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THACKWRAY SEBASTIAN DRIVER

**THE THEORY AND POLITICS OF MOUNTAIN
RANGELAND CONSERVATION AND PASTORAL
DEVELOPMENT IN COLONIAL LESOTHO.**

PhD.

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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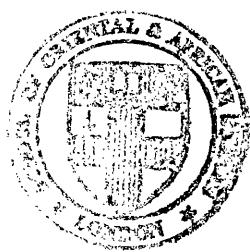
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ABSTRACT

During the 1930s and 1940s there was a huge increase in state interventions into the African rural economy, society and environment by both British colonial and settler governments. These interventions, carried out in the name of conservation and development, have received increased attention from historians in recent years, crucially because of the often violent opposition they encountered from the supposed beneficiaries, but also because of the apparent continuity between colonial and post-colonial development interventions.

This thesis traces the history of colonial conservation and development policies in the mountain zone of Lesotho. As the vast majority of the area is given over to communal grazing it is hardly surprising that these interventions concentrated almost exclusively on the livestock sector. The major colonial intervention in the mountain livestock sector consisted of a policy to close totally a huge swathe of communal grazing land, in order to allow the range to return to its ‘climatic climax’.

The discourse of conservation and development in Lesotho was broadly similar to elsewhere in Africa, though the specific policies were largely shaped by local concerns. The thesis traces the development of this discourse and identifies the reasons why colonial officials became concerned about the mountain environment. The thesis places a particular stress on the science that informed colonial officials’ understanding of the mountain ecology and allowed them to draw conclusions about environmental change, despite the almost total lack of data.

In contrast to many similar policies attempted elsewhere, there are no reports of resistance in Lesotho, despite the fact that the major policy (the grazing closures) would have had a huge impact on the livelihoods of local communities. The thesis argues that the reason that there was no resistance was that the policy was never actually implemented, despite the official reports of success. An explanation for this gap between rhetoric and reality has to be sought in the realm of local, national and international politics.

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1. Introduction

In early 1947 two senior chiefs in the British colonial territory of Basutoland¹ agreed to a request from the Department of Agriculture to close huge swathes of the communal grazing land within the wards falling under their jurisdiction. The Department of Agriculture was concerned that these areas, comprising all but the highest plateaux, were suffering from severe over-grazing and, as a consequence, the pastures were deteriorating and the rate of soil erosion was increasing. Complete resting from grazing would allow the natural vegetation to re-establish itself and once this had occurred livestock would be allowed to return, but this time with new regulations in place to prevent a repeat of the over-grazing. Originally it was thought that the recovery of the vegetation would take only a few years but in the end the closure policy lasted for nine years. According to official sources the closures were a huge success, local livestock owners respected the orders and the veld regained its natural condition.

The closure policy in Lesotho was similar in many respects to other colonial conservation and development projects carried out across southern and east Africa in the same period. The rapid acceleration of colonial government interventions in the African rural economy has led to some academics dubbing the immediate post-Second World War period the ‘second colonial occupation’. These interventions into the rural economy, society and environment have received a good deal of attention from a number of scholars not least because of the myriad resistance movements that arose to combat these colonial interventions.

What first attracted me to the closure policy in Lesotho was that, despite the hugely disruptive nature of the interventions, there were no published reports of resistance to, or even protest against, the project. My reading of literature on rural resistance taught me, however, that protest, struggle and resistance was often clandestine and may not leave its mark on published materials. Part of my mission was, therefore, to uncover the ‘hidden struggles’ and ‘everyday’ forms of resistance to the closure policy.² But in

¹ Through-out the thesis I use the British colonial name, Basutoland, to refer to the colonial administration but I use the Sesotho word, Lesotho, to refer to the geographical area. Within South African academia it has become the norm use the term Sotho with out a prefix. This convention has not been followed by academics within Lesotho or by most academics working exclusively on Lesotho (as opposed to those writing about Basotho resident in South Africa). I have used prefixes through-out, hence Basotho (plural) and Mosotho (singular) to refer to people, Sesotho to refer to language and culture and Lesotho to refer to the geographical area.

² The two phrases reflect the particular influence of William Beinart and Colin Bundy and of James Scott respectively on my original approach. See Beinart, W. and Bundy, C. *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (London, 1987); and Scott, J.C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven, 1985).

order to understand the policy it was also necessary to ask why the British colonial authorities were fearful about environmental degradation in the Lesotho mountains, why they chose to entirely close grazing land and why the chiefly authorities agreed to the policy, especially if the policy encountered opposition from the very people it was supposed to be helping.

Inevitably in attempting to answer these research questions many more became apparent. I have not managed to uncover any ‘hidden struggles’ over the closure policy, chiefly because (I argue) the policy was never enacted, despite the frequent reports of success. The non-implementation of the policy did not mean, however, that it was a non-event. The policy was the result of some highly political wrangling and its existence had some important political implications, even though it was never actually implemented. If anything its lack of impact on the ground makes it all the more interesting. This thesis, therefore, attempts to explain both the causes and consequences of the policy whilst rejecting the claims of successful implementation and environmental regeneration made by the colonial authorities.

1.1. The structure of the thesis

After outlining the structure of the thesis, this introduction places the study in both its intellectual and geographical context. It surveys the existing literature on colonial rural development and conservation policies in Lesotho and beyond, though detailed critiques of aspects of the literature will left to chapter 2, which sets out some off the key theoretical issues. Chapter 1 also provides an introduction to the physical and socio-economic geography of Lesotho, with particular reference to the mountain zone.

The second chapter examines the theoretical issues that run through-out the thesis. Firstly it considers what is meant by the terms conservation and development in a colonial setting. While both modern environmentalist and development studies literature has tended to see the two concepts as having a negative correlation (more development means less conservation) many historians of colonial Africa have used the two words almost interchangeably (especially in reference to soil conservation). In order to understand this contradiction it is first necessary to dis-aggregate the word ‘development’ and to make a distinction between an innate process of development (growth or capitalist development) and an intention to foster development (usually in the form of projects or policies). In the southern African colonial (and apartheid) setting the intention to foster development was associated with the desire to stabilise a declining rural (reserve) economy and ensure the continuation of the migrant labour system. The stabilisation of the rural population had important political implications;

government by indirect rule (or by Bantustan leaders) was founded on the maintenance of the ties between individual Africans and ‘their’ rural home(land).

Also associated with the concept of development was the idea of trusteeship, a trusteeship that extended to the natural environment as well as to people. European colonial officials, drawing on missionary ideologies, saw themselves as trustees of an African environment which African people constantly abused. At the same time the colonial ‘world-view’ led colonial officials to read the African environment in a particular way. An argument that states that different ‘world-views’ lead to different ‘readings’ of the environment does not imply that all ‘readings’ are equally valid. I argue that the colonial understanding of the African environment was often a mis-reading and that this mis-reading contributed directly to some of the difficulties colonial officials encountered in implementing their projects and policies.

Colonial fears about the African environment did not remain static over time. During the first half of the twentieth century the emphasis of the debate shifted at various points and in response to various events and trends. The influence of the United States of America was especially important to the debate about soil erosion in southern and east Africa, though specific local contexts also shaped the nature of the policy that arose in response to these global fears. Chapter 3 traces how an environmentalist ideology developed in Lesotho between the late-nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century. The decline of the country’s agricultural economy was one important factor in fuelling fears about soil erosion especially during the 1930s, but ironically South African debates about the future of ‘white civilisation’ in the aftermath of the Second World War also acted as a catalyst for increased concern amongst Basutoland officials.

In order to understand these fears, and the policies that arose in response to them, it is also necessary to examine the history of the science which informed the colonial officials concerned. Chapter 4, therefore, examines the history of range ecology and its specific application to Lesotho. As with the spread of an environmentalist ideology, the US connection is central but other links within the British Empire were also important. The theory of plant succession, strongly associated with the American ecologist Frederic Clements, provided the basis of almost all range ecology and practical range management in Africa until very recently. The application of this theory to the southern African environment and how the theory was turned into practice are both examined. An understanding of the theory of plant succession is also crucial to an analysis of the way in which colonial officials ‘read’ changes in the vegetational composition of Lesotho’s rangelands. Over the past two decades many of the ecological theories used

by colonial range managers have been fundamentally challenged by new theories of range ecology.

Chapter 5 uses some of these new ideas about range ecology to question the 'reading' of mountain environment by colonial officials and ecologists. As I noted in chapter 4 the process of ecological change in the mountains was based upon their understanding of the pattern of vegetation at that point. If 'invader species' were present, this indicated an environment undergoing degradation. New ecological ideas have, however, rejected many of the notions that informed the colonial officials. Using these ideas it is possible to construct an alternative 'reading' that is less certain about the process of degradation. Despite the persistence of carefully argued concerns about the mountain environment since the early 1930s there is little evidence of a simple process of decline and it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about processes simply from the spatial pattern of vegetation.

In chapter 6 and 7 the focus shifts away from a history of ideas about conservation, ecology and development to the nitty-gritty political context in which the closure policy was formulated. Lesotho's geopolitics, and the fact that the Union government constantly lobbied Britain to transfer sovereignty of the territory to South Africa, are crucial in explaining the rise of fears about soil erosion in the mountain areas. During the colonial period the transfer issue overshadowed the entire administration, from the South African Act of Union right through to independence. All policy decisions were considered in the light of their implications for the transfer issue, though the opinions about transfer within the Basutoland administration varied from individual to individual and over time.

Allegations about the possible impact of silt from the Lesotho mountains on the South African river system, and particularly plans for dam building along the Orange river, were used as a bargaining chip by the Union government during discussions about transfer. There was, therefore, a strong political motivation to enact the closure policy as a way of demonstrating British colonial intentions to prevent increased soil erosion. The closure policy was initially successful in deflecting criticism but the coming to power of a Nationalist government in South Africa led to renewed pressures on the colonial authorities. At this juncture the Union government's complaints became more outspoken and the British colonial authorities decided they needed to come up with additional policies to strengthen their case. This resulted in plans to reduce the goat population of Lesotho by a quarter and plans to construct a massive system of dams within the mountain zone. Neither of these plans were implemented in the colonial

period but the publicity around them was used by the British in their resistance to Nationalist party demands for transfer of the three High Commission Territories.

South African complaints about the state of Lesotho's mountain environment gradually fell away during the mid-1950s. Discussions about large-scale hydrological projects on the South African section of the Orange river continued through-out the 1950s, but the previous concern about the impact of siltation from Lesotho was conspicuous by its absence. South African demands for transfer of the High Commission Territories also waned from the mid-1950s onwards, though periodic, if increasingly half-hearted, demands continued to be made up until Independence. Changing South African demands have to be understood in the context of the development of apartheid ideology and changing attitudes towards African occupation of land amongst white South Africans. Chapter 6 concludes with a section outlining these shifting perceptions.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century settler demands for the alienation of the remaining areas of African owned land are central to an understanding of the political significance of land in Lesotho. Within Lesotho the concept of land 'belonging to the Nation' and hence being inalienable was widely seen as an important defence against further loss of land to white farming interests. The colonial system of administration (indirect rule) was reliant upon maintaining the power of chiefs, and their control over land allocation was seen as the key to their continued political power. Chapter 7 examines the political importance of land within Lesotho and examines how contests over both land itself and over definitions of land rights fed into the debate about overgrazing and the closure policies. The chapter concludes by arguing that, contrary to much of the literature on customary law, colonial codification of land law did not lead to an 'artificial freezing' of land tenure arrangements but rather was one factor in a continuing political contest around the land question.

Chapters 8 and 9 examine the two specific projects attempted in the mountain area in the post-war era. Apart from the closure policy the only other project to control overgrazing was a pilot project on two small plots in the mountain zone of Maseru district. The details of this pilot project are outlined in chapter 8 partially as some findings from the experimental plots feed into the closure policy but also to provide circumstantial evidence to strengthen my claim that the closure policy only ever existed on paper.

After outlining the archival evidence about the closure policy, chapter 9 presents the case that the closure policy in Mokhotlong district was never actually implemented. Despite the numerous reports of success, the direct evidence that the policy was

implemented is contained in a handful of reports written after visits by colonial officials to the area. Against this is weighed evidence from a series of oral history interviews carried out in Mokhotlong district in April/May 1995. In addition a detailed and critical reading of the few eye-witness reports, a number of significant lacunas in the written record and the simple application of common sense all support the argument that the closure policy was not in fact implemented. The arguments presented in chapters 6 and 7 go a long way towards explaining this gap between rhetoric and reality. There are, however, also some crucially important local political issues which also need to be examined. Furthermore the mere existence of the policy had some important local political implications, even though it was never implemented. Chapter 9, therefore, explores these local political issues in some depth.

The Conclusion addresses the question ‘if the livestock development policies did not achieve their stated objectives, what did they actually achieve?’. Some outcomes of the policies are fairly straight forward, a high profile for the Department of Agriculture and a bolstering of a few chiefs political positions for example, while others, such as the impact on the question of transfer or on the lives of the local population, are not so easy to draw conclusions about. Nevertheless it is clear that the policies did ‘do something’ even if this was very different from their stated objectives.

