 7/1.

[192] Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 148.

[193] A comment attached to a letter to the Department of Agriculture submitting statistics on wheat yield in 1893 said, 'This is the first reply to our circular from an intelligent man, I suppose the results may be fairly accurate', AGR, vol. 2, folio 7/1, Merriman – Secretary for Agriculture, 19.01.1893.

[194] Donald Denoon describes colonial states during this period as 'early enthusiasts for the application of science and technology to rural production' as they confronted ecological barriers to the development of commercial agriculture, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere*, (Oxford, 1986), p. 82.

[195] *Agric. J.*, 19 January 1899, vol. 14, p. 86.

The growing competition in the world market was directly linked to changes in trade brought about by transport developments. In July 1895 the *Agricultural Journal* quoted from a pamphlet issued by the department of Agriculture in Victoria, notably titled 'Practice with Science'. The article urged farmers to recognise that technological developments in transport and communication, 'have changed the whole system of commerce....The effect of these has been to destroy local markets, and to consolidate all into one market - the world.'[196] Merchant capital formed the important linkage between producers and the market, and, at the district level, it was the local merchants who were one of the major driving forces behind improvements in agricultural production.[197] It was not without reason that the Commissioner of Public Works said in 1882 that

> *the best Minister of Agriculture is the merchant, who competes with others for the farmer's produce, who introduces new machinery, and leads him to improve the staple so as to get command of the world's markets.* If the merchants here [the Western districts] were as energetic as those in the Eastern Province you would soon notice a great improvement in every direction.[198]

Saul Dubow noted that the interest of merchants in improving the quality of agricultural produce had developed as a consequence of the depression of the 1860s; prior to this, he says, merchants had failed even to offer differential prices for wool.[199] Merchant houses such that of Mosenthal in the Eastern Cape, began to invest in wool-washing facilities and offered prizes at agricultural shows in an effort to encourage better wool production.[200] The firm of Barry and Nephews took on a similar role in the Overberg, and was apparently largely instrumental in encouraging the switch from Cape to Merino sheep in the 1850s and 1860s.[201]

Tony Kirk has described the progressives as 'a rising generation of self-made men, whether British or Afrikaners... among its ranks, the 'progressive' sheep and cattle ranchers, the village store keepers and artisans, the accountants, attorneys, newspaper editors and professional men.'[202] There was considerable overlap in the interests of these men and indeed it was not uncommon for a single individual to fulfil a number of these roles. District merchants were providers of credit, land speculators, and often also owned considerable livestock herds of their own. Aided by their links to commercial and financial institutions in Cape Town, some of the Irish

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[196] *Agric. J.*, 25 July 1895, vol. 8, p. 389.
[197] Saul Dubow outlines the central role of merchant capital in the development of wool-farming in the Eastern Cape, 'Land, Labour and Merchant Capital in the Pre-industrial Rural Economy of the Cape: The Experience of the Graaf-Reinet District, 1852-1872', *Communications,* no.6, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1982.
[198] C.2-'82, p.1. (Emphasis added.)
[199] Dubow, op. cit., pp. 26-28.
[200] Ibid., p. 28.
[201] Du Plessis, op. cit., p. 88. Merchants had a very real interest in the quality of the wool they were buying, as better quality wool not only fared better against international competition, but was also less vulnerable to price fluctuations, Thom, op. cit., p. 188.

1820 settlers who had remained in Clanwilliam had become large landowners and commercial farmers and who, according to P.L. Scholtz, 'took the lead in economic, educational and administrative areas'.[203] Richard Fryer, for example, owned considerable portions of land in the district, became director of the Mutual Life Assurance Society, and owned a number of local trading stores.[204] The cross-section of interests of people who characterised themselves as progressive is perhaps perfectly embodied in the character of one Von Schlicht who was investigating the feasibility of sinking boreholes in Bushmanland in the 1860s. The Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand described him as

> the pioneer of the Copper discoveries in this district, tho' his success has been less than his energy and perseverance seemed to merit. Now again he has at considerable expense, and with no small loss, introduced a flock of well-bred wool-sheep.[205]

These progressive men were at the forefront of the wave of foreign capital flowing into the colony during the nineteenth century.[206] In the absence of other attractive investments prior to the Mineral Revolution, much of this capital went into agriculture, particularly export production which offered significantly higher returns, and the nineteenth century was characterised by a succession of pastoral booms - in wool, mohair, and ostrich feather production.

It is worth reminding ourselves at this point that the organised and interested 'progressive' farmers that we are speaking about were a mere fraction of the colony's total farming population. The Department of Agriculture's *Journal* – sent to all members of Farmers' Associations - was by 1889 being distributed to just 4,000 farmers and to 5,000 ten years later, at a time when the estimated number of farmers in the colony was approximately 30, 000.[207] Progress was a goal that had to be striven for, and as such, the *Agricultural Journal,* the newspapers of the day, and the speeches of state scientists often centred on the need for more farmers to embrace progress, and farm according to the methods of scientific agriculture. A newspaper article cited by Andrew Steedman in the 1830s argued that the aim of Agricultural Societies and the diffusion of information by them and the government, was to 'open the eyes of the agriculturists generally to the magnitude, importance and certainty of the rewards which follow enterprise and perseverance.'[208] Du Plessis discusses the importance of newspapers in espousing the ethos of

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[202] Cited in Du Plessis, op. cit., p. 57.
[203] Scholtz, op. cit., p. 91.
[204] G.B. Dickason, *Irish Settlers to the Cape: History of the Clanwilliam 1820 Settlers from Cork Harbour,* (Cape Town, 1973), pp. 43-58.
[205] CO, vol. 3017, Anthing - Col. Sec. , 04.10.61. Von Schlicht had been responsible for the discovery of a large copper ore deposit at Springbokfontein, but had had difficulty evoking the interest of investors, John Smallberger, *Aspects of the History of Copper Mining, 1846-1931,* p. 33.
[206] Denoon, op. cit, pp. 71-73.
[207] *Agric. J.,* 1 August 1889, p. 198, *Cape Hansard,* 1899, p. 582 and G.6-92, *Census of the Cape Colony,* 1891, p. lxxxvi.
[208] Cited in Steedman, pp. 66-67.

progress and looks in particular at the *Cape of Good Hope Almanac and Annual Register*.[209] What is significant about this series is that it was privately-published and contained much of the same information as the officially-published Blue Books of Statistical Returns. The intentions of its authors were also not dissimilar to the aims of the government in publishing statistics. The preface to the 1832 Almanac made a clear connection between education, progress and the development of commercial agriculture -

> As Education shall expand the mind of the Rising Generation, as Civilisation shall go steadily rather than rapidly forward, and as Liberal Sentiments and Knowledge shall come to bear upon the Colony's Capabilities, an entire change will be wrought in the aspect of the country. Every acre of cultivable land will be brought into use; every tree and herb, and almost every green leaf, will be rendered subservient to the use of man, as it was meant by the Creator to be.[210]

The publication of such 'useful information', Du Plessis argues, aimed to construct the idea of the colony as a 'political, economic and social whole, rather than a conglomerate of disparate entities'.[211] As we have seen already in chapter one, the proponents of progress viewed 'useful information' as a central component of educating the populous to an understanding of progress. As Theodore Porter argues, statistics operate as measures of achievement, and succeed to the extent that they become 'technologies of the soul', providing legitimacy for administrative actions because they provide standards against which the actions of individuals could be measured.[212] Publishing information on livestock numbers, livestock disease and production levels would point to standards against which the performance of individual farmers could be measured and as such, it was hoped, they would be driven to pursue improvements for themselves. Access to information was thus thought to have a direct influence on the productivity of individual farmers. An article published in the *Agricultural Journal* and taken from an American journal for dairy farmers makes a direct connection between information and improved productivity. In a survey taken of patrons to a creamery in Kansas, they were asked the question 'What farm or dairy paper do you take?' Out of the seventy five patrons who answered the question, only 22 regularly read a farm or dairy paper. The article continues:

> In looking up the details of the records of the patrons it was interesting to note that the highest yield was made by a man who takes both dairy and farm papers. The man with a farm paper was getting from $60 to $80 worth of dairy products from one cow, while the man who had no time to read was getting from $20 to $30.[213]

The Cape Department of Agriculture firmly believed that the dissemination of information would

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[209] Du Plessis, op. cit.,pp. 52-54.
[210] Cited in Du Plessis, op. cit., p. 54.
[211] Ibid., p. 74.
[212] The term is from Nikolas Rose in Porter, *Trust in Numbers,* p. 45.

convince farmers of the need for improved farming practices. It was lack of knowledge, an article in the *Agricultural Journal* argued, that explained the failure of livestock farmers in the North-western Cape to appreciate market pressures, which in turn would make them see the advantages of co-operating with state legislature aimed at combating Scab:

> [w]ere such particulars as these more widely known, and could farmers only realise the decrease in their incomes, and the corresponding loss to the State, I am convinced that half measures would no longer be adopted, but that there would be more general demand for more stringent legislation.[214]

The sort of 'knowledge' the author of the article has in mind, is 'useful knowledge', the 'knowledge' contained in statistics.

Educating Farmers: Scientific Farming and Moral Progress

The proponents of progressive farming urged the necessity of educating the colony's farmers in a way that would enable them to enjoy the 'benefits' of scientific agriculture. Science, they argued, provided the only way to understand the world and, as such, was of 'obvious' application in improving farming methods. A contemporary observer, commenting on the need for agricultural schools, urged that practical farming experience was not enough, men needed 'to learn all the scientific laws.'[215] Science was what made agriculture a 'modern' vocation; it was what separated farming as a business from farming as 'mere subsistence.' Like any businessman of this day, the modern farmer was 'intelligent' and 'informed'. In 1909, a farmer and member of the Legislative Assembly, spoke of the professionalisation of agriculture in the colony:

> In the past our boys have gone in for the liberal professions because they thought it more fashionable. Farming was considered as below the work of a doctor or lawyer of surveyor and others. During the last four or five years, that feeling has changed, and people now look to agriculture as being as fashionable, or even more fashionable than some of the liberal professions.[216]

As Charles Rosenberg has noted, the 'infusion of science and systematised knowledge into the farmers' workaday routine would not only benefit his economic condition but also improve his lowly status.'[217] The status of trekfarmers was certainly very 'lowly' in the eyes of the proponents of progress. They needed to be educated to farm more scientifically and the attempts of state experts to propagate an understanding and acceptance of standardised measurement was part of

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[213] *Agric. J*, 21 December 1899, vol. 15, p. 859.
[214] *Agric. J*, 3 August 1899, vol. 15, p. 163. A similar point was made by John C. Molteno in a Select Committee inquiry into the establishment of an agricultural college, A.1 – 09, *Report of the Select Committee on an Agricultural College*, p. 63.
[215] A.1-'1909. *Report of the Select Committee on Agricultural College*, p. 28.
[216] Ibid., p. 12.

this education.

Standard measurement was seen as the necessary accompaniment to scientific agriculture, and state officials considered the apparent lack of understanding of accurate measurement and recording by many farmers an obvious barrier to the improvement of farming techniques. One of the problems in discussions about irrigation was, for example, confusion over the meaning of 'an inch of water', referred to by the Hydraulic Engineer as 'the meaningless expression used by farmers when talking of water flowing through an aperture' and he urged the necessity of standardising the term.[218] State experts also had to urge the importance of taking accurate measurements of dipping tanks and dips. The Scab Commission in 1894 blamed the ineffectiveness of dipping by farmers in the Cape interior on their haphazardness in measuring the sheep dip, and went so far as to propose that farmers who did not accurately calibrate their dipping tanks face a fine of £20.[219]

A link was also developing in the minds of the proponents of progress between scientific farming and the careful use of environmental and agricultural resources. The techniques familiar to many of the colony's livestock farmers - veld-burning and kraaling - were characterised as wasteful, out-dated practices and were criticised on the grounds that they damaged the veld, resulting in the 'poverty' of the herds. When the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon made suggestions about how to improve pastoral production at a meeting of farmers at Grahamstown in 1899, he said:

> I am strongly of opinion that we cannot increase the pastoral products of the Colony by merely increasing the number of our flocks and herds unless we alter our system of farming at the same time.... It is a well-recognised maxim amongst all intelligent breeders, that no man can rear animals profitably under conditions that are unfavourable to their proper development....Our system of stock-farming requires to undergo a complete change, the natural pastoral resources of the Colony must be conserved and utilised to the best advantage, and artificial measures adopted to increase and develop them as far as possible.[220]

While it appears that earlier conservationist theories had met with little response due to the threat they posed to the activities of settler farmers, by the 1880s, there were significant fears among progressive farmers about veld-degradation.[221] As a result, progressive farming became directly

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[217] Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 19.
[218] G. 27-'86, p. 10.
[219] G.1-'94. *Report of the Scab Commission, 1892-1894,* p. 23.
[220] *Agric. J.*, 19 January 1899, vol. 14, pp. 64-66.
[221] See Richard Grove's discussion on the work of the Colonial Botanist in this regard, 'Scotland in South Africa: John Croumbie Brown and the Roots of Settler Environmentalism' in Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (eds), *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies.* (Edinburugh and Pietermaritzburg, 1997), especially, pp. 148-149. Also, 'Early Themes in African Conservation: the Cape in the Nineteenth Century' in David Anderson and Richard Grove (eds.), *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practice,* (Cambridge, 1987).

linked to an understanding of the need to make sustainable use of the 'natural pastoral resources of the Colony'.