1.2. Background

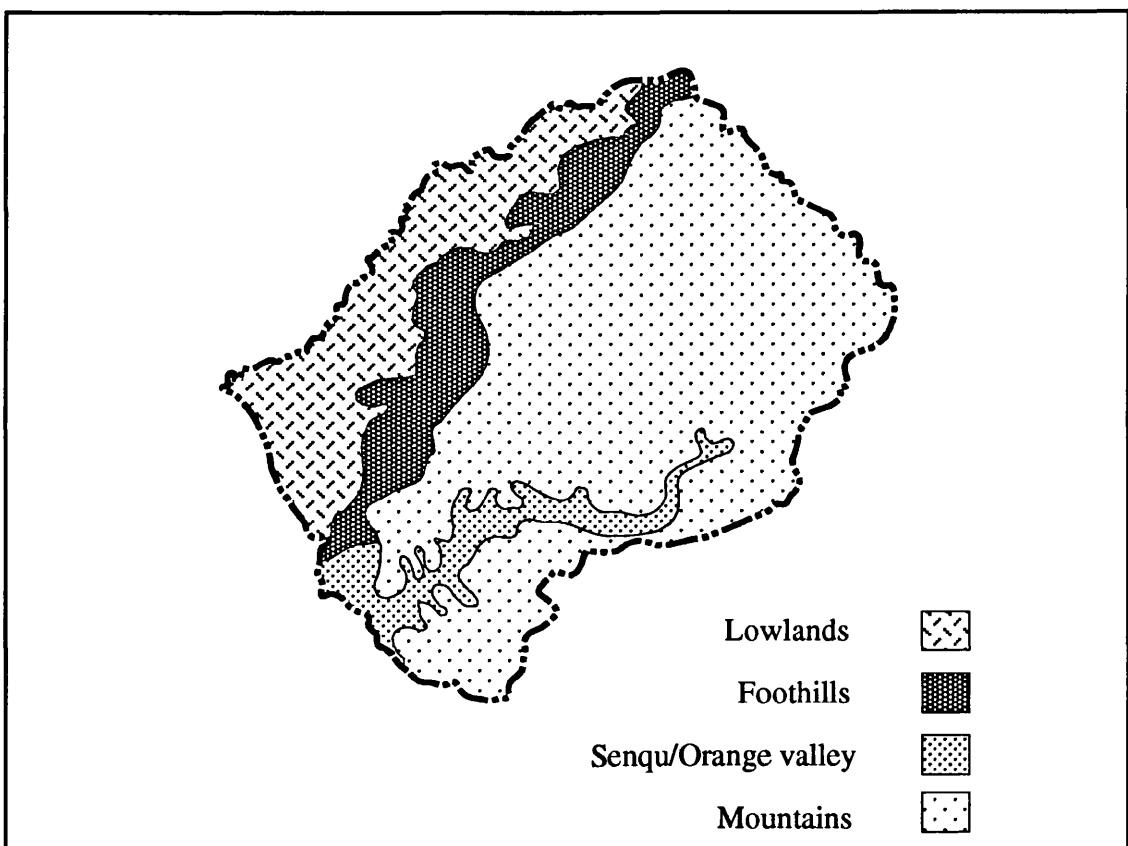
1.2.1. Physical geography of the mountain zone of Lesotho

Most studies of the physical geography of Lesotho divide the country into four physical zones: the lowlands, the foothills, the mountains and the Orange river valley (or the Senqu river as it is known in Lesotho) (see Figure 1.1). These divisions are, of course, somewhat arbitrary and some studies make further sub-divisions, for example making a distinction between the lowlands and the border lowlands in the extreme south west.³ As the names suggest these zones are primarily determined by altitude, the lowlands and Senqu/Orange valley zones usually being delimited by the 6,000 foot contour. The foothill zone consists of the areas along the western escarpment of the Maluti mountains from the 6,000 foot contour up to the main watershed between the Caledon/Mohokare river basin and the Senqu/Orange river basin. The mountain zone accounts for somewhere between 50 and 60 percent of the total land, depending on whose definitions are used.

³ For example Smit, P. *Lesotho a Geographical Study* (Pretoria, 1967).

Lesotho's geology consists of a series of more or less horizontal bands of sedimentary rocks overlain by a massive outcrop of basaltic rock. The sedimentary rocks, made up of Beauforth and Cave sandstones, are exposed in the lowlands and deepest mountain valleys.⁴ The sandy soils found on these sedimentary rocks tend to be highly erodable and nutrient poor. In the mountain areas the basaltic rock has weathered to form dark brown clay soils which tend to be more fertile. Though they are not as susceptible to erosion they are often fairly thin, especially because of the steep relief. This geological pattern is of great significance to an understanding of a full understanding of the process of soil erosion, as Meena Singh's recent research clearly indicates.⁵

Figure 1.1 Physical environmental zones.⁶



The country's topography is heavily influenced by two major river systems, the Caledon/Mohokare and Senqu/Orange. These rivers and their major tributaries all drain south and west across the country cutting deeply incised valleys into the underlying rock. This has resulted in a rugged topography consisting of steep sided valleys divided

⁴ Early research on geology was carried-out by Stockley, G.M. *Report on the Geology of Basutoland* (Maseru, 1947).

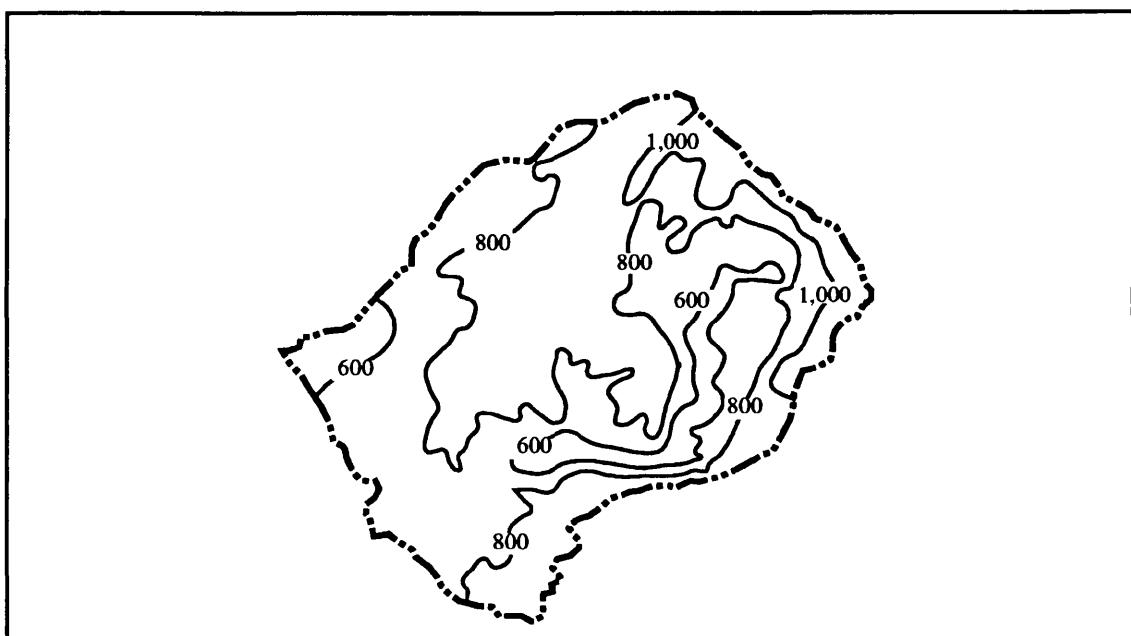
⁵ Singh, M.V. 'Geological, historical and present-day erosion and colluviation in Lesotho, Southern Africa' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1994).

⁶ Adapted from Smit, *Lesotho*.

by high plateaux. This topography means that there is a shortage of flat valley-bottom agricultural fields and many people are forced to plough steeply sloping land.

The climate of Lesotho is highly influenced by altitude. The mountain zone can become extremely cold in winter, with temperatures plummeting far below freezing. Frosts can strike even during the summer months and are a significant constraint on both crop and grassland production. In the eastern mountains there are on average 90 days per annum with temperatures below freezing and the frost period averages about 180 days a year. The lowlands tend to be warmer in winter and hotter in summer, though the relationship between altitude and temperature is not always as straight forward. The steep sided valleys of the foothills and mountains can act as frost hollows and are sometimes significantly colder than surrounding higher areas.⁷

Figure 1.2 Average Annual Rainfall distribution (mm)⁸



Annual rainfall totals tend to be higher in the mountain zone than in the lowlands, with the south western lowlands being the driest area of all. On the high peaks along the Drakensberg escarpment annual rainfall figures are as high as 1,300 mm per annum while in the south western lowlands they average no more than 500 mm per annum.

⁷ Smit, *Lesotho*, p.4.

⁸ Limbach, W. E. 'Current State of Range Management and Development in Lesotho' in O'Rouke, J. T. (ed.) *Institutions for Rangeland Development: Strategies and Lessons Learned. Proceedings of the 1987 International Rangeland Development Symposium* (Boise, Idaho, 1987), pp. 71-80.

Within the mountain zone there is, however, also considerable variability in rainfall from area to area. The mountain valleys tend to be in rain-shadows and receive significantly lower rainfall totals than neighbouring peaks. In the southern reaches of the Senqu/Orange valley annual averages are comparable to the south western lowlands (see Figure 1.2).⁹

Rainfall is highly seasonal with the vast majority of precipitation falling between October and March. The only significant exception to this is when the eastern mountain zones receive heavy winter falls of snow. Rainfall is also highly variable from year to year. Between 1920 and 1970 rainfall data collected in Maseru indicate that total annual precipitation varied from 1119 mm to 419 mm. This represented variations of 63 percent above to 39 percent below the average of 687 mm.¹⁰ Table 1.1 gives some data on precipitation at various stations in the mountain zone.

Table 1.1 Precipitation data from 5 stations in the mountain zone.¹¹

Station	Annual average (mm)	Maximum annual (mm)	Minimum annual (mm)	Inter-annual rainfall variability (CV) ¹²
Mokhotlong Camp	596	817	381	21%
Sehlabathebe	736	1065	308	25%
Sani Pass,	1036	1442	439	28%
Sehonghong	541	873	323	28%
Mashai	498	761	279	26%

Variable rainfall, unpredictable frosts and summer hailstorms all make arable farming in Lesotho a highly risky business. Maize is the major crop grown in the lowlands

⁹ Wilken, G.C. *Agro-climatology of Lesotho* (LASA Discussion Paper No. 1, Maseru, 1978).

¹⁰ Wilken, *Agro-climatology of Lesotho*.

¹¹ These figures are calculated from the following runs of data: Mokhotlong Camp, 1930-1994; Sehlabathebe, 1912-1956; Sani Pass, 1932-1947; Sehonghong, 1935-1955 and Mashai, 1931-1970. All data from Government of Lesotho, Hydrological Survey Department, *Meteorological Data to December 1970* (Maseru, n.d), except for the data from 1970 - 1994 for Mokhotlong Camp which was calculated from monthly rainfall statistics collected from Meteorological Office, Maseru.

¹² The coefficient of variability equals the standard deviation divided by the mean and expressed as a percent, it can be represented mathematically as:

$$cv = \frac{\sigma}{\bar{x}} \times 100\%$$

whilst wheat dominates in the mountain valleys. The broken topography makes only a small percent of the country suitable for arable production and the vast majority of the land area, especially in the mountain districts, is given over to grazing land.

1.2.2.Economy and society of the mountain zone

In the late 1940s the mountain zone of Lesotho had only a small population. The combined population of the two major mountain districts, Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek, numbered only about 82,000.¹³ The majority of this population was concentrated into the valley of the Senqu/Orange river and its tributaries. The higher mountain valleys and the plateaux areas had extremely low population densities, often no more than a handful of people per square mile. This contrasts with the lowland regions where rural population densities could be over 200 people per square mile, especially in the north around Butha Buthe and Leribe.¹⁴

Settlement patterns in the mountain zone were highly influenced by physical geography. Along many of the mountain valleys villages tended to be located along the edge of the first terrace above a stream or river. Fields are sometimes located along the valley bottom in the wider valleys but more often along the valley terraces. Valley bottoms are susceptible to frosts as cold air rolls down the valley sides, making them unattractive for both residential sites and fields.¹⁵

Cattle-posts also tended to be located on spurs or terraces above the higher valleys. According to oral informants in Mokhotlong many of the settlements were initially established as cattle-posts and cultivation was only started sometime later. Many informants reported that their fathers or grandfathers had not owned separate cattle-posts in the higher valleys or on the plateaux lands but had grazed their livestock on the slopes behind their homesteads on a year round basis. By the 1940s, however, a clearer distinction between villages and summer cattle-posts had become apparent. High cattle-posts were occupied solely by herd-boys¹⁶ who would usually return with the livestock to the villages during the winter.¹⁷

¹³ Sheddick, V.G. *Land Tenure in Basutoland* (Colonial Research Studies, No. 13, London, 1954), p. 35.

¹⁴ Smit, *Lesotho*.

¹⁵ Smit, *Lesotho*.

¹⁶ In most of the literature on Lesotho this term is applied to any shepherd, whatever their age. In the interests of clarity and consistency I have used the term despite the obvious pejorative connotations when applied to adults.

¹⁷ Ashton, H. *The Basuto: A Social Study of Traditional and Modern Lesotho* (2nd edition, London, 1967), p. 137.

There were, however, some families living year round at cattle-posts, especially those closer to the main valleys. In the late-1940s the chiefs in Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek both attempted to enforce a programme of villagisation and prevent families living at cattle-posts or in scattered homesteads in the higher valleys year round.¹⁸ While they appear to have had some success in moving hamlets further down the valleys¹⁹ some families remained as permanent residents of cattle-posts or returned to them a couple of years after being ordered down to the villages.²⁰

Census data indicates that the absenteeism rate in the mountain zone was significantly lower than in the lowlands (see Figure 1.3). Data on the percentage of household incomes coming from remittances as compared to agricultural production is not available at a district level but lower absenteeism obviously suggests that agricultural production was probably a more significant contribution to livelihoods in the mountains than it was in the lowlands. In the mid-1950s there were no labour recruiters working directly in Mokhotlong district and presumably Basotho migrants would have first had to go to the major lowland towns to negotiate contracts.²¹ Nevertheless most of the men I interviewed in Mokhotlong ward reported that they had been on at least two or three mining contracts, the exceptions being members of the local petty bourgeoisie.²²

In good rainfall years wheat grows well on the dark basaltic soils of the mountain zone. In the 1940s summer wheat from the mountain zone was the country's most important agricultural export. From the early 1930s onwards Lesotho was consistently a net importer of maize²³ but during the 1940s and 1950s the country continued to be a net exporter of wheat in good rainfall years.²⁴ I have no data on the distribution of this

¹⁸ See chapter 9.

¹⁹ Oral informant 3 (Table 9.1) reported that when he was a young man there used to be a number of smaller hamlets further up the Mabunyanneng valley. In 1995 his hut was the highest permanently occupied hut in the valley. Oral informant 13 used to live in a hamlet further up the Sakeng Valley but sometime during the 1950s, whilst he was in Johannesburg on a mining contract, the hamlet was destroyed and his family were allocated a new residential plot and fields lower-down the valley.

²⁰ Oral informant 1 reported that many families ordered to leave their cattle-posts by the chiefs in the late 1940s and early 1950s quietly returned to the cattle-posts a few years later.

²¹ Interview with Sir James Hennessy, Cambridge, 12 November 1996. Hennessy recalled that when he had been an A.D.C. in Teyateyaneng he spent a large part of his time signing passes for people to go on labour contracts and that this had not been a significant element of his work in Mokhtolong.

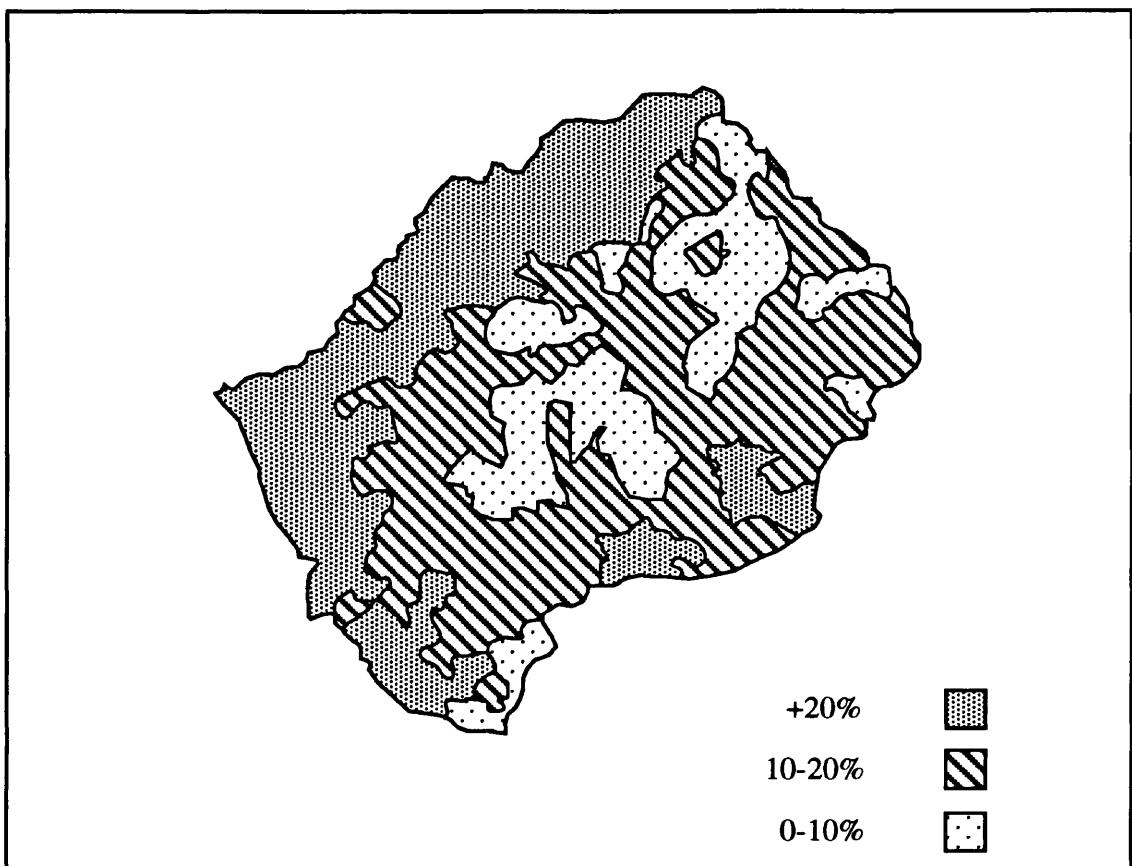
²² See Table 9.1.

²³ See Figure 1 in Murray, C. 'From Granary to Labour Reserve: An Economic History of Lesotho', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 6, 4, 1980, pp. 3-20.

²⁴ In 1957 the country exported 101,077 bags (200lb) and imported 32,316 bags of wheat, Great Britain *Colonial Annual Report: Basutoland 1957* (London, 1958), p. 42.

yield amongst the farmers of the mountain zone so it is impossible to say if it came from a few successful commercial operations or from a wider range of small producers.

Figure 1.3 Absentees as percent *de jure* population, 1956.²⁵



Livestock populations figures for individual districts were not produced between 1937 and 1965, but these two figures do produce a rough guide to the total livestock population of the districts in the period under investigation (Table 1.2).

The livestock figures from Mokhotlong translate into just under three livestock units (lu)²⁶ per person in 1937, compared to a national figure of just over 1 lu per person.²⁷ It is possible to derive some indication of the average size of sheep flocks in Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek compared to national figures from data from government

²⁵ Map reproduced from Smit, *Lesotho*, p. 20. Data from 1956 Census.

²⁶ Through-out the thesis I use the calculation that 1 head of cattle, horse, donkey or mule and 5 head of sheep or goat equals 1 lu. This was the rule-of-thumb calculation used by the colonial authorities, though there are more complex and accurate ways of calculating lu on the basis of the weight of the beast, the age profile of the herd etc.

²⁷ Calculated from the 1936 census figures reproduced in Smit, *Lesotho*, and from Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1936.

wool sheds. In 1939, the last year data was broken down by district, the average flock shorn at government wool sheds comprised 142 sheep in Mokhotlong and 120 sheep in Qacha's Nek, compared to a national average of 94 sheep per flock.²⁸ Oral informants reported that when they were young men and women their fathers all had fairly large herds, with one informant claiming his father had well over 2,000 sheep in the 1940s.²⁹ These figures indicate that livestock played a more important role in the economy of the mountain sector than they did in the lowlands. All of the territory's main agricultural export products (summer wheat, wool and mohair) were strongly associated with the mountain economy.

Table 1.2 Official livestock populations of Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek, 1937 and 1965.

	Mokhotlong		Qacha's Nek	
	1937	1965	1937	1965
sheep	258,173	313,347	255,699	191,265
goats	42,047	120,899	71,254	77,234
cattle	29,622	29,354	41,325	120,899
equines	13,222	17,824	12,582	13,574

As with the figures on wheat production there are no specific data on the distribution of livestock amongst households on a district or local level during this period. Vernon Sheddick did, however, produce figures from a nation-wide survey in the late 1940s (Table 1.3).

This national data clearly indicates the highly skewed distribution of livestock in Lesotho. 50 percent of households survey owned less than ten head of cattle and a similar proportion owned less than nine head of smallstock. At the other end of the scale over 23 percent of the total smallstock population and over 15 percent of the total cattle population were held³⁰ by just nine households.³¹

²⁸ Calculated from Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1939.

²⁹ Informant 9 (Table 9.1), though I was slightly suspicious about the validity of his testimony. Other informants (11, 13) also reported that their fathers had over 1,000 head of smallstock. Most informants gave precise figures for cattle and equines and more general descriptions of the size of the smallstock population.

³⁰ Because of mafisa (loaning out) arrangements it is necessary to make a distinction between holdings and ownership.

³¹ It is not possible to tell from the data whether or not these are the same households.

Table 1.3 Distribution of herd size from nation-wide survey c. 1949³²

cattle		smallstock	
size of holding	frequency	size of holding	frequency
0	60	less than 5	216
1	15	5-9	24
2	17	10-4	19
3	19	15-9	16
4	20	20-4	10
5	24	25-9	13
6	23	30-4	12
7	19	35-9	8
8	23	40-4	8
9	11	45-9	7
10	19	50-4	11
11	16	55-9	2
12	12	60-4	3
13	7	65-9	3
14	12	70-4	3
15	11	75-9	9
16	10	80-4	5
17	6	85-9	7
18	14	90-4	0
19	5	95-9	7
20-9	71	100-49	35
30-9	32	150-99	19
40-9	14	200-49	8
50-9	5	250-99	4
60-9	4	300-49	7
70-9	2	350-99	3
80-9	3	400-49	4
90-9	2	450-99	5
others		500-49	3
100	1	550-99	1
105	1	others	
144	1	650	1
230	1	688	1
		804	1
		850	1
		863	1
		900	1
		1100	1
		1452	1

This heavily skewed distribution suggests that the variation in herd size is not simply a function of household development cycles. The large number of chiefs at the upper-end of this distribution suggests, rather, that it was a function of economic differentiation. There were a few large commercial livestock owners in the mountain zone who received a significant return on their herds, especially in years of high wool or mohair prices.

In summary, during the period in question the mountain zone of Lesotho had a small population concentrated in villages and hamlets along the lower altitude valleys. The domestic agricultural and pastoral economy remained important to livelihoods and the

³² Based on survey of 480 households, Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, p. 99-100.

reliance upon migrant remittances was probably lower than in the lowlands. A number of individuals ran large commercial flocks of livestock on the communal lands , selling wool and mohair to the South African market at the coast. Summer wheat was grown on a commercial basis by at least some households and in good rainfall years the mountain valleys could produce a good yield. Nevertheless the area was intimately involved in the migrant labour system and most young men went for at least one contract at the South African mines.

1.3. The historiography of colonial conservation and development

Conservation and development projects and policies in colonial Africa have received widespread attention in a number of different areas of academic inquiry in recent years. Much of the initial interest arose out of the often violent resistance to some of these policies especially during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s when this resistance was linked to national anti-colonial movements. The increased interest in local social history during the early 1980s led to more detailed analyses of some of these incidents of rural resistance and revealed a greater complexity in the response of rural communities to development projects.

Interest in colonial conservation and development policies has also come from the field of environmental history. Using an environmental history approach some scholars have considered not just the political economy of colonial interventions but also their impact on the environment. This field has begun to play a increasingly important role in African historiography in recent years, though its intellectual roots run fairly deep. There have also been a number of important studies examining the rise of environmentalist ideologies in the colonial setting. A third approach to environmental history, one which examines the influence of the (changing) natural environment on society, has made less of an impact in African studies.³³

Some of the earliest academic literature to consider colonial conservation and development policies was interested in how resistance to schemes introduced in the decades following the Second World War fed into nationalist politics. Much of this literature was based on the premise that rural protest was simply a forerunner of more

³³ The exception to this is Illife, J. *Africans: History of a Continent* (Cambridge, 1995), which uses the adaptation of people to a hostile environment and demography as the lens through which to view African society. Given the radical nature of Iliffe's thesis it is surprising that the book has not received more attention. See also Guy, J. 'Ecological Factors in the Rise of Shaka and the Zulu Kingdom.' in Marks, S. and Atmore, A. (eds.) *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, (London, 1980), pp. 102-119.

organised nationalist politics and tended to treat the peasantry as an undifferentiated mass waiting to be organised by the nationalist political elites.³⁴ Major research linking nationalism and resistance to colonial interventions was carried out in Tanganyika³⁵ and Kenya, where the work of John Lonsdale is a notable exception to the general criticism expressed above.³⁶ This interest in the links between agrarian protest and nationalist politics was not apparent in the South African literature, where literature on national politics concentrated almost exclusively on the urban setting.³⁷

The structuralist literature that dominated African historiography during the 1970s tended to see colonial interventions in African rural life either as part of a deliberate attempt to undermine independent African peasant production and force labour into the wage economy or as belated attempts to put the genie back in the bottle and bolster production in the reserves in order to ensure the continuation of the migrant labour system. In southern African historiography, Colin Bundy's seminal work, based on underdevelopment theory, tracing the rise and fall of the South African peasantry spawned a number of studies concentrating on the success of African peasant farmers in the late nineteenth century and their decline during the first half of the twentieth.³⁸ The environmental decline in the African reserves reported in official documents from the first decades of the twentieth century onwards were seen both as the outcome of a deliberate policy of undermining African agriculture and a cause of its continued decline. In her concluding chapter to the influential collection *Roots of Rural Poverty* Ann Seidman argues:

As a result of systematic policy decisions... Africans in many areas were given little opportunity to earn cash except by joining the vast migratory wage-labour force... The women, children and older men who stayed at home had difficulty in maintaining the levels of agricultural productivity previously attained. As

³⁴ See for example Tickner, V. 'Class struggle and the food supply sector in Zimbabwe' (unpublished paper presented at a Leeds Conference on Zimbabwe, 1980) cited by Ranger, T. *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe* (London, 1985) p. 19-20.