The actions of the trekfarmers - their failure to invest in improvements, their adherence to trekking, their blatant disregard for measures aimed at conserving resources of veld and wild-life - was another way in which they were un-progressive.[222] Embedded in this characterisation of trekfarming, however, was also a moral element in understandings of progress. The image of the 'backward', 'wasteful' Boer had been a long-standing characterisation of the farmers of the interior. In 1663, Governor Wagenaar criticised trekfarmers for their 'indolence... and irregular and debauched lives.'[223] Barrow, at the beginning of the nineteenth century said that trekfarmers were 'a class of men, of all the rest, the least advanced in civilisation'.[224] This, says J.M. Coetzee, 'was no peripheral matter... in that it threatened one of the arguments by which expansive imperialism justified itself: that those deserve to inherit the earth who make the best use of it.'[225] '[B]ecause of his sloth, his complacent ignorance, his heartlessness towards the natives, his general slide into barbarism seemed to betray the whole imperial side.'[226] Trekfarming was not only wasteful and unscientific, but it was also the activity of ignorant, lazy men and progress was not just about making improvements in agriculture, it was about stemming the decline of farmers in the interior into lawlessness and ignorance; it was about the fight between 'civilisation' and 'barbarism'. In 1860, a surveyor touring the districts in the North-western Cape said:

> our migratory population in the interior - both *trekboeren* and aborigines - are steadily and rapidly increasing in numbers, but they are just as steadily, if not as rapidly, subsiding into a state of ignorance, which if unchecked, must soon verge painfully close to barbarism. The most effectual if not indeed the only real remedy for this, as far as I can see, is the immediate commencement of a system of irrigation or other analogous improvements.[227]

As Du Plessis notes, in the moral economy of progress, commercial growth, civilisation, competition and free enterprise were all linked.[228] And progress was not purely an economic transformation, but a cultural conversion as well. In 1861 an editorial in *Het Cradocksche Nieuwsblad* said that the newspaper aimed to point out to readers

> the advantage of getting 14 per ct. per annum for their money for purchasing shares in the 'Cradock Union' and other Banks...; - the benefits arising from Agricultural Societies - planting trees - making Dams, - buying Cawood's American pumps.. the pleasure and comfort which they will be sure to derive by improving their homesteads, -

[222] Lawrence Green mentions the difficulty the state had in protecting the game reserve which had been proclaimed in Bushmanland in 1893, *To the River's End,* (Cape Town, n.d), pp. 136-137.
[223] Cited in J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa,* (New Haven and London, 1988), p. 29.
[224] Barrow, op. cit., p. 401.
[225] Coetzee, op. cit., p. 3.
[226] Ibid.
[227] G.29-'60, p. 47.
[228] Du Plessis, op. cit., p. 40.

> having a nice little flower-garden, railed off with the staves of 'Pyramid' Ale barrels, and a 'cozy' little parlour, with a carpet, in which they may occasionally treat their friends to a *kruije soopie*, - and which in time may break them off the nasty habit of spitting tobacco juice on the floor, or against the side of the pew in church.[229]

The Winning Side: Progressive Politics

These sorts of characterisations and intentions had significant consequences in a context where the progressive ethos was gaining increasing political dominance and as organisations of progressive farmers began to constitute a significant political force. The first Farmers' Associations had begun to emerge in around 1825 in the wool-producing districts of the Eastern Cape with the aim of assisting their members in obtaining capital and making improvements.[230] Morrell, speaking of Farmers' Associations in the Transvaal in a later period, argues that they were a direct response to the perceived need for organisation by those intent on responding to expanding market opportunities.[231] The political power of these sorts of organisations, and of progressive farming interests more generally, may be observed in the rise of the Bond which had developed out of Farmers Associations.[232] It was due to pressure from Farmers' Associations that the Department of Agriculture was created in 1887 as the colony's commercial farmers and merchants reeled under the effects of a drought and a depression in the world agricultural market.[233] The influence of these lobby groups in public policy, both in the area of public opinion and in Parliament, was significant. When the motion for the establishment of a Department of Agriculture was introduced to Parliament, the Premier noted that it was likely to win the support of both parties. Beinart says that such measures as the Scab Act were the work of an 'inter-locking agrarian and political elite'.[234] This elite was linked by their common understand of development as progress. Mordechai Tamarkin argues that the 1895 debate over the Scab Act, for example, was waged as a war between the proponents of progress - linking merchant, mining and commercial farming

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[229] Cited in Du Plessis, op. cit., p. 61.
[230] Thom, op. cit., p. 68.
[231] R. Morrell, 'Competition and Cooperation in Middelburg, 1900-1930', in William Beinart, Peter Delius, Stanley Trapido (eds), *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930.* (Johannesburg, 1986.), p. 386.
[232] Denoon, op. cit., p. 117.
[233] *Cape Hansard*, 1885, pp. 385-6.
[234] Shaun Milton argues that a common understanding of progress provided the basis for an alliance between the technocrats from the Department of Agriculture and a small but influential group of farmers and landowners in the Transvaal at the beginning of the twentieth century, whose influence on the formulation and implementation of agricultural policy, he says, 'cannot be overestimated', Shaun Milton, 'The Transvaal Beef Frontier: Environment, Markets and the Ideology of development, 1902-1942' in Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (eds.), *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies.* (Edinburgh and Pietermaritzburg, 1997), p. 201.

interests - and a minority characterised as anti-progressive.[235]

The state aligned itself behind commercial agriculture. At the Annual Congress of the Association of Agricultural Societies in 1898, the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon outlined the state's position regarding pastoral development when he said '.. as with the increasing quantity of really good stock in the country some protection should be given to the importer and breeder who protects the best interests of the country by rearing really high-class bred stock.'[236]

The power of progressive farmers by the latter half of the nineteenth century, was great and through insinuating themselves into an active dialogue with the state, they were able to have a significant say in directing the development of the agrarian economy during this period. Denoon notes that it was in the context of a dominance of settler groups committed to the production of export staples, that agrarian economies developed in the colonies in the way they did. 'This', he says, 'was a matter of self-regulation rather than imperial direction, but it was none the less effective, and it did dissipate the energies of groups who might have driven the societies towards self-reliance.'[237] The consequence of this, was the discouraging of autonomous production by peasants, subsistence farmers, manufacturers who had no clear connection to export production. Perhaps most importantly, however, Denoon notes that the political consequence of the discouragement of autonomous production was that 'formal political life became a contest between those groups which accepted the logic of export-led development.'[238] It was more than the logic of export-led development that had to be accepted, however, it was development understood as *progress* – incorporating not only the growth of commercial agriculture, but also an understanding of 'improvement' as investment in technology, and of 'scientific' farming as the application of systematic and standardised measurement and practise to problems of agricultural productivity.

[235] Mordechai Tamarkin, 'Flock and Volk: Cape Afrikaner Sheep Farmers in the Mid 1890s: Between Ethnic Calling and the Call of Economic Survival.' Paper presented at the 16th Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society, 6-9 July 1997.
[236] Report on the Annual Congress of the association of Agricultural Societies, *Agric. J.*, 9 June 1898, vol. 12, p. 682. Absent from the congress were any representatives from the districts of the North-western Cape.
[237] Denoon, op. cit., p. 228.
[238] Ibid.

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'The Neighbourhood of the Mere Nomadic Grazier': Trekfarmers of the North-western Cape

Held up to the light of progressive farming, trekfarming and the trekfarmers of the North-western Cape could only be viewed as essentially *non-progressive*. Both their farming practices and their trekfarming lifestyle came in for sustained criticism from contemporary newspapers, state officials, and the other advocates of progress in the colony. As trekfarmers resisted the state's pastoral reform interventions and apparently turned their backs on scientific farming, their response was characterised as a lack of appreciation for, and resistance to, progress. More recently, their response has been treated as resistance to capitalism.[239] Both perspectives are to some extent valid, but both also require some qualification. The resistance of trekfarmers - which often constituted no more than an attempt to continue farming as they thought best - should be viewed, not as resistance to capitalism or to progress, *per se*, but to the particular formulations which each took as trekfarmers encountered them in the North-western Cape in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Similarly their apparent resistance to scientific farming, probably has a great deal to do with the way in which 'science' was understood by state experts and the way in which it was presented to trekfarmers.

Measures of Progress in the North-western Cape

Apart from the copper mines in Namaqualand, the North-western Cape seemed to be devoid of almost any signs of progress by the mid-nineteenth century.[240] Trekfarmers resisted the sale of land in the region; they failed to make any sort of improvements, and indeed often resisted improvements when they were suggested.[241] Worse still, they refused to listen to the scientific

[239] See for example, Mordechai Tamarkin, 'Flock and Volk', specifically p. 7.

[240] The copper mines did not seem to be providing the catalyst for significant development in the region. In the 1860s the Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand complained of his district as being 'the poorest in the Colony' and noted that the valuable Cape Town market was still frustratingly out of reach. John Smallberger, *Aspects of the Development of Copper Mining in Namaqualand, 1846-1931*, pp. 84-85.

[241] The Civil Commissioners reports contained in the annual *Blue Books of Statistical Returns* routinely pointed to the lack of 'progress' in the region. Extracts from the reports of 1859 provide some reflection of what seems to have been commonly-held views of state officials on these districts - The Civil Commissioner of Clanwilliam complained that 'while other districts of the colony have been rapidly progressing in agriculture and commerce, it appears that Clanwilliam has not advanced one step.' The Civil Commissioner of Calvinia said that pastoralism in his district 'gives little or no trouble, promotes indolence and consequent want of energy... The farmers are thus rendered incapable of undertaking any improvements...' *Blue Book*, 1859, p. JJ3.

reasoning of state experts and were determined, it seems, to continue in their 'ignorant' and 'wasteful' ways. When the Civil Commissioners of Clanwilliam and Namaqualand were asked to ascertain the likely response of farmers in their districts to the idea of state loans for irrigation schemes, both pointed out that farmers in their respective districts would not be all that interested in such a scheme, due, they maintained, to their lack of appreciation for the benefits of progress. The Civil Commissioner of Clanwilliam held that

> with few exceptions, their apathetic dispositions are so inherent that no argument is sufficient to produce any favourable result; their ideas do not appear to extend beyond the present means of obtaining a subsistence for themselves and their families, without a thought for the future prosperity of their children.[242]

The Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand, in turn complained that '[u]nder existing circumstances, their chief object appears to be to increase the extent of their properties, rather than to improve what they already possess.'[243] The Colonial Veterinary surgeon would still be saying a similar thing twenty-three years later, only this time about the response farmers to Scab legislation:

> there are a great many minds amongst the farming community in this Colony formed after the model of a certain apostle's, whom no amount of logic will convince... No amount of reasoning will make converts of such men, and I may be only wasting paper in continuing the discussion.[244]

Trekfarmers of the North-western Cape do certainly appear to have resisted many of the developments commensurate with progress. While the state envisaged progress as the growth of sedentary, commercial agriculture, between the 1820s and the end of the century, trekfarmers of the region consistently petitioned against the sale of trekveld - the areas of open grazing land used in the cycles of seasonal transhumance.[245] Farmers of the region argued that the prices that land was sold at were prohibitive in a region where such large amounts of land were needed to farm

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[242] G.54-'62. *Copy of a Circular Addressed by the Colonial Secretary to the several Civil Commissioners, and their Replies thereto, on the Subject of Irrigation*, p. 9. Ford - Colonial Secretary, 16.05.62.

[243] Ibid., p. 10. Judge - Colonial Secretary, 30.05.62.