³⁵ Cliffe, L. 'Nationalism and the Reaction to Enforced Agricultural Change in Tanganyika during the Colonial Period' in Cliffe, L. and Saul, J. (eds.) *Socialism in Tanganyika* (vol. 1) (Nairobi, 1973), pp. 17-24; Maguire, G.A. *Towards Uhuru in Tanzania: the politics of participation* (London, 1969).

³⁶ Lonsdale, J. 'Some Origins of Nationalism in East Africa', *Journal of African History*, 9, 1, 1968, pp.119-146. Frank Furedi's research also avoided the tendency of the era to lump together peasants into a undifferentiated mass though it does not explicitly examine colonial interventions into African agriculture, Furedi, F. 'The Social Composition of the Mau Mau Movement in the White Highlands', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1, 4, 1974, pp. 486-505.

³⁷ Mbeki, G. *The Peasant's revolt* (London, 1984 [1964]) being a notable exception.

³⁸ Bundy's work was not published as a monograph until 1979, but his thesis was well known through two articles and numerous seminar papers; Bundy, C. 'The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry', *African Affairs*, 71, 1972, pp. 369-388; Bundy, C. 'The Transkei Peasantry, c. 1890-1914: "Passing through a period of Stress"' in Palmer, R. and Parsons, N. (eds.) *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (Berkeley, 1977), pp. 201-220; and Bundy, C. *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London, 1979).

traditional irrigation and cultivation practices fell into disuse and the soils became increasingly eroded, the vast majority of the young men growing up in rural areas were even more narrowly restricted to seeking jobs on the large mines or plantations.³⁹

Allen Isaacman argues that the work based on what he labels the ‘strangulation thesis’ tended to simplify complex processes of rural transformation into a single trajectory which was simply the product of ‘exogenous historical forces’.⁴⁰ He contrasts this body of work with the ‘mode of production theorists’ who focused on the articulation of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production.⁴¹ In South African historiography Harold Wolpe was highly influential in the literature on the articulation of modes of production. His widely cited article in *Economy and Society* set-out his basic thesis and included a important argument about how to understand the conservation and development policies enacted in the South African reserves from the 1930s onwards. According to Wolpe the migrant labour system meant that capital did not have to ensure the reproduction of labour as this was ensured through agricultural production in the African reserves. By the 1930s, however, the ability of this reserve economy to provide the conditions for reproduction of labour was rapidly disintegrating, not least because of an environmental collapse. Conservation and development schemes in the reserves can, therefore, be understood as an attempt to ensure that reproduction of labour continued by bolstering the faltering agricultural economy.⁴² Despite the fact that Wolpe’s thesis was, in part, an assertion of South African exceptionalism his arguments have surfaced in literature about colonial environment and development policies in other countries of east and southern Africa.

Both ‘structuralist’ and the ‘nationalist’ approaches to colonial development policies were primarily interested in the relationship between the policies and the national political economy. During the early 1980s a number of scholars began to view these

³⁹ Seidman, A. ‘Postscript: the economics of eliminating rural poverty’ in Palmer and Parsons *The Roots of Rural Poverty*, pp. 410-421, p. 414.

⁴⁰ Isaacman, A. ‘Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa’, *African Studies Review*, 33, 2, 1990, pp. 1-120, p. 9.

⁴¹ Isaacman’s dichotomy is somewhat forced; underdevelopment theory itself was premised on the notion that underdevelopment was the result of capitalist *penetration* into pre-capitalist structures (as opposed to the transformation of the mode of production from pre-capitalist to capitalist). Bundy attempted to use the concept of the articulation of modes of production in the *Rise and Fall*, though, as he admits himself, he was not altogether successful. In the preface to the 2nd edition of *Rise and Fall* he argues that the major weakness of the book is its failure to identify the production relations and internal dynamics of pre-capitalist African society and this ‘inevitably weakens any attempt to theorise its articulation with capitalist colonial society’; Preface to Second edition (London, 1988), no page number.

⁴² Wolpe, H. ‘Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid’, *Economy and Society*, 1, 4, 1972, pp. 425-456.

policies through a more focused lens. Often this narrower focus was in response to a feeling that the social history of rural areas had been sidelined by the structuralist models that dominated in the 1970s.⁴³ For those interested in ‘history from below’ or ‘subaltern studies’, rural struggles were obvious areas of investigation. The influential work of James Scott, working in South East Asia,⁴⁴ and others⁴⁵ encouraged Africanist historians to move beyond the more spectacular cases of violent confrontation⁴⁶ and look for ‘hidden’ or ‘everyday forms of resistance’ to the state.

In South Africa much of the literature concentrated on the social history of the ‘white’ farming districts where a focus on the dynamics of class relations and how they were transformed at a local level was seen as an important palliative to the rather sterile debate about the exact nature of the transition to capitalist agriculture.⁴⁷ There was, however, also a significant growth in the literature on resistance in the African reserves and how this intersected with national political movements. In contrast to the earlier ‘nationalist’ approaches towards similar subjects in the rest of Africa this literature was strongly grounded in local social and political history and the links to national movements were explored from the perspective of the rural population.⁴⁸

⁴³ Isaacman ‘Peasants and Rural Social Protest’; Beinart and Bundy *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa*, p. 2. There has been a similar burgeoning of ‘subaltern studies’ in Asian and Latin American historiography, for a critique see Mallon, F.E. ‘The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History’, *American Historical Review*, 99, 1994, pp. 1491-1515; Mukherjee, M. ‘Peasant Resistance and Peasant Consciousness in Colonial India: Subalterns and beyond’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 October 1988, pp. 2109-2120 and 15 October, 1988, pp. 2174-2185; Brass, T. ‘Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements and the (Re)emergence of a (Post) modernised (Middle) Peasant’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 18, 2, 1991, pp. 173-205.

⁴⁴ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

⁴⁵ Also often drawing on an older literature on resistance to slavery in the Americas, for example Mullin, G.W. *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth Century Virginia* (New York, 1972); Genovese, E.D. *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974).

⁴⁶ Such as that in Witzieshoek discussed by Hirson, B. ‘Rural Revolt in South Africa’, *The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Collected Seminar Papers), 8, 22, 1976.

⁴⁷ See for example Keegan, T. ‘The sharecropping economy, African class formation and the 1913 Native’s Land Act in the highveld maize belt’ in Marks, S. and Rathbone, R. (eds) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African class formation, culture and consciousness, 1870-1930* (London, 1982), pp. 195-211 and various papers in Beinart, W., Delius, P. and Trapido, S. (eds.) *Putting a Plough to the Ground*, (Johannesburg, 1986). Bradford, H. ‘Highways, by-ways and cul-de-sacs: the transition to capitalism in South African historiography’, *Radical History Review*, 46, 1990, pp. 59-88, provides a useful review and critique of the South African rural historiography. See also the more recent work by Nancy Jacobs, which places access to resources centre stage in the discussion about class formation and race in the South African countryside: Jacobs, N. ‘The Flowing Eye: Water Management in the Upper Kuruman Valley, South Africa, c. 1800-1962.’ *Journal of African History*, 37, 1996, pp. 237-260.

⁴⁸ See for example Beinart and Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa*; Bundy, C. ‘Land and Liberation: popular rural protest and the national liberation movements in South Africa, 1920-1960’ in Marks, S. and Trapido, S. (eds.) *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth*

These shifts in South Africa historiography mirrored similar shifts elsewhere in Africa.⁴⁹ The work of Terence Ranger on Zimbabwe is particularly notable in this respect. His early work viewed rural protests as a pre-cursor to later nationalism, but did not address the question of how peasant consciousness was transformed through the colonial period and how it interacted with nationalism.⁵⁰ A new perspective was revealed in a 1978 review article entitled ‘Growing from the Roots’ (a reference to Palmer and Parson’s edited collection *The Roots of Rural Poverty*). One of the comments Ranger made about the body of work represented by *The Roots of Rural Poverty* was that it had very little to say about peasant consciousness.⁵¹ Ranger’s subsequent work concentrated on this very topic, drawing largely on detailed fieldwork in the Makoni district of Zimbabwe.⁵²

In his 1978 review article Ranger also criticised much of the existing agrarian historiography for taking official reports of economic or ecological decline at face value. The ‘social history’ approach to rural economy and society consciously questioned this archival data, especially in connection to discussion about resistance and class relations. Clandestine resistance only appears in the written record when it is discovered and other forms of ‘everyday resistance’, such as sabotage, feigning illness and deliberate misunderstanding of instructions from landlords or colonial officials tended to be reported as just another indication of the ‘lazy and uneconomical nature of the African’.⁵³ Many historians, therefore, turned to oral history in order to circumvent the problems associated with a reliance upon archival sources.⁵⁴ The use of oral history

Century South Africa (London, 1987), pp. 254-285; Beinart, W. and Bundy, C. ‘State intervention and rural resistance in the Transkei 1900-65’ in Klein, M. (ed.) *Peasants in Africa: contemporary and historical perspectives* (Beverly Hills, 1980) pp. 271-315; Delius, P. ‘Sebatakgomo: Migrant organisations, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland revolt’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 3, 1989, pp. 581-615; Delius, P. *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: reconstruction and resistance in Northern Transvaal* (Oxford, 1996); Mager, A. ‘The People Get Fenced: Gender, Rehabilitation and African Nationalism in the Ciskei and Border Region, 1945-1955’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 4, 1992, pp. 761 - 782; Marks, S. *Reluctant Rebellion: the 1906-08 disturbances in Natal* (Oxford, 1970).

49 For example Throup, D.W. *The Economic and Social Origins of Mau-Mau, 1945-1953* (London, 1988).

50 Ranger, T. ‘Connections between “Primary Resistance” Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 9, 3, 1968, pp. 437-454.

51 Ranger, T. ‘Growing from the Roots: reflections on peasant research in Central and Southern Africa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 5, 1, 1978, pp. 99-133.

52 Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War*.

53 Issacman, A., Stephen, M., Adam, Y., Joro Homen, M., Macamo, E. and Augustinho, P. ‘Cotton as the motor of poverty: peasant resistance to forced cotton production in Mozambique, 1938-1961’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 13, 1980, pp. 581-615.

54 For example Keegan, T. *Facing the Storm: Portraits of Black Lives in Rural South Africa* (Athens, Ohio, 1988); Van Onselen, C. ‘The Reconstruction of a Rural Life from Oral Testimony: Critical

helped historians develop a much more nuanced and complicated picture of rural society but few ‘social’ historians developed their analysis further to consider the relationship between that society and its environment.⁵⁵

In the African context there is a fairly long tradition of literature that concentrates on the impact of colonialism and capitalism on the African environment. Much of the academic literature has concentrated on the impact of colonial hunting on African animal populations⁵⁶ or on the relationship between colonialism and the spread of disease, in particular trypanosomiasis or ‘sleeping sickness’. A pioneering study by an ex-colonial official, John Ford, on the ecology of the tsetse fly, encouraged historians to consider the ramifications of the disease in discussion about the impact of colonialism on pre-colonial societies. Colonial officials tended to ascribe the spread of tsetse fly to the increased mobility and livestock population growth that has resulted from the establishment of *Pax Britannica*. Ford dismissed this claim and argued that the early years of colonial rule resulted in unprecedented disruption to African ecological management systems and it was this that had resulted in the spread of tsetse fly.⁵⁷

Helge Kjekshus incorporated Ford’s work into his thesis about the impact of colonialism on the African environment. Kjekshus argued that pre-colonial African societies had developed effective and equitable resource management and ecological control mechanisms which were smashed apart by the advent of colonialism, leading to serious over-exploitation and environmental decline.⁵⁸ Kjekshus model has been critiqued in a number of subsequent studies, most notably by John McCracken. McCracken argues against the simple model that colonialism led to a spread of tsetse

Notes on the Methodology in the Study of a Black South African Sharecropper’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 20, 3, 1993, pp. 494-519; Van Onselen, C. *The Seed is Mine: the Life of Kas Maine, a South African sharecropper, 1894-1985* (London, 1996).

⁵⁵ Though there is good reason to be highly cautious about using oral history to re-construct a picture of past environmental conditions and change, see Lindblade, K. ‘Discrepancies in understanding historical land use changes in Uganda’ *PLA Notes*, 28, February 1997, pp. 59-63.

⁵⁶ MacKenzie, J. ‘Chivalry, Social Darwinism and Ritualised Killing.’ in Anderson, D. and Grove, R. (eds.) *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practice* (Cambridge 1987), pp. 41-62; MacKenzie, J. *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1988); MacKenzie, J. ‘The Natural World and Popular Consciousness in Southern Africa: the European appropriation of Nature’ in Kaarholm, P. (ed.) *Cultural Struggle and Development in Southern Africa* (Harare/London, 1991), pp. 13-31; Steinhart, E.I. ‘Hunters, poachers and game keepers: towards a social history of hunting in colonial Kenya’, *Journal of African History*, 30, 1989, pp. 247-264; Wagner, R. ‘Zoutpansberg: the dynamics of a hunting frontier, 1848-67’ in Marks, S. and Atmore, A. (eds.) *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (London, 1980), pp. 313-349.

⁵⁷ Ford, J. *The Role of Trypanosomiasis in African ecology: A study of the tsetse fly problem* (Oxford, 1971).

⁵⁸ Kjekshus, H. *Ecological Control and Economic Development in East African History: The Case of Tanganyika: 1850-1950* (Berkeley, 1977).

fly and shows a far more complicated process of advance and retreat of the tsetse belt through-out the colonial period.⁵⁹

McCracken was also one of the first historians of colonial development and conservation policies to stress the importance of the individual agricultural officer's understanding of the issues.⁶⁰ This is a theme that has been taken up in a number of other studies and there now exists a wide-ranging literature on the development of colonial ideas about conservation and development.⁶¹ In southern African historiography probably the most influential contribution has been William Beinart's 1984 paper in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*. In contrast to his earlier work on Pondoland and his collaborative work with Colin Bundy, Beinart explicitly set-out to 'journey through the labyrinths of official minds' and examine how colonial ideas about African society and environment fed into policy making.⁶² Beinart's survey of colonial attitudes in southern Africa has since been widely cited in the literature, though some have been critical of his stress on a common colonial discourse and have emphasised the specific local issues driving policy.⁶³ David Anderson's 1984 paper in *African Affairs* on colonial soil conservation in East Africa has also been widely cited in subsequent literature.⁶⁴

Beinart and Anderson (in conjunction with Richard Grove) both followed up these studies with editorial efforts to bring together a wide range of different scholars working on issues related to conservation and development in Africa.⁶⁵ Both these collections were important in helping open out two new avenues of inquiry in African historiography. Firstly they brought a dominant theme within American environmental

⁵⁹ McCracken, J. 'Colonialism, Capitalism and Ecological Crisis in Malawi: a re-assessment' in Anderson and Grove *Conservation in Africa*, pp. 63-78. See also Vail, L. 'Ecology and History: the example of Eastern Zambia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1977, 3, pp. 129-155; Giblin, J. *The Politics of Environmental Control in North-eastern Tanzania, 1840 -1940* (Philadelphia, 1992); Maddox, G., Giblin, J and Kimambo, I.N. (eds) *Custodians of the land: ecology and culture in the history of Tanzania* (London, 1996); Birley, M. 'Resource Management in Sukumaland, Tanzania', *Africa*, 52, 1982, pp. 1-30; Richards, P. *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution*, (London, 1985).

⁶⁰ McCracken, J. 'Experts and Expertise in Colonial Malawi', *African Affairs*, 81, 1982, pp. 101-116.

⁶¹ See also John McKenzie's work on hunting referred to above.

⁶² Beinart, W. 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development: a Southern African Exploration, 1900-1960', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11, 1, 1984, pp. 52-83.

⁶³ Phimister, I. 'Discourse and the discipline of historical context: conservationism and ideas about development in southern Rhodesia, 1930-1950', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12, 2, 1986, pp. 263-275.

⁶⁴ Anderson, D. 'Depression, dust bowl, demography and drought: the colonial state and soil conservation in East Africa during the 1930s', *African Affairs*, 83, 332, 1984, pp. 321-343.

⁶⁵ Beinart, W. (ed.) 'Special Issue: The Politics of Colonial Conservation', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989; Anderson and Grove, *The Politics of Colonial Conservation*.

history, tracing the roots of modern environmental thinking,⁶⁶ to the notice of Africanist historians, especially through the work of Richard Grove. Grove argues that the American literature on the ‘roots of environmentalism’ ignored the importance of ideas developed within the British colonial empire, especially on the small island way-stations along important shipping routes.⁶⁷ His work on the Cape in the nineteenth century revealed some early conservation ideologies, often associated with Scottish colonial officials and missionaries, and the growth of a dessicationist ideology that tied de-forestation to declining rainfall.⁶⁸

While Grove’s work has been widely cited it has not been criticized in the literature on the growth of ideas about conservation in southern Africa. Most of the small number of academic studies in this field have, rather, concentrated on de-bunking the romantic and whiggish popular histories of game preservation.⁶⁹ There have been a couple of studies following the American tradition of biography as environmental history, tracing the development of one individual’s ideas about conservation and how these influenced others.⁷⁰ There have also been a number of texts glorifying pre-colonial conservationist ideologies and to calling for a return to these ‘traditional values’, though these tend not to be particularly scholarly in nature.⁷¹ Many themes within the history

⁶⁶ The classic work in this field is Worster, D. *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (2nd edition, Cambridge, 1994).

⁶⁷ Grove, R. *Green Imperialism: Science, Colonial Expansion and the Emergence of Global Environmentalism, 1660-1860* (Cambridge, 1994); Grove, R. ‘The Origins of environmentalism’, *Nature*, 345, 3 May 1990, pp. 11-14.

⁶⁸ Grove, R. ‘Early themes in African conservation: the Cape in the nineteenth century’ in Anderson and Grove *Conservation in Africa*, pp. 21-40; Grove, R. ‘Scottish Missionaries, evangelical discourses and the origins of conservation thinking in southern Africa 1820-1900’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, pp.163-87; Grove, R. ‘Scotland in South Africa: John Crombie Brown and the roots of settler environmentalism’ in Griffiths, T. and Robin, L. (eds.) *Ecology and Empire: The Environmental History of Settler Societies* (Edinburgh, 1997), pp. 139-153.

⁶⁹ See Carruthers, J. ‘Creating a National Park, 1910-1926’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1988, pp. 188-216; Carruthers, J. ‘The Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary: ‘psychological blunder, economic folly and political monstrosity’ or ‘more valuable than rubies and gold’, *Kleio*, 24, 1992, pp. 82-100; Carruthers, J. ‘Nationhood and National Parks: Comparative Examples from a Post-Imperial Experience’, in Griffiths, T. and Robin, L. (eds.) *Ecology and Empire: The Environmental History of Settler Societies* (Edinburgh, 1997), pp. 125-138; Khan, F. ‘Re-writing South Africa’s Conservation History: The Role of the Native Farmers Association’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20,4, 1994, pp. 499-516.

⁷⁰ Grove, ‘Scotland in South Africa’; Beinart, W. ‘Vets, Viruses and Environmentalism: The Cape in the 1870s and 1880s’ in Griffiths and Robin *Ecology and Empire*, pp. 87-101; Carruthers, J. ‘Lessons from South Africa: War and Wildlife Protection in the Southern Sudan, 1917-1921’ (unpublished paper presented to ASA-UK Biennial Conference, University of Lancaster, September 1994). Timm Hoffman, an ecologist, is working on the biography of John Acocks, pers. cors. 23 October 1996.

⁷¹ See for example Kasere, S. ‘Campfire: Zimbabwe’s Tradition of Caring’ in United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service *Sustainable Development* (Voices from Africa, No. 6, Geneva:

of environmental ideas remain unexamined, however, especially topics such as the development of environmental science and connections between environmental ideologies and racist ideologies.

The second area of research that the editorial efforts of Beinart and Anderson and Grove helped foster was investigations of the impact of colonial and post-colonial development projects on the environment. Both these collections included papers by scholars with backgrounds in the social and natural sciences carrying-out applied research into conservation and development issues.⁷² These contributors tended to be more interested in the environmental impact of projects rather than the political context in which they were enacted. This cross disciplinary interaction made historians increasingly aware of research findings that questioned the uni-lineal view of environmental destruction.

Some of the most influential research in this area came out of a new paradigm of range ecology that developed during the 1980s. The work of range management specialists such as Ian Scoones in Zimbabwe and Nick Able and Yvan Biot in Botswana challenged prior ecological theories that linked livestock populations in excess of carrying capacity to range degradation. Instead they emphasised the concepts of variability and disequilibrium, and argued that semi-arid rangelands have to be considered 'event-driven' environments. Extreme events, specifically droughts, are the primary agents forcing changes in the vegetational pattern of these environments rather than the pressure of grazing per se.⁷³

This new ecological approach helped foster a cross-disciplinary re-evaluation of 'the assumptions, theories and technologies which have underpinned interventions' into the African environment.⁷⁴ Many non-historians took an increasingly historical approach

1996), pp. 33-40. Khan identifies a lack of research on pre-colonial African ideas about the environment as one of the key lacunas in the current literature; Khan 'Re-writing South Africa's Conservation History'.

72 See for example Wilson, K. 'Trees in fields in Southern Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, pp. 369-383; Nyamafene, K. 'Adaptation to Marginal Land Amongst the Peasant Farmers of Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, pp. 384-389; Hughes, F. 'Conflicting Uses for Forest Resources in the Lower Tana River Basin in Kenya' in Anderson and Grove, *Conservation in Africa*, pp. 211 - 228; Lindsay, W. K. 'Integrating Parks and Pastoralists: some lessons from Amboseli' in Anderson and Grove, *Conservation in Africa*, pp. 149 - 167.

73 Research by these three and others are included in the collection Behnke, R.H., Scones, I. and Kerven, C. (eds) *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium: New Models of Natural Variability and Pastoral Adaptation in African Savannas* (London, 1993).

74 McGregor, J. 'Review Article: Environmental Knowledge Under Scrutiny', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1994, 20, 2, pp. 317-324.

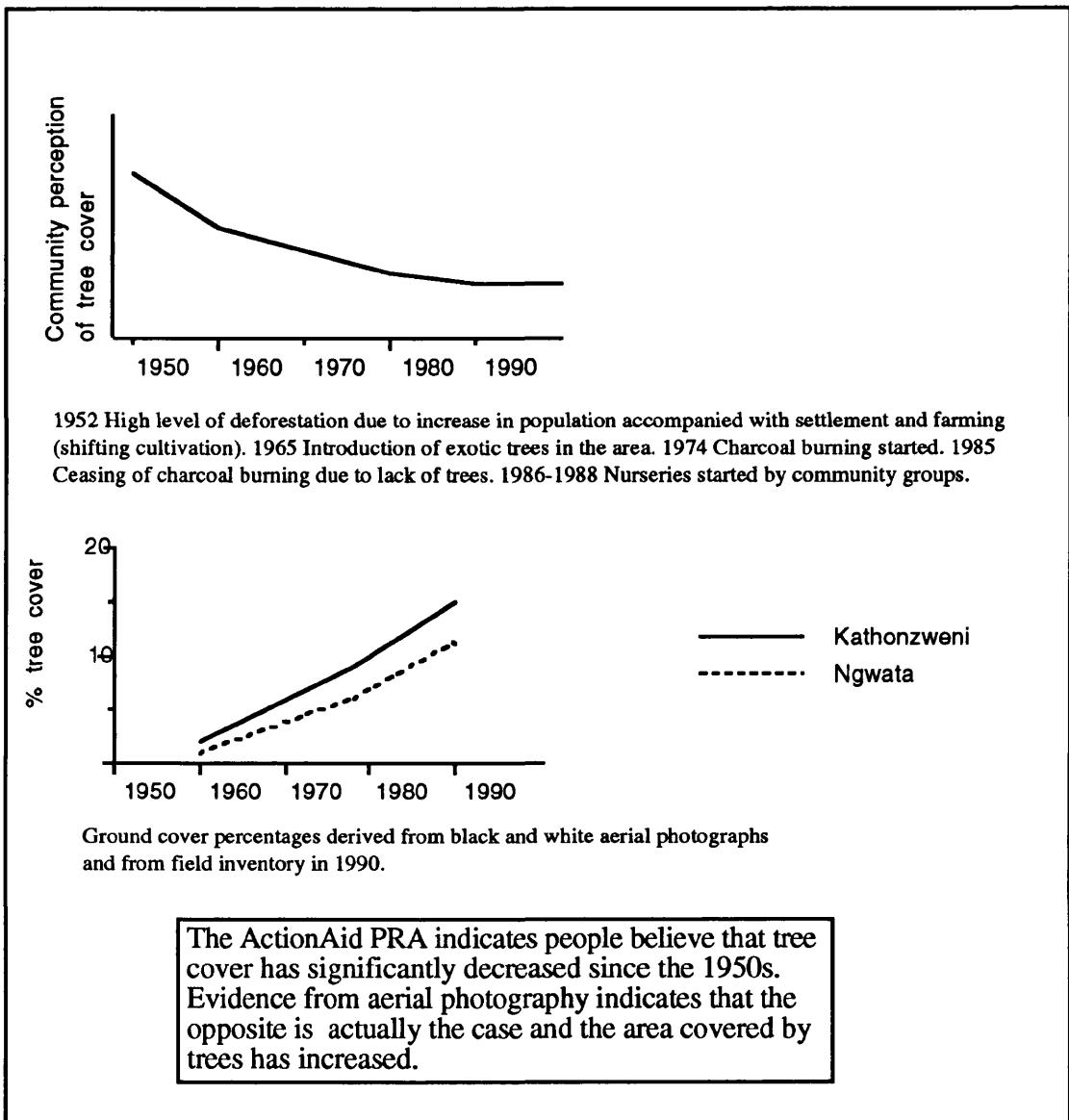
to environmental issues across sub-Saharan Africa. Research in this field has been particularly vibrant in Zimbabwe where the work of Ian Scoones, Ken Wilson, JoAnne McGregor, Michael Drinkwater and Jocelyn Alexander all stressed the continuity between colonial and post-colonial environment and development policies in the communal areas.⁷⁵ Within development studies there has also been an increased awareness of the fact that development policy did not suddenly start at independence and there have been a number of studies tracing the history of development discourse to its roots in the nineteenth or eighteenth century (there are differences in emphasis between different researchers).⁷⁶