[244] G.26-'86. *Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon for 1885.*

[245] Considerable opposition to the alienation of trekveld in the 1820s resulted in the appointment of a Commission to investigate the issue. The correspondence and minutes of evidence from this investigation are bound together in CO, vol. 8547. There were a number of other investigations throughout the subsequent period into the issue of the alienation of trekveld. See for example, A.55-'60. *Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Assembly to His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor dated 23rd March 1860, on the Subject of the Granting of Looriesfontein to the Bastaards,* A.46-'60. *Report and Proceedings of the Select Committee on Trekvelden,* G.30-'60. *Copy of Correspondence with the Divisional Councils... in which 'Trekvelden' exists on the Subject of the Future Disposal of these Lands,* A.113-'61. *Correspondence on the Subject of the Trekvelden near the Zak River,* A.3 - '64. *Select Committee Report on Crown Lands,* A.8-'66. *Report of the Select Committee appointed to investigate and report on the Petition from Bastaards and others at the Rhenish Mission Station.*

effectively and argued the necessity of keeping trekveld open.[246] The state was, however, unimpressed with the opposition to the alienation of land in the region - not only did it constitute a loss of potential revenue for the state, but it also meant that farmers were not being encouraged to make the sorts of improvements associated with progress. A Commission investigating the workings of the Scab Act in the 1890s was dismayed at the apparent lack of interest in making improvements to the land shown by local farmers: In response to being told by Jeremias Nieuwoud, a Calvinia farmer, that farmers rented land from the government for a few years and used it communally, one of the Commissioners said, 'So that really there is a large tract of country being used as a sheep run which is perfectly undeveloped, and which under the present circumstances never will be developed?' Nieuwoud's response was that the quality of the veld changed dramatically according to the amount of rainfall and as such farmers did not consider it worthwhile to limit themselves to one piece of land.[247]

The preference of the state for sedentary farming and the connection its officials made between settlement, improvement and progress was evidenced in the words of the Surveyor General in 1860 as he outlined his vision for development in the region:

> I have no doubt that the alienation of these Trekvelden to private owners is a mere question of time, which will be forced on the good sense of the divisional councils and the public by the contrast which their pasture will present, in their unimproved condition, with their unopened, badly-used fountains and water-holes, and wasteful occupation, when colonial progress should have pushed enterprising land-owners, the makers of dams, the builders of houses, and the cultivators of the soil, in greater numbers to the neighbourhood of the mere nomadic grazier.[248]

Transhumant pastoralism precipitated significant anxieties about the moral development of the inhabitants of the colony's interior and it seemed to the proponents of progress that the region's inhabitants were dangerously beyond the supervision of the state and the influence of the 'civilising' forces associated with settlement.[249] The education that was so closely associated with the moral development of the colony was severely lacking in the region and was one of the things that appeared to hamper progress in the region.[250] While it appears that levels of literacy in the

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[246] CO, vol. 2846, ref.8, 14.03.1848. See also, A.113-'61 *Correspondence on the Subject of the Trekvelden near the Zak River,* A.3 - '64. *Select Committee Report on Crown Lands.*

[247] G.1-'94. *Report of the Scab Commission, 1892-1894,* p. 577.

[248] G.30-'60. *Copy of correspondence with the Divisional Councils of certain divisions in which 'Trekvelden' exist on the subject of the future disposal of these lands,* Surveyor General – Col. Sec.

[249] The antipathy of state's to transhumant pastoralism is almost universal, see Ali Said, 'Pastoralism and the State Policies in Mid-Awash Valley: The Case of the Afar, Ethiopia'. African Arid Lands Working Paper Series No. 1/94, The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

[250] Civil Commissioners' Reports, *Blue Book,* 1858, pp. JJ5. The problems faced by the state in educating a nomadic population are discussed in P. J. van der Merwe, op. cit., pp. 241-2, 268-271. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Department of Education took the unprecedented step of appointing a teacher who spent several years travelling around the northern part of Calvinia with the trekfarmers. Van der Merwe, op. cit., p. 270.

region were not significantly lower than other rural districts in the colony, there were few schools besides those attached to mission stations .[251] In 1860 a surveyor noted that although farmers on the Olifants river were able to read and write, having had some education, '[a]rithermatic is not taught, and I believe there is not one of the farming population I allude to who can cipher a sum in the simplest rules of arithmetic.'[252] Many of the region's farmers had been taught to read and write at home by itinerant tutors or through sporadic attendance at a mission school. This was hardly the sort of education that was associated with progress. 'Progressive' education was secular, conducted in English, and strongly rational. The aim of this education was to impart to the student a broad and rational understanding of how the world worked and an appreciation for liberal values.

The proponents of progress argued that the failure of farmers in the region to adopt scientific farming methods and to make improvements was due to their ignorance. In 1894, the Scab Commissioners were perturbed by the apparent lack of rational understanding among certain farmers of the interior. The report of the Commission said that it had been necessary to 'minutely cross-examine witnesses... for the purpose of elucidating statements, often made without sufficient forethought, or to hear out preconceived notions which had no foundation in fact, and which on minute examination were consistently found to be untenable.'[253] Even Julius Voskule, who described himself as a 'large storekeeper and speculator', when asked if Scab was contagious, replied that he did not think it was contagious in Cape sheep.[254] The Commissioners were sceptical of his understanding of how Scab did develop:

> Commissioner: What in your opinion, is the cause of scab in Cape sheep here?
> Voskule: It is the winter, when the dew falls.
> Commissioner: Do you think it is caused by an insect?
> Voskule: That is possible; I don't know.
> Commissioner: Do you think that the winter and the dew create the insect?
> Voskule: If it is an insect they may.
> Commissioner: Do you know of any other insect or animal which is created in that way, without parents?
> Voskule: No.
> Commissioner: Then scab insect must be an exception to all other rules?
> Voskule: That may be; I have not seen the animals which make an insect, but I leave it to those who are experienced in it.

[251] *Blue Book, 1865*, pp. Y14-17, G.6-'92, pp. 486-7.
[252] G.29-'60. *Reports of the Surveys of the Olifant's River*, p. 39.
[253] G.1-'94. *Report of the Scab Commission, 1892-1894*, p. 2.
[254] G.1-'94. *Report of the Scab Commission, 1892-1894*, p. 569.

Scientific Experts in the North-western Cape

Farmers of the North-western Cape, like others elsewhere, believed that knowledge was gained through experience and observation and were suspicious when state scientists appeared and began making claims about how to farm, based, it seemed, purely on theoretical knowledge. As Mordechai Tamarkin notes, one of the distinguishing features of trekfarming communities, was their reluctance to accept that knowledge about farming could be gained from books.[255] These farmers were not as convinced of the universality of science as were many progressives. In 1882, the Commissioner of Public Works had noted that '[t]he farmers are not very prone to take the advice of theoretical strangers. They ridicule the idea of experts from Europe being able to show them anything...'[256]

While progressive farmers deemed them irrational, farmers such as those of the North-western Cape, often had a very clear idea of the conditions in which they were operating and, at a time when many of the measures advocated by state experts were meeting with indifferent success, farmers in the region were reluctant to believe that 'progressive' measures were better than their own. When one North-western Cape farmer was asked why he had moved his stock contrary to Scab Act regulations, his response was simply that 'he [knew] the conditions of his veld better than the Inspector.'[257] In a farming system adapted to the peculiarities of the region and designed to take best advantage of local environmental vicissitudes, farmers of this region were also acutely aware of how their farming practices differed from those of other parts of the colony. Farmers in the North-western Cape were, for example, finding that commercial wool farming in the region was not all that easy. When a Commission investigating the working of Scab Acts in 1909 noted the decline in numbers of wool sheep in the North-west between 1894 and 1908, they found that farmers in the region were switching to Cape sheep because they were apparently better able to handle poor veld conditions, were less fussy about drinking water, and had a better breeding capacity than merinos.[258] In a region where farms were generally about 40 square miles in extent and even the wealthiest farmers moved their stock seasonally, fencing was a costly and, many thought, unnecessary investment. In 1909 it was noted that except around cultivated land, fencing

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[255] Tamarkin, op. cit., p. 6, William Beinart also points out that one of the main difficulties facing state experts in combating livestock disease, was in persuading farmers that the diseases were known to science, 'Vets, Viruses and Environmentalism at the Cape', in Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (eds), *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies.* (Edinburugh and Pietermaritzburg, 1997).

[256] C.2-'82. *Report of the Select Committee Appointed by the Legislative Council to Consider and Report upon the Appointment of a Minister of Agriculture,* p. 1. See also *Agric. J.*, 28 January 1892, p.170.

[257] G.11-1909. *Report on the Scab Acts and their Administration in the North-western Districts of the Cape Colony*, p.6.

[258] Ibid., p. 5.

was virtually unknown in the North-western Cape due to the cost involved in fencing the large farms.[259] Boreholes and dams were considered both expensive to construct and difficult to maintain.[260]

The divergence of opinion between the growing concern among some 'progressive' farmers over veld deterioration and the determination of trekfarmers to continue the practices which progressives believed caused this damage to the veld, reflects the discontinuity that could exist between understandings of agricultural practices and the natural environment. Progressive farmers seemed increasingly concerned about veld deterioration, a concern shared by state scientific experts and, in seeking an explanation for veld deterioration, they identified some of the practices that were most central to livestock farming by trekfarmers, namely - trekking, kraaling and veldburning.[261] These practices were indeed the very things which livestock farmers of the North-western Cape relied upon in order to deal with seasonal and drought-related fluctuations in grazing land. They seemed to accept these fluctuations as inevitable and had adapted their farming to account for them. As Bishop John Marie Simon noted in 1897:

> The seasons are too irregular. Your investment grows for two or three years, and then a large part of it is lost during the drought that inevitably follows. You can hardly count on a good season in three. Add to this serious disadvantages of many diseases that kill off your animals by the hundreds...'[262]

He added that during the 1897 drought, 'Those who had lost everything abandoned cattle raising and simply became employees of those who still had a few possessions. Some lost as many as 300 cattle and 800 sheep, but in the ensuing years many have been able to re-enter the ranks of well-to-do farmers.'[263] In 1909 a report similarly noted that 'A farmer [in the North-western districts] may lose half his small stock in time of drought, but he knows that two or three favourable seasons will more than restore the loss..'[264]

In 1896, when the Member of Parliament for Calvinia complained that the Scab Act was not practicable in the North-western Cape, he defended the local knowledge of the region's farmers; their right not to be convinced by the authority of state experts such as the Colonial Veterinary surgeon:

> Those farmers had taught themselves to farm; they knew their sheep and their veld, and no one could teach them what they ought to do with their sheep. Their grievances were

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[259] Ibid., p.2.
[260] G. 33 - '84. *Report of Hydraulic Engineer for 1883*, p. 23.
[261] Richard Grove discusses the influence of John Croumbie Brown in raising concerns about the effects of veld-burning in the 1860s, 'Scotland in South Africa'.
[262] John Marie Simon, *Bishop of the Hottentots: African Memories, 1882-1909*, p. 105.
[263] Ibid.
[264] G.11-1909. *Report on the Scab Acts and their Administration in the North-western Districts of the Cape Colony*, p. 1.

genuine, and nothing could persuade them to believe the contrary. The advocates, doctors and other learned men of the House got their information from books; the farmers learned by experience, and how could such people know what was good for farmers and what farmers were capable of doing. They – the advocates and doctors – failed to see that what could be carried out in Australia could not necessarily be carried out in South Africa.[265]

Farmers it seems often had very real concerns about the effects of the measures advocated by scientific experts, and often had cause to doubt the merits of 'scientific' agriculture. Some of the early experiments by state experts or 'progressive' farmers did not meet with particularly good results. Officials in the Department of Agriculture were frustrated by the fact that farmers of the North-west were not responding to calls to assist in the extermination of locust despite the fact that the anti-locust fungus was supplied to farmers *gratis*. Yet it seems that farmers were apparently concerned that the fungus would harm their crops or livestock and the Department of Agriculture itself admitted that the fungus was not all that effective in dry conditions.[266] Similarly, many farmers were worried about having poison on their farms for dipping against Scab, while traces of dip in drinking water were apparently turning sheep away from water sources.[267] Early work on livestock disease vaccines was also characterised by indifferent results, and the dipping of livestock prescribed by state experts was reported to have led to numerous stock deaths.[268]