Perhaps the most striking challenge to the assumption that degradation has been a one way affair came from an Overseas Development Institute (ODI) study into Machakos District in Kenya. Archival and photographic evidence from the colonial era showed that this was an area thought to be suffering an environmental crisis and development interventions were enacted as a result. During the colonial era these interventions were resisted by the communities living in Machakos District. Since then, however, many of the policies advocated by the colonial authorities, such as the terracing of fields and planting of trees, have taken place without any direct government involvement. The ODI team argue that the primary reason for this turn-around has been population increase, which has forced people to use the land more productively and to invest in environmental improvements. This strong challenge to the dominant Malthusian assumptions about population and environmental degradation has received a great deal of attention from both environmental historians and people interested in contemporary

⁷⁵ Alexander, J. H. 'The State, Agrarian Policy and Rural Politics in Zimbabwe: case studies of Insiza and Chimanimani Districts, 1940-1990' (unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1993); Drinkwater, M. *The state and agrarian change in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas*, (London, 1991); Drinkwater, M. 'Cows eat grass, don't they? Evaluating Conflict over Pastoral Management in Zimbabwe' in Croll, E. and Parkin, D. (eds.) *Bush Base: Forest Farm* (London, 1992), pp. 169-186; McGregor, J. 'Woodland Resources: Ecology, Policy and Ideology: An Historical Case Study of Woodland Use in Shurugwi Communal Area, Zimbabwe' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Loughborough, 1991); Scoones, I. 'Livestock Populations and the Household Economy: A Case Study from Southern Zimbabwe' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1990); Scoones, I. 'Politics, Polemics and Pastures: Range Management Science and Policy in Southern Africa' in Leach, M. and Mearns, R. (eds) *Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment* (London, 1996), pp.34-53; Scoones, I. and Wilson, K. 'Households, Lineage Groups and Ecological Dynamics' in Cousins, B., Jackson, C. and Scoones, I. (eds) *Socio-economic Dimensions of Livestock Production in the Communal Lands of Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1988); Wilson, K. 'Trees in fields in southern Zimbabwe'.

⁷⁶ Cowen, M.P. and Shenton, R.W. *Doctrines of Development* (London, 1996); Cowen, M.P. and Shenton, R.W 'The Invention of Development' in Crush, J. (ed.) *Power of Development* (London, 1995), pp. 27-43; Watts, M. 'A New Deal in Emotions: Theory and Practice and the Crisis of Development' in Crush *Power of Development*, pp. 44-62; Porter, D.J. 'Scenes from Childhood: The Homesickness of Development Discourse' in Crush, *Power of Development*, pp. 63-86.

Figure 1.4 Vegetational change in southern Machakos district, Kenya according to an ActionAid Participatory Rural Appraisal project and according to an Overseas Development Institute project team⁷⁷



environmental issues.⁷⁸ Figure 1.4 indicates how the findings reported by the ODI team contradict prior descriptions of the direction of environmental degradation in the

⁷⁷ ActionAid, *Lifestyle Overload ?: Population and Environment in the Balance. A Report of the ActionAid Seminar held at Commonwealth House, London, on 20 November 1991*, (edited by Johnson, V. ActionAid Development Report No. 5, London, n.d. [c.1991]), p. 7; Tiffen, Mortimore and Gichuki, *More People, Less Erosion*, (Table 8.1).

⁷⁸ Tiffen, M., Mortimore, M. and Gichuki, F. *More People, Less Erosion: Environmental Recovery in Kenya* (London, 1994); Tiffen, M. and Mortimore, M. *Environment, Population Growth and Productivity in Kenya: A Case Study of Machakos District* (International Institute of Environment and Development Drylands Network Programme Issue Paper, No. 47, London, 1994).

area. Figure 1.4 also highlights a potential problem in using oral history to reconstruct past environmental change. Recent research from Uganda supports both the conclusion that increased population does not necessarily mean more environmental degradation and the problems associated with oral history as a way of re-constructing environmental change.⁷⁹

This work on environmental change complements research on American environmental history which stresses transformations rather than degradation.⁸⁰ Beinart has again been at the forefront in introducing this literature to an Africanist audience, most notably through his monograph with Peter Coates comparing South African and United States environmental history (concentrating on the period between the mid-19th and 20th centuries).⁸¹ The idea of transformation rather than destruction has also informed his recent research into the pastures of the Karoo region of South Africa. This work provides a good example of the possibilities of cross-fertilisation between the work of ecologists and other natural scientists and environmental historians.⁸² His research on the Karoo is included in a collection of papers, cleverly entitled *The Lie of the Land*, from across the continent which argue against a uni-linear view of environmental destruction.⁸³ The publication of this collection arguably marks the firm entrenchment of this new perspective on African environmental change, at least within academic circles.

1.3.1. Secondary literature on Lesotho

Given Lesotho's long-standing reputation as a country suffering from both acute soil erosion and low agricultural productivity there has been surprisingly little attention paid to colonial conservation and development policies. The major texts on the economic

⁷⁹ Lindblade, K., Tumuhairwe, J.K., Carswell, G., Nkwiine, C. and Bwamiki, D. 'More People, More Fallow: The Myth of Over-cultivation in Kabale District, Uganda' (unpublished paper, 1996).

⁸⁰ Worster, D. 'Seeing Beyond Culture', *Journal of American History* (Roundtable: Environmental History), 76, 1990, pp. 1078-1106; Cronin, W. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983).

⁸¹ Beinart, W. and Coates, P. *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa* (London, 1995).

⁸² Beinart, W. 'Environmental Destruction in Southern Africa: Soil Erosion, Animals and Pastures Over The Longer Term' in Driver, T. and Chapman, G. (eds.) *Time-scales and Environmental Change* (London, 1996), pp. 149-168. In this paper Beinart makes good use of ecological research by Timm Hoffman and R. Cowling which argues against the widely held belief that semi-arid Karoo vegetation is spreading into wetter areas (often couched in terms of a 'desert on the march'); Hoffman, T. and Cowling, R. 'Vegetation Change In The Semi-Arid Eastern Karoo Over The Last 200 Years: An Expanding Karoo - Fact or Fiction?', *South African Journal of Science*, 86, 1990, pp. 286-294.

⁸³ Beinart, W. 'Environmental Destruction in Southern Africa: Soil Erosion, Animals and Pastures Over The Longer Term' in Leach and Mearns *The Lie of the Land*, pp. 54-72.

history of Lesotho have tended to concentrate on the period between c.1830s and c.1930s and on the growth and subsequent decline of the Basotho peasant agricultural sector.⁸⁴ The migrant labour system has dominated the historiography of Lesotho both as subject of inquiry itself and as the chief explanatory factor in its economic history.⁸⁵ The relationship between chiefs, commoners and the colonial state has also been well covered, though this has tended to be in relation to studies of the growth of organised political movements.⁸⁶

The lack of interest in late colonial development policy is surprising compared to the huge interest in Lesotho as a recipient of development aid during the 1970s and 1980s and the underlying continuity in development policy. One of the results of this huge interest in post-colonial Lesotho amongst development organisations was the Lesotho

⁸⁴ Eldredge, E. *A South African Kingdom: the Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth Century Lesotho*, (Cambridge, 1993); Kimble, J. 'Clinging to the Chiefs: Some Contradictions of Colonial Rule in Basutoland, c.1890-1930' in Bernstein, H. and Campbell, B. K. (eds) *Contradictions of Accumulation in Africa: Studies in Economy and State* (London, 1985), pp. 25-69; Kimble, J. 'Labour Migration in Basutoland, 1870-1885' in Marks, S. and Rathbone, R. (eds.) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870-1930* (London, 1982), pp. 119-141; Kimble, J. 'Towards an Understanding of the Political Economy of Lesotho: the Origins of Commodity Production and Migrant Labour, 1830-c.1885' (unpublished Masters thesis, National University of Lesotho, 1978).

⁸⁵ Bonner, P. "Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women?" Liquor, Prostitution and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945' in Walker, C. (ed.) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1990), pp. 221-250; Guy, J. and Thabane, M. 'Technology, Ethnicity and Ideology: Basotho Miners and Shaft-Sinking on the South African Gold Mines', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 2, 1988, pp. 257-278; Guy, J. and Thabane, M. 'Basotho Miners, Oral History and Workers Strategies' in Kaarsholm *Cultural Struggle and Development*, pp. 239-258; Maloka, T. 'Basotho and the Mines: Towards a History of Labour Migrancy, c. 1890-1940' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1995); Maloka, T. 'All Chiefs are Shepherds: Populism and Labour Migration in Colonial Lesotho, 1886-1940' (unpublished paper presented at Societies of Southern Africa Seminar Series, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 21 October 1995); Maloka, T. 'Khomo Lia Oela: Canteens, Brothels and Labour Migrancy in Colonial Lesotho, 1900-40', *Journal of African History*, 38, 1997, pp. 101-122; Murray, 'From Granary to Labour Reserve'.

⁸⁶ Coplan, D. and Quinlan, T. 'A Chief By the People: Nation versus State in Lesotho', *Africa*, 67, 1, 1997, pp. 25-59; Edgar, R. *Prophets with Honour - a Documentary History of Lekotla la Bafo* (Johannesburg, 1990); Machobane, L. B. B. J. *The Political Dilemma of Chieftaincy in Colonial Lesotho with Reference to the Administration and Court Reforms of 1938* (Institute of Southern African Studies, National University of Lesotho, Occasional Paper, No. 1, Roma, 1986); Machobane, L. B. B. J. *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions* (Basingstoke, 1990); Neocosmos, M. 'Towards a History of Nationalities in Southern Africa' (unpublished paper presented at Dimensions of Economic and Political Reform in Contemporary Africa conference, Kampala, 8 April 1994); Rugege, S. 'The Chieftainship and Society in Lesotho: a study in the political economy of the Basotho chieftancy from pre-colonial times to the present' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1993); Weisfelder, R. F. *Defining National Purpose in Lesotho* (Papers in International Studies, Africa Series No. 3, Athens, Ohio, 1969); Weisfelder, R. F. *The Basotho Monarchy: A Spent Force or a Dynamic Political Factor?* (Papers in International Studies, Africa Series No. 16, Athens, Ohio, 1972); Weisfelder, R. F. 'Early Voices of Protest in Basutoland: The Progressive Association and Lekotla la Bafo', *African Studies Review* 17, 1974, pp. 397-409.

Agricultural Sector Analysis (LASA) project. The project aimed to collect the data necessary for more planned interventions into the rural economy of Lesotho and included a study of past soil and water conservation projects.⁸⁷ The analysis of colonial projects was confined almost entirely to describing what had taken place according to official reports, though the authors did note an apparent shift in policy away from physical engineering approaches during the 1950s, despite the reports that these had been a success.⁸⁸ An annotated bibliography on water and soil conservation by Qalabane Chakela also made the point that the reports of success in official documents did not tally with the fact that they were suddenly dropped with no further comment.⁸⁹

Both Nobe and Seckler's and Chakela's work was primarily concerned with the technical side of soil and water conservation and development and how past experiences could feed into contemporary initiatives. Chakela undertook a more in-depth study of soil and conservation policies and projects in his chapter on Lesotho in a general SADC history of soil and water conservation.⁹⁰ Discussion of colonial projects is dominated by the massive programme of contour bank construction initiated in the 1930s. Chakela's analysis is still largely concerned with the technical aspects of the projects, rather than their political and economic context and consequences, though his work supports Showers's analysis of the contour bank building programme.

Kate Showers has studied the impact of these policies on the physical environment and, with Gwendolen Malahleha, on the attitude of people whose land was 'protected' towards the contour banks.⁹¹ They argue that the policies often had a negative effect on rates of erosion, and were resented and frequently resisted by the local populations. In line with much of the contemporary literature in development studies, and in the tradition of authors such as Kjekshus, Showers sees pre-colonial techniques of resource management as being environmentally sound. In contrast to much of the literature on the livestock sector (discussed below) she views increased soil erosion on lowland arable lands as being the direct result of ill conceived colonial anti-

⁸⁷ Nobe K.C. and Seckler, D. W. *An Economic and Policy Analysis of Soil Water Problems and Conservation Programmes in the Kingdom of Lesotho* (LASA Research Report No. 3., Maseru, 1979).

⁸⁸ Nobe and Seckler, *An Economic and Policy Analysis of Soil Water Problems*, p. 59.

⁸⁹ Chakela, Q.K. *Review and Bibliography: Water and Soil Resources of Lesotho, 1935-1970* (Uppsala, 1973), p.13.

⁹⁰ SADC-ELMS, *History of Soil Conservation in the SADC region: a collection of eight national studies and a summary report* (Maseru, 1987).

⁹¹ Showers, K. 'Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho: Origins and Colonial Response, 1830-1950s', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, pp. 263-286; Showers K. and Malahleha, G. M. 'Oral Evidence in Historical Environmental Impact Assessment: Soil Conservation in Lesotho in the 1930s and 1940s', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 2, 1992, pp. 276-296.

erosion policy.⁹² Showers, therefore, dates the on-set of accelerated environmental degradation to the late 1930s, when the anti-soil erosion programme got underway. She uses oral history to show that there was little evidence of degradation in the 1930s, though there are reasons to be cautious about these findings. Evidence from elsewhere indicates that oral history may be a particularly unreliable way of re-constructing a picture of past environmental conditions (see Figure 1.4).⁹³

James McCann has recently used a number of additional sources to re-examine Showers research. While he agrees with her general ‘disturbance’ thesis he traces its roots to an earlier period and to changes in agricultural techniques. McCann particularly emphasises the impact of deep ploughing introduced during the nineteenth century and Basotho farmers responses to new market opportunities. He also emphasises the point that there are particular physical characteristics of the duplex, sodic soils of the lowlands that make them especially susceptible to erosion.⁹⁴

McCann’s point about the physical properties of the lowland soils is supported by recent research by Meena Singh, a physical geographer. Singh examines the phenomenon of soil erosion in the Lesotho lowlands on a number of different time-scales. She argues that the geological history of the highly eroded lowland soils indicates that they were formed by soil erosion in the past, under a different hydrological regime. The dongas that scar the lowlands of Lesotho are a result of the continued re-working of these deposits and human impact is ‘more an acceleration of a pseudo-cyclic natural process, than an initiation of a new process regime’.⁹⁵

Colonial conservation and development projects other than the physical anti-erosion works have received little attention. Sandra Wallman’s *Take Out Hunger*, published in 1969, remains the only monograph specifically to analyse colonial development projects. Wallman carried out applied anthropological research into one of the two case studies she presents, the Farmech Mechanisation Scheme, and analysed the second, the Taung Reclamation Scheme, using secondary materials and project documents.⁹⁶

⁹² Showers ‘Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho’.

⁹³ See also Linblade, ‘Discrepancies in understanding historical land use changes’.

⁹⁴ McCann, J. *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa, 1800-1996* (in press), chapter 7.

⁹⁵ Singh, ‘Geological, Historical and Present-day Erosion and Colluvation in Lesotho’.

⁹⁶ Wallman, S. *Take Out Hunger: Two Case Studies of Rural Development in Basutoland* (London, 1969).

Her detailed descriptions of the projects and the reasons for their failure have not been followed-up in subsequent research. This may be because the more theoretical articles she published on the basis of her fieldwork emphasised individual psychological factors to explain Lesotho's 'non-development' and have, therefore, been associated with a liberal historiography emphasising economic dualism.⁹⁷ While Colin Murray's characterisation of Wallman's theoretical arguments as 'reductionist and ahistoric'⁹⁸ is valid, there is much excellent primary research in *Take Out Hunger* that could be built on in further studies of colonial development policies. The 'Farmech' project was in progress at the time of Wallman's fieldwork, and one obvious research project would be to see how the project fared in subsequent years and assess its long-term impact on the lowland regions of Mafeteng district.

Another fascinating area of research is suggested by A.F. Robertson in an article on the career of James Jacob Machobane. During the 1950s Machobane established a remarkable organisation in Lesotho designed to increase agricultural production rapidly, mainly through inter-cropping, and thus to 'banish hunger' from the country. Though a number of colonial officials gave the 'Machobane system' a degree of support many in the Department of Agriculture (both before and after Independence) regarded it as a threat and Machobane argues his movement was deliberately undermined and eventually destroyed.⁹⁹ Robertson's article is based almost entirely on an interview with Machobane and a few official published sources: archival information on the colonial officials attitudes and actions towards Machobane and his organisation are available in the Lesotho National Archives (LNA) and the relationship could prove to be a fascinating, and important, research topic.¹⁰⁰

There is a fairly extensive literature on rangeland degradation and grazing regimes in the mountains,¹⁰¹ though little of this considers the issues for the colonial period. Tim

⁹⁷ Wallman, S. 'Conditions of Non-development: The Case of Lesotho', *Journal of Development Studies*, 8, 2, 1972, pp. 251-262; Wallman, S. 'The modernisation of dependence: a further note on Lesotho', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 3, 1, 1976, pp. 102-108.

⁹⁸ Murray, C. 'From Granary to Labour Reserve' p.4.

⁹⁹ Robertson, A.F. 'Popular Scientist: James Jacob Machobane and *Mantsa Tala*', *African Affairs*, 93, 1994, pp. 99-121.

¹⁰⁰ LNA B3597/11, J.J. Machobane's Agricultural System, 1958.

¹⁰¹ Dobb, A. J. 'The Organization of Range Use in Lesotho, Southern Africa: A Review of Attempted Modifications and Case Study' (unpublished Masters dissertation, Washington State University, 1985); Government of Lesotho, Ministry of Agriculture and Marketing, *Seminar on the Productivity of Mountain Livestock, Mazenod, Lesotho, 16 July 1984* (Maseru, n.d. [c. 1984]); Swallow, B. M., Mokitimi, N. and Brokken, R.F. *Cattle Marketing in Lesotho* (Research Division Bulletin RD-B-49/ISAS Research Report No. 13, Maseru, 1986); Swallow, B. M., Motsamai, M., Sopeng, L., Brokken, R. F. and Storey, G.G. *A Survey of the Production, Utilisation and Marketing of Livestock Products in Lesotho* (Research Division Report RD-R-81/ISAS Research Report No.

Quinlan discusses colonial livestock development policies in his article in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, but his purpose is essentially to contrast these with post-colonial policies in the livestock sector.¹⁰² Some of his arguments will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2. D.S. Uys put together a useful factual account of the history of the mohair industry in Lesotho, though for the colonial period it is based more or less entirely on official documents.¹⁰³ Some of the most detailed descriptions of colonial policies in the livestock sector are given by Daniel Phororo in his official report on the livestock sector written in the late 1970s.¹⁰⁴ Surprisingly Phororo makes no mention of the 1947 closure policy in Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek in his report and told me in an interview in 1995 that he had never even heard of the closure policy.¹⁰⁵ The closure policy is only mentioned briefly in a couple of studies on the livestock sector in Lesotho either quoting the Department of Agriculture *Annual Reports* or Patrick Duncan's 1960 textbook *Sotho Law and Custom*.¹⁰⁶

17, Maseru, 1987); Ivy, D. and Turner, S. 'Range Management Areas and Grazing Associations - experience at Sehlabathebe, Lesotho' in Centre for Development Co-operation Services (eds) *Successful Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa*, (Windhoek, 1996), pp. 117-146; Klosterman, E.W. *Livestock Production in Siloe, Nyakosoba and Molomong Areas* (Agricultural Research Technical Bulletin, RD-B-11, Maseru, 1983); Lawry, S. *Livestock and Range Management in Sehlabathebe* (Land Conservation and Range Development Project (USAID), Range Management Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Maseru, 1986); Lawry S. 'Communal Grazing and Range Management: the Case of Grazing Associations in Lesotho' in *African Livestock Policy Analysis Network* (International Livestock Centre for Africa, No. 13, Addis Ababa, 1987); Limbach, 'Current State of Range Management and Development in Lesotho'.

- ¹⁰² Quinlan, T. 'Grassland Degradation and Livestock Rearing in Lesotho', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 3, 1995, pp.491-507.
- ¹⁰³ Uys, D. S. *The Lesotho Mohair Industry: History and Evaluation, 1970 and 5 more years* (Maseru, 1971).
- ¹⁰⁴ Phororo, D. R. *Livestock Farming in Lesotho and Pasture Utilisation: Analysis and Suggested National Policy* (No. 4 in Series, The Anatomy of Lesotho's Agricultural Development Section, Maseru, 1979). Phororo worked in the Ministry of Agriculture both before and after Independence, eventually becoming the Permanent Secretary in the 1970s. The report cited above was written specifically because it was feared his departure from the Ministry in 1979, to take up a post with the FAO, would mean the government was no longer able to access his personal knowledge and expertise. In 1986 he became the de facto Minister of Agriculture in the military government of Major General Lekhanya, though his position with the FAO officially barred him from political office. He left the government in 1990 and set-up a veterinary practice on the outskirts of Maseru.
- ¹⁰⁵ Interview with Daniel Phororo, 25 April 1995, Maseru.
- ¹⁰⁶ Duncan, P. *Sotho Laws and Customs: A handbook based on decided cases in Basutoland together with the Laws of Lerotholi* (Cape Town, 1960), p. 78; Quinlan, T. *The Livestock Economy in the Mountain Zone of Lesotho* (Socio-economic Project Report of the Maluti/Drakensberg Catchment Conservation Programme, May 1989), p. 30; Swallow, B. M., Motsamai, M., Sopeng, L. and Storey, G.G. *Livestock Development and Range Utilisation In Lesotho* (Research Division Report RD-R-82/ISAS Research Report No. 18, Maseru, 1987) p. 23; Lawry, S. 'Private Herds and Common Lands: Issues in the Management of Communal Land in Lesotho' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1988), p. 107-108.

Most of the literature on current grazing regimes and development policy refer to the past simply to provide a benchmark against which present degradation can be measured. Raymond Staples and W.K. Hudson's 1938 *Ecological Survey* is widely cited in this literature as an example of both the long-standing nature of range degradation and an indication of how the solutions to the problem are well known but have never been implemented.¹⁰⁷ In contrast to much of the colonial discourse on Basotho livestock management, and in line with most contemporary development studies literature, the modern reports on livestock development in Lesotho tend to argue that elements of the pre-colonial grazing strategies were environmentally sensitive. This literature tends to regard the colonial period as a time when many of the current problems with the grazing regime were initiated. Colonialism introduced 'external markets and entrepreneurship' which 'undermined the local institutions' and led to people acting in their own economic self-interest rather than in the interests of the community.¹⁰⁸ The colonial government did try to institute sensible grazing management policies, but these lacked any popular support:

However well conceived, these laws proved to be ineffective; perhaps they were perceived by the Basotho people as an imposition of expatriate (colonial) values.¹⁰⁹

1.3.2. Where this thesis fits into the secondary literature

This thesis is the first to deal specifically with the history of colonial livestock development policies in Lesotho. The 1947 closure policy briefly mentioned elsewhere forms the central point around which this thesis is built.

While the thesis falls within the broad category of environmental history it does not set-out to trace the way in which the mountain environment was been transformed over the colonial period. Nor does it attempt to trace the impact of the closure policy on the environment. Indeed it argues that the policy had no direct impact on the environment as it was never implemented. Nevertheless I have been heavily influenced by the growing literature challenging the view of uni-linear environmental degradation and I reject the notion that the pastures of the mountain area of Lesotho have shown continuous degradation in response to increased population pressures. In chapter 5 I marshal some of the new ecological thinking on African rangelands in support of my argument that any observations of changing conditions in the rangeland in the period

¹⁰⁷ See for example Limbach 'Current State of Range Management', p. 73.

¹⁰⁸ Swallow et.al *Livestock Development and Range Utilisation*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ Limbach 'Current State of Range Management', p. 74.

mid-1940s to mid-1950s had nothing to do with the implementation of the closure policy. It is also used to provide an alternative ‘reading’ of the environmental conditions which colonial officials and others believed indicated range degradation.

The emphasis on the political and socio-economic causes and consequences of the policy in the mountain zone, and the short-time frame, make the thesis akin to the rural social history that has concentrated on resistance to the colonial state and on rural class formation. Indeed, as I suggested at the start of this chapter, that is where my primary early influences lay. Like much of the social history the thesis uses oral history as a way of avoiding the biases and assumptions of the archival record. Unlike most cases where oral history is used, however, it does not provide a more nuanced version of events and trends reported in the written record: rather the oral history flatly contradicts the official history. Though oral evidence on the state of the pastures during the period in question was also collected whilst in the field I have tended to avoid using it to reconstruct a picture of past environmental conditions partially for reasons outlined above but also as none of the oral testimonies provided me with a firm picture of environmental change in the decade following the ‘war with Hitler’.¹¹⁰

Another field of environmental history, tracing the development of ideas about the environment, is well represented in the thesis. Chapters 3 and 4 clearly build on the work of academics such as Grove, Beinart, Anderson and McCracken. The emphasis is perhaps more on the history of science than the existing literature in this vein, an area I would identify as being under-represented. I also place emphasis on the role ideas about post-war re-construction played in the accelerated intervention in the second half of the 1940s, unlike the previous literature which has tended to see the war as simply an intermission in the growing concerns sparked off primarily by the global depression in the early 1930s.