Scientific Agriculture, Commercial Farming and Capital

Many of the measures associated with scientific farming practices required significant capital investment. We should not ignore the correlation between 'wealthy' and 'progressive' that was applied so effortlessly by contemporary observers. Wealthy farmers were 'progressive' and 'backward' farmers were generally poor. Many farmers in the North-western Cape simply lacked the access to credit or capital to make improvements. In 1894, a Calvinia farmer told the Scab Commission that while he was convinced of the scientific arguments of the state veterinary surgeons, the costs of dipping were simply 'greater than the benefit which would be derived from it.' And he added that '[a]nother difficulty is the poverty of a good many of the farmers, who have neither money nor credit'.[269] In 1883, a petition signed by twenty five inhabitants of Clanwilliam, Calvinia and Namaqualand called the government's attention to the suffering which the recent drought had caused in the region and asked the government to investigate the possibility of

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[265] *Cape Hansard*, 1896, p. 227.
[266] *Agric. J.*, vol. 15, 28 September 1899, pp. 480-481.
[267] *Cape Hansard*, 1894, p. 120 , G.11-1909. *Report of the Scab Acts and their Administration in the North-western Districts of the Colony*, p. 5.
[268] G.26-'86, p. 11 and also G.11-1909. *Report of the Scab Acts and their Administration in the North-western Districts of the Colony*, p. 5.
[269] G. 1-94, *Report of the Scab Commission, 1892-1894*, pp. 577-578.

irrigation in the region, adding that 'your Petitioners individually, or as a body, are utterly unable to defray the costs of irrigation works of great magnitude.'[270] Loans for such improvements as irrigation and fencing were available through the state, but farmers who lived on leasehold or mortgaged farms were generally prohibited from obtaining them. Lack of security was the main reason given by the Hydraulic Engineer in the 1880s for refusing irrigation loans. Of the sixteen applications from Calvinia at the end of 1880, only six were found eligible, 'owing solely to the insufficiency of security'.[271] The Hydraulic Engineer explained in his report in 1883 why farmers who had applied for loans to construct storage dams, weirs and furrows, had their requests refused:

> It is to be regretted that their generally impoverished state has prohibited (in a degree) the Government extending all the aid to them it is anxious to, nine-tenths of the Farms being mortgaged. Until the possessors of those farms find a way out of their monetary engagements with the Bond-holders, so as to enable them to benefit by the terms offered them under the "Irrigation Act", they are likely to remain the holders of unproductive farms.[272].

Access to credit for improvements was the factor which distinguished wealthier farmers from most trekfarmers. As Morrell points out, credit was crucial in determining the success of farmers and banks preferred land to stock as security, and definitely preferred lending to larger farmers engaged in more 'scientific' farming practices.[273] Morrell notes too, that lack of capital prevented farmers from making the shift towards export-orientated production or cultivation - as is reflected in the petition of the inhabitants of Clanwilliam, Calvinia and Namaqualand referred to above.[274] And, while stockfarming was often 'not an easy or lucrative option', farmers who could not afford to make the improvements to match the growing export standards demanded by buyers were at a distinct disadvantage.[275] A report on Clanwilliam in 1882 noted that '[t]he possession of current coin is a rarity few of them enjoy. Credit has failed them, tradesmen and friends can help them no longer.'[276]

This brings us to the question of the apparent opposition of these farmers to capitalism. As I said in the introduction to this chapter, they were arguably not opposed to capitalism *per se* —indeed they were all to some extent involved in producing for the market—but to the particular form of capitalism that they encountered. The complaints of trekfarmers in 1844 that land was

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[270] CO, vol. 3674, Inhabitants of Clanwilliam, Namaqualand and Calvinia - C.C. Namaqualand.
[271] G.37-'83. *Report of the Hydraulic Engineer*, 1882, pp. 4-6. See Also G.33-'84. *Report of the Hydraulic Engineer*, 1883, p. 6
[272] G. 33-'84. *Report of the Hydraulic Engineer*, 1883, p. 19.
[273] Morrell, op. cit., p. 379-382.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Morrell, op. cit., p. 379-382.
[276] G.37-'83. *Report of the Hydraulic Engineer*, 1882, p. 30. Balfour - Gamble, 03.08.1882, Civil Commissioners' Reports in the *Blue Books* for 1862 and 1863.

being sold to 'Capitalists or Rich Men' provide an indication of how trekfarmers of the region understood 'capitalism'. [277] Capitalism was not for them necessarily the structural relationship that we apply retrospectively, capitalism meant very particularly, the actions of certain individuals - often 'parties unconnected with the district'- whose activities often impacted on their own ability to farm.[278] Trekfarming was also not a practice that was compatible with capital-intensive livestock farming, and a clash of interests between trekfarmers and wealthy land-owning farmers was inevitable.[279] The water sources and land that trekfarmers relied on were being bought up by wealthier farmers or land speculators and fenced off. By the 1880s pressure on trekfarming was also growing as trekking was being severely hampered not only by the alienation of land, but by the halt on any further expansion by the desert margins of the Kalahari and the Namib and finally by the German acquisition of South West Africa in 1884.[280] Progress, as many rural inhabitants were certainly aware, would not benefit every one; development had as its corollary, underdevelopment, which had significant implications for many rural inhabitants. As Du Plessis says, '[a]fter all, who was it who had little to lose and much to gain from a fully rationalised infrastructure including the unrestricted movement of capital in pursuit of profit, greatly increased social mobility, fully secularised local government and free trade?'[281] Economic life in rural districts was often dominated by the local merchant who bought produce and extended credit and who was often characterised by rural inhabitants as an exploiter.[282] The links these rural capitalists had to Cape Town did not go unnoticed by rural inhabitants. The concerns of local inhabitants often reflect an apprehensiveness about the loss of local control and influence that seemed to accompany the march of progress. Indeed, 'progress' had at its very centre, an understanding of the development of a 'united' colonial society.[283] The naive assumption of the surveyor, Patrick Fletcher in 1860, that local inhabitants in Clanwilliam had no reason not to embrace progress reflects the degree to which the proponents of progress failed to recognise the unequal nature of development in the colony, and the damaging effects it could have on rural inhabitants. He said that local farmers 'gravely suspected the insecurity of their land-tenure', but

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[277] 1/WOC, vol. 11/15, Petition of Inhabitants of Hantam - C.C. Worcester, 05.01.1844.
[278] A.113-'61.
[279] Morrell notes with reference to the Transvaal that trekking was a practice which was destined to divide the farming population as a custom which depended on usufructuary rights. Morrell, op. cit., p. 375. cf. P. J. van der Merwe, op. cit., pp. 275-278. Van der Merwe notes that the seasonal appearance of trekfarmers in Namaqualand was treated by landowners as ''n plaag, net soos sprinkane' and that Namaqualand farmers took to protecting their land from use by trekkers in the trek season, p. 278.
[280] Christopher, op. cit., p. 140.
[281] Du Plessis, op. cit., p. 142.
[282] Dubow, op. cit., pp. 5- 28, Scholtz, op. cit., p. 73.
[283] Robert Wiebe had noted a similar tension and concern over the loss of popular community control in rural America in the late nineteenth century in his discussion on the roots of Populism, Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920,* (London and Melbourne, 1967).

added the he was 'confident that ere long they will think otherwise; that they will soon understand the relation they bear to the colony at large, and learn that they are governed - not by foreign lords and masters, but by their own elected representatives.'[284] His comments earlier in his report, however, suggest that the statements of opposition from local farmers reflected more of an awareness of what progress meant than state experts were comfortable with. When he reported on his surveys of the Olifants River, he noted that to talk to the farmers in the region

> of artificial irrigation by dams on the river, the idea is ridiculed; and pumps, they can satisfactory demonstrate would prove a dead failure. Those of them who have a vague notion that something might be done in this direction, fear the introduction of taxation, but perhaps the idea most dreaded of all is, that the land will somehow or other get into the hands of strangers (*vreemde menschen*), or that such will be encourage to settle among them.'[285]

In other words, at the root of their opposition to irrigation was the fear of taxation they could ill-afford and that irrigation would be the harbinger of 'progressive' commercial farming and land speculation that they had seen elsewhere in their region. As development occurred along certain lines and as progress was defined in specific ways, the characterisation of the North-western Cape was to have implications both politically, and for its future development, as formal political life both in the region and in the colony as a whole was dominated by the ethos of progressivism.

The Politics of Progress

The almost total lack of any signs of 'progress' in the North-western Cape, made the need for development in the region all that more obvious and the politicians who represented the region were throughout the latter half of the century all strong progressives. Political life in the region was generally dominated by mining interests, local merchants and large, wealthy farmers – all proponents of progress. The MP for Clanwilliam was often a local merchant or farmer and the representative for Namaqualand was usually linked to mining interests. The member of the House of Assembly for Namaqualand between 1899 and 1907, Francis Oats, had for example, been a mining engineer and became a director of De Beers Mines in 1890. He was also linked to large commercial farming interests and served on the boards of Rhodes Fruit Farms and Imperial Cold Storage company.[286] John X. Merriman, also member for Namaqualand in the late nineteenth century and later Premier, was also linked to mining and merchant interests and was described later as a 'pioneer fruit exporter and producer.'[287] The member of the House of Assembly for Clanwilliam in the 1860s was H. Steele who was also the manager of the Namaqualand Mining

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[284] G.29-'60. *Reports of the Surveys of the Olifant's River*, p.48
[285] Ibid., p. 39.
[286] Beyers, C.J.(ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography,* vol.IV, pp. 415-6.

Company.[288] The political representatives for the region were thus, it seems, often the very 'Capitalists' and '*vreemde menschen*' that local inhabitants complained about. And there is perhaps no better way of illustrating what 'representation' meant to these progressives than referring to the words of J.X Merriman in 1894, then Member of Parliament for Namaqualand:

> The country was going back because people were not keeping pace with the times.... the lack of moral courage in the country was causing much of the present state of affairs. Many people came and said they were in favour of a Scab Act, but their people were against it and they were going to vote against it. They were there to teach their constituents from the better knowledge they were able to obtain not to vote as they were told.[289]

There was a significant distance between trekfarmers and the so-called farmers representatives of their districts and this distance came to the fore in 1895 in the debate over Scab legislation. The trekfarmers were dismayed to see that even their own party, the Bond, failed to back them in their opposition to anti-Scab legislation.[290] Farmers of this region not uncommonly referred to a sense of marginalisation. A memorial from farmers in the Kenhardt district in 1891 described themselves as 'tydelyke Trekkers' and complained that 'Uwe memorialisten woonen verre van den Hoofdzetel der Regering en het Gouvernment hoord selden hoe het in de buitenhoeken der Kolonie gesteld is.'[291] The lack of political representation had important implications for the way in which the state allocated its efforts and resources. The state lent its support to progressive farmers and commercial agriculture and as such, those regions where commercial agriculture was strong were more in line for state spending. Perhaps it is not surprising then that there were no railways in the North-western Cape apart from those linking the copper mines to Hondeklip Bay and Port Nolloth until the early twentieth century. The North-western Cape was left completely out of the discussions on railway provision in the 1890s. A member of the House of Assembly joked at the time that all districts in the colony needed railways equally, except '[t]hose which were already amply supplied...[and] also the exception of Namaqualand and Clanwilliam, which everybody would acknowledge were wholly out of the railway beat, so to speak.'[292]

It is ultimately the ability of regional interest groups to evoke state support for their needs that guides the nature and extent of state interventions in a region and the dynamics of regional involvement in a national agrarian economy. As Denoon points out, environmental constraints do

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[287] De Kock, W.J and Kruger, D.W. *Dictionary of South African Biography*, vol. II. (Pretoria, 1972)
[288] A3-'64. *Select Committee Report on Crown Lands.*
[289] *Cape Hansard*, 1894, p. 165.
[290] Tamarkin provides a detailed account of the split between progressives and conservatives over anti-Scab legislation and the sense of disempowerment felt by many Dutch-speaking rural inhabitants during this period, *Cecil John Rhodes and the Cape Afrikaners, The Imperial Colossus and the Colonial Parish Pump*, (Johannesburg, 1996), pp. 200-210.
[291] CO, vol. 4275, Kenhardt inhabitants - Col. Sec. 14.11.1891.
[292] *Cape Hansard*, 1890, p. 64.

not alone determine regional development so much as the ability to organise the means to overcome these constraints and it is the work of political groupings to organise for these measures. The lack of transport infrastructure and the state's reluctance to respond to the calls of farmers in this region for direct state assistance, points to the lack of political representation available to these farmers and the dominance of other interest groups. Certainly, when the problem of transport in the North-western Cape was brought up in Parliament by the Member of Parliament for Namaqualand in 1902, he noted that 'it was unfortunate that the great bulk of the members of the House were ill-acquainted with the districts north-west of the main line of railways.'[293] The apparent economic marginalisation of the region was linked in his mind to political marginalisation and he continued, saying that the provision of transport in the region should not be left 'for private enterprise' as some members of the House had suggested, and that the people of the district 'had received practically no recognition at all.' 'What evidence had the people of his constituency (Namaqualand), for instance, that the Government cared for them in any shape or form. They were protected by the law, and that was all.'[294]

As Du Plessis argues with regard to Paarl, however, not all members of rural communities *wanted* railways. This brings us to another aspect of the opposition of trekfarmers to progress. Just as there was a moral element to the ethos of progress, so too was there a moral perspective to the opposition to it. Conservatives in Paarl boycotted railways in the 1860s in response to the proposal to run trains on Sunday. The introduction of railways posed a disruption to established patterns of commerce and social life, argues Du Plessis, and Sunday trains struck at the very core of a community life centred around church activities.[295] It was the perceived impact that many of the features associated with progress would have on community life that concerned these rural conservatives. That trains were also understood to be an undesirable link to the corruption of the city, reflects a certain perspective on 'progress'. Development defined by some as the 'march of progress', was understood by others to be social and moral decay.[296] This thinking was encapsulated in pastoral literature as far back as Theocritus and offers a view of the changes commensurate with development not as progress, but as decline.[297] Progress was accompanied by a secular understanding of the world that was antithetical to the world-view of many Dutch-speakers of the Cape interior.[298] As Du Plessis notes, in discussing the opposition of Paarl conservatives to state-run education, a great deal of this opposition stemmed from the realisation that secular education offered an education infused with the confidence in empirical science and

[293] *Cape Hansard*, 1902, pp. 397-398.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Du Plessis, op. cit., pp. 178-179, 184.
[296] cf. Dubow, op. cit., pp. 14-28.
[297] Coetzee, op. cit., pp. 8-31.

rationality that was at the centre of progressive understandings of the world, and which was something which they could not share. John Fairbain had articulated this confidence in man's scientific rationality when he explained that progress had placed 'all the powers of man under the control of right reason and an enlightened conscience' and which 'by the co-operation of numbers, realises the most stupendous effects.'[299] Du Plessis argues that this sort of confidence in man's rationality—assisted, it should be noted, by *numbers*—was seen as arrogant speculation about the will of God by conservatives.[300] Christopher notes that there was significant opposition to irrigation schemes from some farmers, many of whom, Christopher says, regarded it as acting against God's wishes: 'We have been told that God made the rivers so that the water should run in them and hence it should not be taken out by artificial means.'[301] The complaint of farmers that irrigation was sinful because it was against the will of God, should be read in the context of this different understanding of knowledge. This perspective was, however, difficult to reconcile with the progressivist ethos with its strong grounding in empiricism and positivism and according to which the world could only be understood through scientific observation. Things which were unverifiable directly, such as God, could not form the basis of *knowledge* and thus to say that irrigation was a sin, was to operate not in the realm of knowledge, but in the realm of belief, and faith was, in the end, irrational. The progressive confidence in scientific method was again evinced in the comments of the Chief Inspector of Sheep in 1899 when he told farmers in a conference in Grahamstown that '[i]t is in the power of man to banish parasitic diseases from the face of the earth...'[302] He contrasted his modern view with the 'mediaeval view' of those who argued that Scab was a 'direct interference of the Almighty.' What troubled him was that '[t]hey conclude that being so they must be accepted as inevitable, must be met with humiliation and prayers, until the Deity shall be appeased and shall miraculously cause the pest to die out.'[303] Acknowledging the validity of the 'irrational' beliefs of trekfarmers would be to concede to the failure of the rationalist conception of universal knowledge and would constitute a serious threat to the colonising perspective of the coloniser's right over the territory because of superior knowledge.[304] Herod in W.H. Auden's 'The Massacre of the Innocents' contemplates this scenario:

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[298] Christopher, op. cit., p. 20.
[299] Cited in Du Plessis, op. cit., p. 105.
[300] Du Plessis, op. cit., p. 146.
[301] Christopher, op. cit., p. 62.
[302] *Agric. J.*, vol. 14, 19 January 1899, p. 77.
[303] Ibid., p. 76.
[304] David Spurr argues that the moral imperative to Imperialism rested partly on the way in which colonial discourse operated to construct the colonised lad as 'chaos calling for the restoration of order, absence calling for the affirming presence, of natural abundance that awaited the creative hand of technology', op. cit., p. 28.

> Reason will be replaced by Revelation. Instead of Rational Law, objective truths perceptible to any who will undergo the necessary intellectual discipline, and the same for all, Knowledge will degenerate into a riot of subjective visions.[305]

In the context of a political and social environment where progress formed the dominant discourse, the understandings and perspectives of trekfarmers were difficult to articulate in a way that would render them as something more than merely irrational belief. As such trekfarmers were as much intellectually sidelined as they were politically disempowered. Even their 'own party' refused to take up their cause in the debate over anti-Scab legislation because such a move would be seen as being a move against progress. The difficulty faced by certain districts in attempting to press their demands on the government in this context may be observed in the comments of the representative for Richmond, Thomas Theron. Theron, in 1890, complained that the present railway systems had not benefited Richmond and its surrounding districts, but that the difficulties of these districts were ignored because 'it was said that the country people judged in ignorance, and that their public meetings were worthless.'[306] And again, the question of access to information was not an insignificant factor: Another member of the House responded to Theron's complaint by saying that 'the political education of the electors of that district are sorely in want of more information before they were able to pass an opinion upon the railway question.' He continued – 'Their infancy in politics is demonstrated by there being no other man competent to preside at a public meeting and explain the position of public affairs than the parson.'[307]

Resistance and Information

Despite attempts by the state to encourage 'colonial progress' along the lines it advocated, trekfarmers continued to farm as they considered best. The arguments of state experts, and the 'obvious' merits of scientific farming they advocated, did not simply win over the hearts and minds of trekfarmers. The fact that the state introduced legislation and fines to force farmers to comply with state pastoral reform measures, is a reflection of the considerable lack of consensus about the benefits of these measures. When the state had attempted to put an end to the communal use of trekveld by selling or leasing it to individual farmers, farmers joined together in syndicates to hire large tracts of land under one person's name and as such continue using it seasonally and communally.[308] When the state attempted to enforce anti-Scab legislation, dipping requirements and restrictions on the movement of stock were simply ignored by farmers. When the state

[305] E. Mendelson (ed), *W.H. Auden, Collected Poems*, (London, 1976), p. 303.
[306] *Cape Hansard,* 1890, p. 71.
[307] Ibid.
[308] G.1-'94. Report of the Scab Commission, 1892-1894, p. 577.

attempted to include the region in the operation of the Scab Act in 1894, it was met with marked resistance and non-cooperation by district farmers. Even the Scab officers who had been employed to keep tabs on the operation of the Act were being found guilty of contravening provisions of the Act. In 1894, the member of the House for Calvinia complained that the Scab Act was not practicable in the North-western Cape and that even 'the enterprising, the best farmers in the district were opposed to the Bill.'[309] In 1909 it was noted that the principal reason for the decline in the number of woolled sheep in the North-western Cape in the previous two decades had been due to farmers 'intentionally having crossed or sold their woolled sheep, believing that by getting rid of these they would be free from the operation of the Scab Act, which they regarded as not only wholly inapplicable to the North West but also likely to occasion them great loss.'[310] It was noted in 1909 that Scab Officers and Scab Boards in the North-western Cape, were themselves not carrying out their duties regarding the enforcing of the Scab Acts. The report complained that 'some members of the Scab Boards and even some Inspectors have expressed their opposition to the operations of the Scab Act'[311] When farmers apparently suggested that the Act be administered by the elected Scab Boards in the district, the Secretary of Agriculture was not all that impressed, pointing out that there would then be no one to ensure that the Inspectors 'do their duty' and he reaffirmed the decision that Scab Boards act purely as advisory bodies.[312]

One of the main ways though that trekfarmers of the region could avoid the intervention of the state was simply to withhold information. So much of the state's activities depended on the co-operation of local farmers for its operation, that the withholding of information constituted a significant barrier to state intervention. In 1868, the Civil Commissioner of Clanwilliam in response to queries relating to the newly introduced Crown Pastures Act, complained that he was unable to obtain any information on the number of cattle being grazed on Crown land in his district because the local Divisional Council had passed a motion saying that information could not be provided. He notes that 'they were careful to lay no information against each other' and that as 'the Depasturing Act is not acceptable to them for obvious reasons ... that therefore as a class they are unwilling to co-operate with me.'[313] Other legislation such as that which prohibited the burning of the veld by farmers was also almost impossible to enforce without the support of local farmers. The 1877 Commission on livestock diseases found that almost all of the farmers they interviewed said they burnt the veld.[314] A resident of Worcester, Mr Lindenburg, had earlier

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[309] *Cape Hansard*, 1894, p. 161.
[310] G.11-1909. *Report on the Scab Acts and their Administration in the North-western Districts of the Cape Colony*,p.5.
[311] G. 11-1909. p. 11.
[312] Ibid.
[313] CO, vol., 3125, ref. 21, C.C. Clanwilliam - Col. Sec.
[314] G.3-'77, *Report of the commission appointed to Inquire into and Report upon Diseases in Cattle and*

complained that farmers were ignoring legislation prohibiting veld burning. When the Colonial Botanist suggested that the law was possibly 'in advance of public opinion on the matter', another local farmer, Mr Rabie disagreed, saying that it was not that the law was in advance of public opinion, and that '[f]armers were not so stupid as not to know what was good for them; but the real difficulty lay in the unwillingness of the farmers to become informers on their neighbours.'[315] Some of the more famous examples of this, however, were the opposition of livestock farmers to measures aimed at combating epizootics. There was considerable opposition to anti-Scab measures throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and by 1896, for example, the Scab Act was apparently almost being totally ignored in the North-western districts.[316] Much of the problem lay in the reliance of this legislation on the co-operation of farmers. The Animal Diseases Act (1881) relied almost entirely on the voluntary reporting of animal diseases to Resident Magistrates, field cornets, or Justices of the Peace and in 1889 it was still necessary for the *Agricultural Journal* to urge farmers to comply with the provisions of the Act.[317] For local farmers, the influence of their neighbours and local farming practices often had more reality than the distant rumblings of state policy. A surveyor who was accompanied by a Clanwilliam farmer on his a tour into the North-western Cape to investigate irrigation, said in his report that the farmer had 'incurred the displeasure of most of his friends and neighbours.'[318]

The Census branch and the Department of Agriculture constantly pleaded with farmers not to underenumerate their livestock holdings for fear of taxation, yet despite imposing a £5 fine for refusing to give information, the fact that the state was still complaining in 1904 that farmers were underenumerating their livestock holdings, is a sign that there was little the state could do, and that it had failed to convince many farmers of the benefits of state statistics on livestock.[319] The collection of livestock figures was, after all, the manifestation of concerns about the progress of the colony and the need to 'educate' the colony's farmers; neither of which were viewed as particularly relevant to many of the trekfarmers in the region who were far-removed from the progressivist ethos that underlay these concerns. The attempts of overworked district officials to count the district's livestock, could quite possibly have seemed to the region's trekfarmers to verge on being a little irrational itself. What, after all, were rows and rows of figures ever going to achieve? The counting of livestock was not necessarily seen as being central to one's ability to farm. Barnabas Shaw mentioned a Liliefontein farmer 'who possessed three or four hundred

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Sheep in this Colony.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Charles Van Onselen, 'Reactions to Rinderpest in Southern Africa, 1896-97', *Journal of African History*, 13(13), 1972, p. 474, fn.9, Beinart, op. cit., p. 89.
[317] *Agric. J.*, 4 Jul. 1889, p. 189.
[318] G.29-'60. *Reports of the Surveys of the Olifant's River*, p. 13.
[319] CSS, vol. 4/1/1, ref. 401. 18.02.93 and CSS, vol. 4/1/2, 07.94.

sheep and goats could never count further than twenty, and yet, if on coming from the field, one sheep or goat were missing he was sure to find it out.[320] When the possibility of collecting annual figures on livestock and losses to livestock disease was mooted in 1892, the Minister of Agriculture was not particularly optimistic about obtaining the information that Parliament wanted. 'There were some farmers whose information was not to be relied upon, while others kept no books, but carried the number of their stock in their heads; and in many cases he was afraid, the farmers were not quite correct.'[321]

Income tax was introduced by the Taxation Act of 31 May 1904, and livestock enumeration was once again linked directly to taxation and stock numbers were required from farmers at the beginning and end of each year for valuation purposes.[322] We should perhaps not be surprised to discover that the state relied on farmers to make submissions, nor that the Commissioner of Taxes complained that farmers were avoiding making submissions. He said that according to the 1904 census there were about 34,000 farmers in the colony, out of which, only 219 paid taxes in 1904/5 financial year.[323] Despite the information the state had collected on livestock herds, it still struggled to enforce payment of taxes and, from now on, the state would find it considerably more difficult to convince many farmers that the collection of information on their livestock herds was in their best interests.

[320] Barnabas Shaw, *Memorials of South Africa,* (London, 1841), p. 77.
[321] *Cape Hansard*, 1892, p. 38.
[322] G. 32-1905. *Report of the Commissioner of Taxes, for the year 1904-5.* pp. 52-54.
[323] G.34-1906. *Report of the Commissioner of Taxes, for the year 1905-6.* p. 5.

6
'True Legislation': Statistics and the State

> 'The people of this land have asked through their representatives in Parliament for information regarding its resources, and the Government relies upon its Officers satisfying this public want for the public benefit.'[324]
>
> 'For the very state apparatus that was built on numbers would also be bound, by its design, to misuse numbers... Under such circumstances, a tyranny of numbers would be both inescapable and seemingly unassailable - for enlightened and accountable governments would be enforcing it, and sovereign populations would be demanding it.'[325]

Despite the fact that statistics were for 'the public benefit', the authorities at the Cape in the latter half of the nineteenth century had considerable difficulty enumerating the colony's livestock herds. Much of this difficulty arose from the lack of interest and sometimes outright hostility from the very public for whose benefit the statistics were supposedly being collected. Added to this, the collection of statistics also posed considerable administrative problems, and the enthusiasm of state functionaries for livestock enumeration was often just as wanting. The state nonetheless persevered, and the Cape Department of Agriculture (later the Department of Lands, Mines and Agriculture), despite all the difficulty and expense it entailed, collected annual and sometimes monthly figures on livestock and livestock disease from the time of its establishment in 1887, until it was disbanded in 1910 with Union.[326] These statistics were all about progress – charting 'colonial progress' and making it happen, as the state used the statistics to make decisions about interventions in the agrarian economy. Despite their claim to offer a 'true' reflection of conditions, statistics could not, however, ultimately provide the answers to questions regarding state policy and the allocation of resources. What statistics offered was more the prospect of a 'tyranny of numbers' as decisions were negotiated in a public arena based on numbers and an understanding of the colony, its resources and its potential, that was often very far from the reality of many of its inhabitants.

The state had considerable difficulty throughout the nineteenth century collecting the statistics it wanted. The difficulties they faced, said state officials, were observable in the lack of accuracy of the colony's livestock figures.[327] The final report of the 1865 census noted that the

[324] AGR, vol. 2, folio 7/1, Circular no. 9 of 1894
[325] Nicholas Eberstadt, *The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule,* (Washington, D.C., 1995), p. 16.
[326] *Cape Hansard,* 1902, p. 448.
[327] The final reports of census publications during this period always apologised for the inaccuracy of the data and complained of the difficulty of date collection. See for example, G.20-'66. *Census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 1865,* p. 5, G. 42-'76. *Results of the Census of the Cape of Good Hope,* p. 2, G. 6-'92. *Census of the Cape of Good Hope, 1891 – Final Report,* p. cx.

returns for livestock and crop production were 'somewhat unsatisfactory', stressed the difficulty of conducting a census in a 'thinly-peopled colony', and pointed out that the inhabitants viewed demands for statistical information as 'necessarily preced[ing] measures for increased taxation.'[328] The report also noted that 'in numberless instances, enumerators had not comprehended the true significance of the form used, or had been imperfectly instructed as to the mode of filling it up.'[329] The Department of Agriculture was similarly disappointed in the response it received to its requests for regular returns on livestock and harvests. In 1893 the Secretary of the Department of Lands, Mines and Agriculture complained that the monthly reports of 'agricultural prospects' from Civil Commissioners have 'with but very few exceptions.. been entirely disregarded.'[330] In 1893 only three returns were received - two from the inspectors of Native locations and one from the Civil Commissioner of Bredasdorp. Between October 1894 and August 1895 no returns are received from Calvinia, none from Clanwilliam and only two from Namaqualand, while other districts such as Graaf-Reinet, Kimberley, Fort Beaufort, and Carnarvon submitted returns on a regular basis.[331] In 1891, the Colonial Secretary lamented of the livestock figures collected in the census: 'I wish it, however, to be distinctly understood that, in the nature of things especially in this Colony, agricultural statistics are at best but mere approximations. All I can do is to vouch for the absolute accuracy of the tabulation.'[332]

'The Nature of Things especially in this Colony': Enumerating the Cape

As the Colonial Secretary so accurately noted, a great deal of the state's difficulties lay at the point of collection, operating in a terrain where neither the public nor its own functionaries necessarily shared its understanding of, or appreciation for, statistics. Not everyone in the colony was convinced of the merits of the state's statistical queries, and official notices and contemporary newspapers, all stressed the need for the public to recognise the 'value' of livestock enumeration. An article in the *Cape Argus* in 1875 complained that census enumeration was

> greeted in many quarters as a joke, and false or inaccurate particulars are likely to be given, but erroneous impressions appear to have got abroad as the precise nature of the census. Some folks are foolish and credulous enough to believe that the object of the Government is additional taxation.... Everyone possessing any common sense must be well aware of the value of statistics, and none are more important than the number of inhabitants in a country, the quantity of land under cultivation, how many flocks and herds are in existence, and the like...[333]

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[328] G.20-'66, *p.* 5.
[329] Ibid. See also G.42-'76, p. 1.
[330] AGR, vol. 57, fol. 217/2. Circular no. 6 of 1893.
[331] AGR, vol. 57, fol. 217/2, undated list.
[332] G.6-'92, p. cx.
[333] *Cape Argus,* 4 March 1875, p. 2.

Some inhabitants of the colony simply did not care about the 'value of statistics' and considered the state's statistics-gathering activities an unnecessary intrusion.[334] In 1902 when the House of Assembly was debating the merits of the annual livestock returns, a member of the House complained that it was 'a sort of inquisition for a policeman to come to a man's farm and make inquiries into his private affairs, which he would report to one's neighbours.'[335] A letter from 'An Enumerator' to the *Cape Argus* in 1865 said that although enumerators were generally well received, he knew of one householder and Justice of the Peace, who refused to give any information even after the third visit and who apparently said that 'he would see the enumerator d—d (sic) first'.[336] The response of an individual to the census was no doubt greatly influenced by his or her previous interaction with representatives of the state, their perception of the value of the information gathered, as well as their understanding of community. The collection and dissemination of statistical information was seen, as we have already noted in chapter one, as part of the process of educating people to understand the colony as a unified society. The possibility of charting the progress of a colonial society through statistics appears to have been more a progressive ideal than a reality. The need for a national awareness of progress had to be constantly urged. In 1848, the editor and writer, Dr A.N. Changuion complained of the lack of national identity in the colony:

> Although a great deal of the available talent could be useful, it fails to mature because it is not being developed... Too soon, before they properly know what citizenship means, they want nothing more than merely to earn money, to marry and raise a family. Must a grain farmer not think beyond his fields?[337]

Members of the public were also sceptical of the enumeration process itself and had doubts about both its accuracy and its validity as a reflection of conditions in the colony. A satirical article published in the *Uitenhage Times* in 1865 alluded to a general lack of confidence in the capabilities of enumerators as the writer of the article assumed the voice of a semi-literate enumerator.[338] ('Sittin down by the road side I drawd up the follin list of questions which I proposed to ax the people I visited.') Some of the questions asked by him included - 'What's yer age?' 'Air you marrid? and if so how do you like it? How many children hav you, and do they sufficiently resemble you as to proclude the possibility of their belongin to any of yer nabers?' 'Did you ever hav the masels, and if so, how many?' 'Do you know any Opry singers, and if so, how much do they owe you?' 'How many chickens hav you, on foot and in the shell?' The article is clearly poking fun at the alleged lack of education of many of the enumerators, but also refers to

[334] CSS, vol. 4/1/1, ref. 401. 18.02.93 and CSS, vol. 4/1/2, 18.12.93.
[335] *Cape Hansard*, 1902, p. 448.
[336] *Cape Argus*, 1 April 1865, p. 3.
[337] Cited in Du Plessis, op. cit., p. 74.
[338] *The Uitenhage Times and Farmers' Courant*, 30 June 1865, n.p.

larger consideration - the state's statistical queries are caricatured as an obsessive enumeration of meaningless data including 'Opry singers' and 'masels'. Was the information the state collected that 'valuable' after all?[339]

The problems the state had with its own functionaries were not insignificant, and they could by no means be trusted to provide 'accurate' information. Field-cornets who were used for livestock enumeration for much of the period were as much members of local farming communities as they were on the state's payroll and under the authority of local Civil Commissioners and Resident Magistrates. They were usually farmers themselves and shared similar perspectives to their neighbours. They went to the same church, spoke the same language, had a similar education, and farmed in similar ways. A Commission appointed in 1857 to investigate the possibility of holding a census suggested that fieldcornets not be used for census enumeration, saying that they '[did] not appear to be suited for the purpose of obtaining an accurate census of the colony; as their position and avocations would generally prevent them from devoting the necessary time and trouble to this work.'[340] In what was a common-place characterisation of the ignorant Boer farmer – the Civil Commissioner of Oudtshoorn told the Commission that fieldcornets '[were] not sufficiently intelligent or accurate to undertake the compilation of a census, such as is now required.'[341] That fieldcornets were subject to local censure and held views and understandings that were not in step with the requirements of progress, did not escape the attention of state authorities. After the 1865 census, the Colonial Secretary said that it might be more advisable in future 'that all the enumerators be employed and paid directly by the Government, and made directly responsible to it.'[342]

Nonetheless, in an effort to keep down the costs of collecting information, the state had little alternative but to use the state functionaries already in place despite its reservations. Local officials frequently complained that they lacked the means to acquire the requested information. The reliance on fieldcornets is revealed in a letter from the Civil Commissioner of King Williams Town in 1893, who said that he would only be able to submit a monthly report if fieldcornets in his district complied with his request for information as he '.. seldom [had] occasion to visit the country wards, [and was] therefore hardly in a position to report on such matters from personal knowledge.'[343] During the severe drought in Namaqualand in 1894, the Department of

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[339] Concerns about the literacy levels of enumerators were significant enough in 1865 for provision to be made for administrative assistants to assist fieldcornets who were illiterate or only partially literate, A. 70-'65. *Instructions issued to the Respective Civil Commissioners relative to the employment of Enumerators and Clerical Assistants in taking the Census of the Colony.*

[340] CO, vol. 4647.

[341] CO, vol. 4647, C.C. Oudtshoorn - Col. Sec, 21.01.1858.

[342] G.20-'66, p. 5.

[343] AGR, vol. 57, fol. 217/2 22 November 1893.

Agriculture asked the Civil Commissioner to submit a report detailing the extent of stock losses and the possibility of famine. The Civil Commissioner's report contained none of the detail or scope the department was expecting, providing accounts of individual losses which he obviously considered as indicative of general conditions in the district. The Civil Commissioner had relied on the information of local farmers and fieldcornets and the anecdotal details he provided would have been of little use in assisting the department to prepare for the possibility of famine.[344] The Civil Commissioner of Stellenbosch noted in 1895 that as he 'had no opportunities of coming in direct contact with the rural population of my District, hence the data contained in the enclosed report has been obtained from others than those directly engaged in agriculture of Horticulture.'[345]

Working as an enumerator was also apparently not a particularly sought after job in some rural districts. Whether due to the fear of local censure or simply the prospect of travelling around an arid district trying to procure information from an unwilling populace, the Civil Commissioner of Calvinia in January 1863 told the Colonial Secretary that 'as to the appointment of Enumerators... I shall not be able to procure the sufficiency of fit and proper persons'.[346] In 1895 another Civil Commissioner complained that 'these gentlemen holding those offices object strongly of their [being] constantly required to furnish reports on a subject they consider beyond the scope of their duties.'[347] A Colonial Office circular addressed to Civil Commissioners in 1864 pointed to the kinds of difficulties the state faced in its dealings with some of its distant functionaries: 'On former occasions, some persons in the pay of Government have not furnished, or have furnished too late, the information required by Civil Commissioners. Should such a case occur of delay or refusal in your division, it will be incumbent on you promptly to point out that every one deriving emolument from the public treasury comes under the obligation to make the required returns.'[348] In 1895 the Resident Magistrate in Swellendam suggested that fieldcornets and farmers were not reporting stock diseases, and pointed out that there was also no way of forcing them to.[349]

There were, however, other problems, and the social and environmental conditions in the colony made the statistics collected by the state, at best a partial enumeration. Enumerating the livestock of the large squatting populations inhabiting Crown land in the rural interior, tenants living on farms owned by others, and trekfarmers who criss-crossed district boundaries with their livestock, was virtually impossible.[350] When the missionary at Pella submitted the census returns

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[344] AGR, vol. 57, folio 217/4, C.C. Namaqualand - Secretary for Agriculture, 08.02.1894.
[345] AGR, vol. 57, folio 217/4, C.C. Stellenbosch - Secretary for Agriculture, 06.12.1895.
[346] CO, vol. 3050, C.C. Calvinia – Col. Sec. 09.01.63.
[347] AGR, vol. 57, folio 217/4, 2.12.1895.
[348] Colonial Office Circular, No. 5 of 1864, 29.10.64.
[349] AGR, vol. 201, 7.03.1895 and 19.03.1895.
[350] See for example the queries addressed to the Civil Commissioner of Calvinia regarding the movement of livestock, CSS, vol. 4/1/1, 17.07.1893, Registrar-General of Statistics - C.C. Calvinia A.70-'70. *Instructions issued to the Respective Civil Commissioners relative to the Employment of Enumerators*

for his mission station in 1865, he said that 'Had the people not been more than usually scattered I believe it would have been taken with ease within the time allowed. But it happened that rain had fallen shortly before in Bushmanland and the people had consequently 'trekked' to their outlay places.'[351] Confusion over divisional boundaries themselves proved as much of a problem.[352] The Select Committee investigating the possibility of holding a census of the colony in 1857, noted that one of the main obstacles to accurate information was the confusion over the boundaries of fieldcornetcies.[353] These boundaries designated the jurisdiction of fieldcornets and areas of enumeration, and it was not uncommon for field-cornets and Civil Commissioners to admit to being unclear as to their exact location. In 1856, for example, the Civil Commissioner of Clanwilliam complained that he was 'at a loss with regard to the exact defined Boundaries of the [neighbouring] Division of Namaqualand.'[354] It seems that it was not uncommon for the same area to be counted twice by two different field cornets, and it is not unlikely that there were similarly times when some areas were simply let out.[355]

In an effort to educate farmers about the importance of statistics, the state sought the support of local church ministers and teachers.[356] Livestock and harvest schedules were circulated at the gathering of farmers at the Easter *Nacthmaal* service and teachers were asked to spend time explaining the process of livestock and harvest enumeration to their classes as an attempt to popularise livestock enumeration and overcome some of the problems of reaching a dispersed farming population.[357] As Du Plessis has argued, however, rural communities were often sensitive to the intrusions of the state into local education and church activities and the effect was therefore probably more significant as another sign of this encroachment, than it was in successfully indoctrinating rural communities.

The environmental conditions in the North-western Cape did nothing to facilitate the gathering of livestock information either. The vast area, arid conditions and frequent droughts, lack of road infrastructure and dispersed population, meant that the collection of information was especially difficult in these districts.[358] Namaqualand and Calvinia were usually two of the most costly districts to enumerate for these reasons.[359] In a letter, striking for its departure from the

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and Clerical Assistants in taking the Census of the Colony, Marincowitz, op. cit., p. 42.

[351] CO, vol. 3081, Rev. Ungroodt – C.C. Namaqualand, 08.04.1865.

[352] There is considerable correspondence on this issue. See CO, vol. 2911, C.C. Clanwilliam – Col. Sec. 05.11.55 and vol. 2924, C.C. Clanwilliam – Col. Sec. 12.07.56 and CO, vol. 2992, 30.01.60. See also comments in the Final census reports for 1865, 1875 and 1891.

[353] CO, vol. 4647, Replies to Circulars. 1857. See also G.6-'92, *Report of the Census, 1891.* p. v.

[354] CO, vol. 2924, C.C. Clanwilliam – Col. Sec. 06.08.1856.

[355] See for example, CO, vol. 5088, Col. Sec. - C.C. Namaqualand, 12.07.1865.

[356] CA, CSS, vol. 4/1/1, Rev. Snyman - Colonial Secretary, 16.03.1893.

[357] CSS, vol. 4/1/1, Colonial Office Circular, 09.10.93, CSS, vol. 4/1/2, ref. 257.

[358] AGR, vol. 2, folio 7, 15.07.93.

[359] G. 42-'76. *Results of the Census of the Cape of Good Hope, 1875.* p. 2.

usual discourse of official correspondence during this period, the Civil Commissioner of Namaqualand in 1891 outlined some of his difficulties:

> You have no idea of what a difficult task I am struggling with. This division is 400 miles long and from 2 to 300 broad, and to cut that extent of country up and appoint suitable enumerators for the different areas involves a crushing amount of labour... This is an *awful* country to travel in. Bad water, worn roads and [...] Just now there is not a bit about for an animal to eat and consequently one has to send a [...] wagon, and form depots ahead.
>
> I do not want to be always grumbling, but really I feel the impossibility in connection with this census more than I have ever before felt anything of the kind. I am sure this is far in away the most difficult division in the Colony to manage...[360]

Livestock Statistics, Colonial Progress and Prospects

Livestock statistics were important, state officials and the press kept reminding the public, because they were a reflection of the 'progress' of the colony. This was, of course, progress measured in a very specific way and for livestock this meant particularly, the growth of commercial farming. These measurements of progress were used in industrialised and colonised countries throughout the world.[361] When the Cape government was asked to consider holding a census in 1861 in line with the Australian colonies, reference was made to the resolutions of the International Statistical Congress held in Paris in 1857 where it was noted that data collection should be standardised as the aim of census enumeration was enable comparisons between countries.[362] These comparisons were important to the colony's ability to attract both foreign investment and settlers.

A.J. Christopher has noted that it was in the nineteenth century, in competition with similar publications from other parts of the Empire, that promotional accounts of the Cape began to make their first significant appearance as a way of attracting prospective settlers.[363] These descriptions, published privately and under the auspices of the colonial government, or the Colonial Office in London, focused on demonstrating the Colony's unrealised potential and emphasised that that new European settlers could bring about significant change. Publications such as John Noble's *Descriptive Handbook of the Cape Colony* were largely verbatim renditions of government statistics, pointing to the unfulfilled productive potential of some parts of the Colony and to the impressive economic growth of others. The 1875 edition, for example, noted that only 10,000 acres were under cultivation in the Clanwilliam district due, he claimed, to the lack of initiative of local farmers.[364] William Burchell had earlier told his readers that British

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[360] CO, vol. 3674, C.C. Namaqualand – Col. Sec. 31.01.91.
[361] Porter, op. cit., p. 35.
[362] G.21-'60. *Correspondence Relative to a Proposal from the Government of Australia for taking a Census of the British Colonies generally, in 1861.* p. 4.
[363] Christopher, op. cit., p.20
[364] Noble, op. cit., pp. 67-68

settlement 'would be the means of bringing to light the real resources of the colony, and of turning to profit many valuable productions which are now passed by unobserved, or ignorantly supposed to be of no value'.[365]

The colonies, however, were also competing for investment. As Donald Denoon argues, settler societies had no delusions about their dependence on foreign capital for development. It was when this capital failed to appear that there was cause for concern.[366] Advertising the agricultural potential of the Colony was one way of attempting to attract more investment and members of Parliament and state bureaucrats, familiar with the daunting prospect of financing any state interventions, were acutely aware of the need to portray a positive image of the colony abroad. They were very conscious of balancing the demands of the colony with their ability to pay. The government's objection to the proposal in 1895 that the state grant loans to farmers, for example, was that in order to raise the approximately £1 million need to finance these loans, the value of the Cape's public securities on the London market would be negatively affected, thereby weakening the government's ability to raise money for other projects.[367] When there was discussion over holding a census in the colony in 1901, a number of members of the House of Assembly argued against it on the grounds that it would portray an unduly negative picture of the Colony so soon in the wake of the South African War. Josias Hoffman, member of the House for Paarl, argued that taking a census so soon after the disruption of the war, 'would be bad policy... for the small returns would certainly damage the Colony's credit in Europe.'[368] The interest in International Exhibitions was driven by a similar concern for promoting the colony. In discussing the Paris International Exhibition of 1867, *De Worcestersche Courant* said,

> The value of such exhibitions to any country can scarcely be fully estimated, especially to one so little known as the Cape of Storms. The Cape wants *advertising* that its resources may become known to the world at large. As it has been found profitable for private firms or companies to advertise their commodities, so will it be found advantageous for distant colonies to advertise their products and resources to the European markets.[369]

Lingering anxieties about the potential success of white settlement and about development in Southern Africa, made these reflections of progress all the more important. An editorial discussing the publication of the 1891 census figures said that, 'even in its present fragmentary

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[365] William Burchell, *Hints on Emigration to the Cape of Good Hope*, (London, 1819), p. 9

[366] Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism*, pp. 54-70. H. B. Thom notes that one of the possible explanations for the comparatively rapid growth of the wool industry in the Australian colonies was the considerable investment of British capital in improvements in wool production, Thom, op. cit., p. 174.

[367] *Cape Hansard*, 1895, p. 234.

[368] *Cape Hansard*, 1899, pp.391-392.

[369] *De Worcestersche Courant*, 22 February 1866, p. 2. Denoon discusses the direct role of the Colonial and India Exhibition in London in 1887 in attracting British capital to Queensland, Denoon, op. cit., p. 128.

form the Census shows that our greatest task is even yet to make South Africa a "white man's country"'.[370] The racial dimension to development in the colony is reflected in the racial break-down in ownership of livestock from 1891 onwards.[371] Shaun Milton has pointed to the close link between the image of a strong agrarian economy and national self-assertion on the part of white settlers. Beef exports from the Transvaal, he says, became an important part of the Union's political image as a 'white man's country' and as a member of the world-wide community of 'white' dominions.[372]

'True legislation': Information and State Intervention

In its comment on the 1865 census in the Cape, an editorial in the *Cape Argus* noted that

> As a people, we are so desirous of making the rate of progress of our own divisions appear more rapid to that of any other, that we frequently fall into the error of believing that our neighbourhood alone is the one which deserves and should receive the congratulations of the entire Colony for the go-ahead energy of its people, and the superior ability which they have displayed.'[373]

The was more at stake than just pride however. Statistics took on a new significance as they formed part of the competition for state resources between regions and interest groups within the colony. As any proposed state intervention was judged by its perceived contribution to progress, statistics which reflected progress formed a central rhetorical device in the public sphere. The press, state officials and politicians all referred to the need for statistics to inform state interventions and policy; rational decision-making was indeed itself a sign of progress. In discussing the merits of collecting annual figures on livestock and livestock disease in 1892, the Member of the House of Assembly for Cape Town argued that, '[t]he country was greatly in need of such returns. *There could be not true legislation except upon the basis of statistics.*'[374] The Governor had similarly noted in 1890 that '[a] serious drawback to much-needed legislation of a progressive character has been the absence of statistical information.'[375]

Theodore Porter has noted that wherever dispute was possible in questions of public policy, there was a demand for statistical information because it implied the subordination of

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[370] *Cape Argus*, 20 April 1891, p. 4. See also *Cape Argus*, 29 April 1891, n.p. In 1905, the Census report complained that '[t]he circumstance which renders the taking of a Census in this Colony so much more intricate a matter than in most of the British Dominions is, of course, the complexity of our Races', G.19-1905, p. xvi.
[371] G. 6-'92. *Census of the Cape of Good Hope, 1891.*
[372] Milton, op. cit., p. 205
[373] *Cape Argus*, 4 April 1865, p.2.
[374] *Cape Hansard*, 1892, p. 38.(Emphasis added.)
[375] *Cape Hansard*, 1890, p.1, see also J.X. Merriman's comments, p. 55.

personal interests and prejudices to the objectivity of numbers.[376] Yet, as Porter notes, the limits of quantification become apparent closer to the scene of bureaucratic action, and decisions are always ultimately carried out through political negotiation.[377] Seen in this light, it becomes apparent that the ability of interest groups to articulate their demands determined their success. And it is here that we observe the significance of statistics in regional development, as any discussion on policy used statistics in a debate that was ultimately about notions of progress. As statistics were employed in definitions of scientific agriculture and used in articulating 'colonial progress', specifically as the growth of commercial farming, so too they defined decision-making in the colony. Statistics - reflecting the 'true situation' - legitimated the arguments of politicians and the actions of the state bureaucracy by placing their decision-making in the realm of objective and rational science.

Politicians often pointed to the rate of progress in their district – all the time defined as the growth of commercial, 'progressive' agriculture – as an indication of its deservedness of state spending on railroads, roads, and other facilities such as research institutions. Regional interests had a very keen awareness of the implications that statistics could have in arguing for state interventions or investment. The Divisional Council of Wodehouse complained in 1880 that the statistics reported for their district were inaccurate. The reason for their concern was clear: 'in view of the railway measures being considered at Parliament during the present session, the Petitioners argue that it is desirable before the extension of the Divisional boundaries, that complete and accurate returns should be obtained of the population, wealth and produce of the division of Wodehouse.'[378] They complained that

> the totals given in the published Census Returns of the agricultural productions of this divisions [were] very far below the quantities raised and as an illustration of the wholly unreliable character of such returns, your Petitioners may mention that the whole quantity of oats set down is less than the quantity actually produced by a single farmer in this division.[379]

Politicians often argued over numbers. The 1865 Census added new fuel to the ongoing dispute between the Eastern and Western provinces of the Colony over political representation.[380] Politicians of the eastern districts used the statistics to argue for greater representation in Parliament on the grounds that the East was the economic power-house of the Colony. Statistics on population were particularly significant as Eastern politicians argued that their province was

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[376] Porter, *Trust in Numbers,* 74.
[377] Ibid., p. 116.
[378] A.9-'80. *Petition of the Divisional Council of Wodehouse.*
[379] Ibid. A more accurate reflection of the district was sufficiently important to them that they voted the sum of £50 for the purpose of obtaining accurate statistics for the district.
[380] The discussion on the census figures was widely covered in contemporary newspapers. See for example *The Cape Argus,* 27 June 1865, 25 July 1865, 29 June 1865

under-represented in Parliament, but the fact that the Eastern Province had significantly higher numbers of livestock was also useful to them, as they held it up as evidence that the East was the wealthier of the two provinces.[381]

Disputes over the use of statistics in questions of state expenditure came to the fore again in 1890 as the Sprigg ministry was brought down due to a vote of no confidence from Parliament because of the government's proposed scheme for the extension of railways. Critics of the scheme accused the government of failing to base its decisions on accurate information.[382] Much of the debate, however, centred on how to make decisions based on the available information, with each region attempting to prove its deservedness of state expenditure by employing various statistics as proof of its economic potential.[383] Was a line that carried wool more important than a line to a district noted for its cultivation of pumpkins?[384]

As Nicholas Eberstadt argues, statistics actually provide a very poor basis for decision-making and interventions. There are always limits to what the state can know through the statistics it collects and its reliance on this information means that its decisions are made purely on the consideration of *this* information while other possible factors are left out of the debate. Eberstadt analyses the use of statistics by the United States Government and by development organisations in the last few decades, and comes to the conclusion that in numerous cases, the type of information collected has obscured important realities about social problems. 'Policy prescriptions', he concludes, 'have been distorted by numbers'.[385] This is largely the result of the difficulty in obtaining information on the sorts of things that would lead to a better understanding of a problem; in other words, the things that are most important, are often not easily quantifiable. Often the structures for collecting this sort of information are simply not in place. This explains why it is that government's and other organisations are often forced to assess their interventions based purely on their spending. Figures on expenditure are the easiest to obtain, but ultimately do not provide a reflection of the actual *impact* of development assistance on local economies or societies.[386] This was certainly true of the Cape colony during the nineteenth century as the government time and again would produce little more than an inventory of expenditure as an

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[381] *Cape Argus,* 25 July 1865, p. 2. (Quoting the *Port Elizabeth Telegraph).*

[382] One member of the House of Assembly said, 'I am perfectly certain that there is in the minds of hon. Members a feeling that the conduct of the Government in introducing this Bill, on the information before them, is most debatable. It shows a reckless conduct of the affairs of the country which is much to be deprecated. No man in the House could build even a stable on such information', *Cape Hansard,* 1890, p.70.

[383] *Cape Hansard,* 1890, pp. 4-5, 34-35, 55-69, 73-77, 98. For a similar debate later, see *Cape Hansard,* 1899, pp. 583-584.

[384] There were frequent joking references to the dominance of pumpkin production in certain areas, see, for example, *Cape Hansard,* 1890, p. 58.

[385] Eberstadt, op. cit., p. 19.

[386] Eberstadt, op. cit.

account of it interventions. This was, for example, the case with state-sponsored jackal extermination in the 1890s, where the Department of Agriculture produced regular statements of the amounts paid out for jackals' tails. On closer investigation, however, officials were alarmed to find that the figures belied the considerable amount of fraud that accompanied these payments. It eventually came to light that the state had been paying out twice for the same tails, for manufactured tails, and for tails that had been imported from outside the Colony. Ultimately there were considerable doubts as to whether the scheme was having the desired results at all.[387]

The state needed 'accurate' information to formulate policy and assess its interventions, and it invested considerable time and expense in acquiring this sort of information. But the information the state produced was ultimately only ever partial – Not only was the information it collected, by its own admission, fraught with inaccuracy, but through the narrow focus of its enquiries, the state limited its knowledge largely to the confines of its own understandings and agendas. *This* was the official knowledge on the colony that echoed through channels of administration, through Blue Books and newspapers, and in the houses of Parliament. As we have witnessed in the case of the state's jackal extermination scheme, however, the seamlessness of this 'knowledge' could obscure not only the workings of state measures and interventions, but also whole social and economic realities. Similarly, while detailed records of land revenue provided a reassuring picture of the sale or lease of increasing amounts of the Colony's Crown land, there seemed to be a great deal that was going unrecorded. The Scab Commission was surprised to hear that farmers in the Northern Cape rented land that they used communally. When one of the Commissioners asked a farmer for details of the amount of money involved in these arrangements, he explained that he was unable to provide the information, but that the farmers had it recorded among themselves.[388] When the state occasionally stepped outside its usual channels of enquiry it often had to confront the disturbing realisation that there was a great deal about the colony that it did not know.

[387] *Cape Hansard* 1899, pp. 584-587, A.9-'99. *Report of the Select Committee on the Destruction of Vermin*, specifically pp. iii-iv, A.2 – 1904, *Report of the Select Committee on the Destruction of Vermin.*
[388] G.1-'94, p. 577.

Conclusion

By the nineteenth century, livestock enumeration, along with other statistics, had become part of a discourse of progress and operated at a point which combined some of the central hallmarks of the progressivist ethos – rational and scientific deduction, economic sagacity, and moral development. Statistics were soundly at the centre of elite discussions about progress in the colony at this time - they were necessary to legislate for progress, they were necessary as a reflection of progress, and they were necessary to educate the colony's inhabitants about the meaning of progress. Statistics could assume this role because of the claim that statistics had to 'objectivity'. Livestock enumeration was important because it offered the prospect of an accurate reflection of the state of the colony's herds. It is these sorts of statistics that were used in state decision-making, and yet the stratum of 'knowledge' that was so central to the operations of the state, appears to have been largely a facade that hid much of the reality of the pastoral economy from the state.

Statistics were seen as central to scientific agriculture. Farming without keeping records and statistics was haphazard, unscientific. By its own emphasis, the state was defining its prerogative to decide what was scientific and what was not and since scientific practice was so closely linked to progress, what was *progress* and what was not. The state employed its own scientific experts, and while these men often learned a great deal from the colony's farmers, they held the right to decide what constituted 'knowledge' about agriculture, and what was simply 'irrational' belief. The opinions of state experts carried significant weight in the dialogue between progressive farmers and the state. But there was also a whole sector of the farming population in the colony which did not share in this dialogue; they were largely excluded on the basis that their understandings were not grounded in scientific rationality; they were simply too 'ignorant', too 'uninformed' to be allowed any real say in how the colony's livestock should be administered. The stage was set for significant discord in the relationship between trekfarmers and the state over how they should manage their herds.

Statistics were also important, state officials said, to chart progress. By collecting the statistics that it did, the state reaffirmed the progressivist understanding of 'development' and its antithesis 'barbarism'. The preference of progressives and the progressive state for export-led development underlay the interest in livestock statistics as the colony's development was envisaged largely in terms of the growth of commercial agriculture. In keeping with this understanding of progress, 'improvements' were defined as the investments in 'rational', scientific measures and

technologies aimed at increasing productivity. When the state began to offer assistance to farmers who wanted to make 'improvements', these definitions were to have significant consequences for regional development.

As we have seen, however, not all farmers shared this enthusiasm for 'improvement'. Many of the 'improvements' that went hand in hand with progress were simply unsuited to the farming conditions of the North-western Cape. However, added to this, many rural inhabitants seemed deeply concerned about some of the other developments that would accompany 'progress'. The experience of many trekfarmers of 'progress' up until the end of the nineteenth century had given them very little ground for optimism and certainly a great deal to be concerned about. What historians term the 'spread of capitalist relations' in the region, they experienced as rising land prices, the presence of land speculators, the alienation of trekveld, and the economic stranglehold of the local merchant. Their experience had given them reason to resent the presence of '*vreemde menschen*' who were usually the local proponents of progress.

While the state envisaged closer interaction with rural inhabitants and more direct intervention in the colony's agriculture, trekfarmers seldom welcomed this presence because of the form in which it came. State intervention in agriculture had manifested itself as the alienation of trekveld, the insistence on measures which they felt would not work, and some which they considered harmful and even evil. The obsession of state experts with numbers and measurement was one they also did not share, and because of this and their reluctance to make 'improvements', they were characterised as ignorant and their farming practices as wasteful.

That the state had to put its legislative weight behind 'progress' is a reflection of the difficulty of convincing the colony's inhabitants of its merits. The state began to extend its influence into almost all aspects of rural life and as it did so, many rural inhabitants expressed their resentment at their lack of control over their own affairs. '*Vreemde menschen*' were telling them how to farm, how to educate their children, how to treat their labour. Many rural inhabitants resented the intrusion of the state into these previously local and private realms and, in the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century, they experienced the growing state presence, not as assistance, but as interference. To give the state information on their livestock was to give it - an institution they had little reason to trust - leverage which could be used against them. Where the state's reach so far exceeded its grasp, as in the North-western Cape, the failure of farmers in the region to provide information constituted one of their most effective forms of resistance to state intervention.

The gap between the state and the trekking population of the North-western Cape did not improve in the course of the nineteenth century. The region formed a hot-bed of Boer resistance during the South African War and with the exception of a few garrison towns, was totally under

the control of Boer rebels for almost two years.[389] It is no wonder then that when the idea of holding a census was mooted in 1900, the idea was dropped partly because of fears that the enumeration of livestock might precipitate further uprising from the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of the rural interior.[390]

When Professor MacOwan told the Select Committee in 1882 that 'the people can not be made scientific by Act of Parliament', he said it with the hope, perhaps in the conviction, that the colony's farmers would come to realise for themselves that scientific agriculture was the way forward for farming. In terms of the trekfarming population of the North-western Cape, his observation would, however, prove to be a great deal more accurate than he would have liked. As the state made livestock statistics a part of the way in which it defined what was 'science' and what was not, what was 'improvement' and what was not, what was *progress* and what was not, the trekfarmers of this region seemed to be a frustrating reminder that there was a certain sector of the farming population that no Act of Parliament would make scientific as they shunned scientific farming and refused to comply to legislation which tried to persuade them otherwise.

[389] Rodney Constantine, 'The Guerrilla War in the Cape Colony during the South African War of 1899-1902: A Case Study of the Republican and Rebel Commando Movement', (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1996), pp. 122-187. Constantine argues that the extent of rebellion in the region was more widespread than has previously been recognised, and claims that an estimated 50,000 Boers in interior farms and small towns were connected with the rebellion, and approximately 6,500 as rebels. Bill Nasson discusses the black response to the Boer uprising in this region during the war, *Abraham Esau's War: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899-1902,* (Cambridge, 1991).

[390] *Cape Hansard,* 1900, pp. 288-290, 391-392.

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