My stress on the importance of colonial ideologies of environment and development to the increased intervention in the African environment does not mean that I totally reject structuralist explanations. Clearly colonial development policy in Lesotho has to be understood in connection with the migrant labour system and capitalist growth in South Africa. Nevertheless it is not adequate to explain all the actions of the colonial state in Lesotho as primarily concerned with ensuring that the territory continued to subsidise the costs of reproduction of the migrant labour force. Indeed I would argue that a primary motivation of the colonial state, especially in the post-war period, was to ensure its own reproduction and to prevent the transfer of administration to the Union

¹¹⁰ See chapter 9 for details of how I carried-out the oral history for this thesis.

government. The transfer issue is central to the history of livestock development in Lesotho.

Most literature on the economic history of Lesotho has been based on South African historiography. In this thesis, especially in chapter 7, I tend to stress the differences between Lesotho and the South African reserves. In sections of the thesis dealing with the relationship between chiefs and the colonial state I have tried to introduce literature from the indirect rule colonies to the north of the Limpopo, especially in connection with the politics of land allocation. I have also attempted to incorporate some of the recent literature on the history of development, much of which has come from people working outside of the discipline of history. It is to this literature that I turn in the next chapter.

2. Conservation, development and order

Development and conservation are often seen as being two opposing ideas: the former aimed at transforming both society and the physical environment and the latter aimed at protecting the physical environment from being transformed by society. In the 1980s and 1990s efforts to marry the two concepts (Integrated Conservation and Development Projects, Sustainable Development) have been thought of as new, challenging and a departure from previous orthodoxy. The growing literature on colonial African rural development projects clearly shows, however, that the linking of conservation and development has a far longer history. In this chapter I will explore the history of development as an entry point into a discussion of the major arguments underlying my thinking about colonial development policies in the mountain areas of Lesotho.

In an article in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* Tim Quinlan argues that colonial and post-colonial interventions in the livestock sector of Lesotho have been marked by an intrinsic ambiguity:

On the one hand, the projects implicitly disavow the notion of natural ecological limits, asserting that creative intervention will protect the grassland, and allow more (improved) stock on the land. On the other hand, a premise of the projects is that livestock have overgrazed the grassland, and thus they implicitly blame stock-owners for having transgressed natural limits. This judgement is expressed in the restrictions which the projects impose on use of the grassland, and which are reminiscent of the preservationist ideology of conservation.¹

During the colonial period, Quinlan argues, it was the first side of this dichotomous equation that held sway. In the post-colonial period grassland conservation issues have come to the fore:

A discernible difference between colonial and post-colonial lies in the role attributed to stock-owners. Colonial projects emphasised livestock as the critical resource and, wittingly and unwittingly, allowed Basotho to manage the grassland. Post-colonial interventions have begun to emphasise grassland as the critical resource, in terms of its bio-physical capacity to support other economic activities.²

Evidence presented in this thesis will clearly show that when Quinlan states that ‘little attention was paid to the conservation of grazing land [during the colonial era]’³ he is simply mistaken. Ironically, however, I accept Quinlan’s implicit argument that colonial interventions in the livestock sector could be characterised as developmentalist. They were also, however, conservationist.

1 Quinlan, ‘Grassland Degradation’, p. 491.

2 Quinlan, ‘Grassland Degradation’, p. 496.

3 Quinlan, ‘Grassland Degradation’, p. 494.

Implicit to Quinlan's analysis are orthodox 'development studies' definitions of development and conservation. Development is conceived of as simply a process of improvement, essentially measured through an increase in output (though the use of quote marks indicates some scepticism about these claims on the part of development). Conservation, on the other hand, relates simply to the 'bio-physical' realm and can be measured by the proximity of the environment to its natural state. These definitions are then read back to the colonial period and government actions are labelled according to their fit to the modern definition.

Historians of colonial interventions into African rural society and the African environment have, by contrast, used the terms conservation and development almost interchangeably. Beinart's seminal 1984 article used the terms conservation and development in its title but the text spoke mainly of conservation, conservationism and conservationist ideologies, while the term development tended to be reserved for post-1960 state interventions; again with quote marks implying that these interventions were somehow not authentic development.⁴

Similarly Anderson, in his article in *African Affairs*, tends to refer to interventions in the 1930s as conservationist, but in the conclusion to the article he implies that the interventions marked the 'beginnings of "development"'.⁵ Neither Anderson nor Beinart examine the meaning of these two terms. It is clear that their understanding of the term conservation is closely tied to the productive capacity of land, rather than its proximity to a 'natural state', and the concept is, therefore, more easily reconcilable with the concept of development. Quote marks around the word development also suggest a divergence between the outcome of these interventions and the outcome of authentic development: i.e. these interventions did not lead to a widespread improvement in the human condition of the population of these areas.

While I would argue that Anderson is correct to describe these early interventions as 'development' (though for reasons that I hope will become apparent I would leave out the quote marks) the potential for confusion caused by competing definitions of the term means that it is necessary to explore the history of the concept explicitly.

4 Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development'.

5 Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought', p. 343. Again note the quote marks around development.

2.1. History of development

2.1.1. Development, progress and modernity

Despite the impression created by the many development studies text books that assume development has its roots in the years immediately following the Second World War,⁶ development has a long and complex history. The texts that do consider the history of development often look for its roots in the late eighteenth century Enlightenment and the ‘epoch of modernity’.⁷ Michael Watts argues that shortly after the word development entered the English language in the eighteenth century it attracted to itself a powerful metaphorical association with ideas about biological growth. It also bore a close affinity to teleological views of history, science and progress.⁸ The rise of a teleological view of history is frequently associated with Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment. In many of the texts that do consider the pre-1945 history of the concept, Smith is cited as the forefather of development because of his belief that human society passed through a series of stages, from hunting and fishing, through pastoralism and settled agriculture to commerce and manufacture.⁹ Furthermore Smith’s concentration on the desire of the individual to pursue pleasure placed wealth, value and accumulation at the centre of economic theory; the concepts that still dominate most development discourses in the late twentieth century.¹⁰

Others, such as Kate Manzo, look back beyond Smith to Thomas Hobbes and to John Locke. Manzo cites Hobbes because of the binary distinctions he makes between science and superstition, man and beast, man and child, order and anarchy, sanity and madness, sense and nonsense and reason and passion. The creation of an ‘Other’ is central to Hobbes scheme and

Although Hobbes did not speak in terms of underdevelopment, the logic of Leviathan provides an exemplary illustration of modern understandings of that term. To be underdeveloped was to exist in a condition of unreason, marked by the absence of industry, culture, navigation, trade, comfort, knowledge of the earth, time, art, letters and society. For Hobbes, this mode of living in continual fear and danger was exemplified by children and ‘savages’ and attributable either

6 Some texts pinpoint an exact date: 20 January 1949; the day of Harry Truman’s inaugural address as US President when he declared: ‘We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas’; quoted by Porter, D. ‘The Homesickness of Development Discourses’, p. 66.

7 Manzo, K. ‘Black Consciousness and the Quest for a Counter-Modernist Development’ in Crush, *Power of Development*, p. 228-252.

8 Watts, ‘A New Deal in Emotions’.

9 Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*.

10 Lasch, C. *The True and Only Heaven*, (New York, 1991), p. 52, quoted in Watts, ‘A New Deal in Emotions’, p. 48.

to the absence of science ('ignorance') or to the presence of superstition and its reliance upon 'false rules'.¹¹

Manzo also marshals John Locke into the proto-development fold, arguing that his *Second Treatise of Government* was also reliant upon a spatial and temporal distancing of 'us' from 'them'. Rational man had created human comfort and progress through the application of labour to land. Those, such as the native inhabitants of the Americas, who had not improved their land through labour (described by Locke as being in 'an imperfect state of Childhood') needed the guardianship of rational civilised man to be brought to reason.¹²

The linking of development and modernity, and the incantation of Hobbes, Locke and Smith as the forefathers of development discourse, ironically relies upon many of the internally contradictory aspects of the word that these explorations seek to explain. Manzo's linking of the 'Othering' of Hobbes and Locke to development is only possible by blurring the distinction between development as a state and development as a process. Watts's concentration on the connection between development and Enlightenment views of progress similarly blurs the distinction between development as an innate process and an intentional project. In general the linking of development and modernity would seem to have little to offer as a tool for sharpening the focus on either of these two complex, diffuse and contested terms.

2.1.2. Development and positivism

Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton's recent research tracing the history of development discourse appears to have much more to offer.¹³ They identify the roots of what they label development doctrine in early nineteenth century European reactions to the socially disruptive outcomes of rapid industrialisation and capitalist growth. Central to the elaboration of development doctrine were the ideas of the French positivists, especially Henri de Saint Simon and Auguste Comte, often described as the founder of the discipline of sociology.

Saint Simon and his followers, living through the era of the French Revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism, addressed the problem of creating order in a society undergoing rapid transformation. The Saint Simonians argued that the thinkers of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution had succeeded in destroying the old basis of

11 Manzo 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a Counter-Modernist Development', p. 233; citing Campbell, D. *Writing Security: US Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, (Minneapolis, 1992).

12 Manzo 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a Counter-Modernist Development', p. 235.

13 Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development* and Cowen and Shenton 'The Invention of Development'. The following paragraphs are closely based on these two sources.

political and economic order. This had been necessary; but they had been unable to create a new theory and practice upon which to build a new era of order and stability. Most importantly of all, the growth of capitalism had created the spectre of unemployment and a relative surplus population. By putting a premium upon the self-interested action of the rational individual the Enlightenment thinkers had compounded the problem of social disorder. The Saint Simonians argued that the present epoch of disorder had to be transformed through active purpose by those who were entrusted with the future of society.

While Comte agreed with much from his Saint Simonian predecessors he argued that their project of reconciling order and progress was premature and it was first necessary to create a new science of history, or sociology. Crucially Comte argued that there needed to be a reformulation of the concept of order in line with natural laws. In the natural world progress was orderly and in keeping with these universal laws but in the human realm progress was restless and inconsistent. It was development that would bring order to progress. Knowledge was the pre-requisite for this reconciliation between order and progress: for ordered progress to be continuously reproduced it was necessary simply to develop the encyclopaedias of knowledge and then to apply their wisdom.

Positivist knowledge was restricted to the few ('the high priests of positivism'¹⁴) but altruism, a primary principle of Comte's positivism, meant that ordered progress would lead to the collective good. Comte argued, however, that care should be taken in transferring the 'ideas customs and institutions' of civilised men 'indiscriminately and... indiscreetly' to the 'less civilised' as such action would likely lead to the 'gravest political unrest'.¹⁵ The positivist ideas first needed to be explored and tested amongst society's elite before being transferred to the rest of humanity.

I have gone into some detail on nineteenth-century positivist thought because out of these ideas it is possible to distil three essential features of development that have implications for this study. First, development was conceptualised as a way of ameliorating or controlling the negative or destructive elements of progress, especially relative surplus population, and creating order out of disorder. Secondly, it involved an active transformation or an intention to develop. Thirdly, development was to be

14 Cowen and Shenton 'The Invention of Development', p. 35.

15 Andreski, S. (ed.) *The Essential Comte: selected from the Cours de Philosophie Positive* (London, 1974), p. 200-1, quoted in Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*, p. 35

entrusted to individuals who possess the necessary skills or knowledge to see through the intention to develop, what Cowen and Shenton label as trusteeship.

2.1.3. From French positivism to British colonial development policy

Cowen and Shenton argue that there is a direct genealogical lineage between nineteenth-century French positivist thinking and twentieth-century development doctrines in British colonial Africa. Ironically it was one of the foremost theorists of liberal democracy, James Stuart Mill, who arguably did most to introduce positivism into British political and economic theory.

Mill was heavily influenced by French positivist thinking and his analysis of the crisis of mid-century British industrial society echoed many of their theories. He broke with the positivist thinkers, however, over their solution for a swift transformation of society from its present disordered state through the direction of a few individuals of genius. Rather, Mill argued, there needed to be widespread education and the development of human minds. This development of minds could only take place under conditions of liberty where individuals had freedom of choice. Where these conditions did not exist they had to be created through trusteeship. Mill was an employee of the East India Company and used India as an example of a place that needed to be governed by an Imperial cadre:

India ... needed to be governed despotically through the exercise of trusteeship in order to create the conditions under which 'education', 'choice', 'individuality' - in a word 'development' - might occur. For Mill, wittingly, as for unwitting modern theorists, development could only occur where the conditions of development were already present. Societies in which the conditions were not present had to be guided by those from societies in which such conditions were already extant.¹⁶

Like Comte, Mill opposed the transfer of the institutions of the 'civilised' world to the 'uncivilised'. Indeed he even opposed the transfer of administration of India from the East Indies Company to the British Crown on the grounds that the rule of India would be corrupted by British democracy. Despite the fact that this transfer did occur Mill took comfort in the fact that the 'principles of trusteeship would underpin the new administration'.¹⁷

16 Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*, p. 41.

17 Cowen and Shenton 'The Invention of Development', p. 41, citing Mill, J.S. 'Writings on India' in Robson, J.N., Moir, M. and Moir, Z. (eds) *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (vol. 30, Toronto, 1990).

One of the things that Mill argued effective trusteeship in India should guard against was the transfer of resources from India to Britain. Development would act against this draining of resources, but it had to be a specific form of development sited within rural village communities. It was only in village communities, Mill argued, that the space could be found to create an autonomous democratic form of development: an alternative to the corrupting force of British democracy. In this argument Mill was essentially following the lead of numerous other thinkers who had sought to protect Indian village communities from the destructive power of capitalist growth and align state development or trusteeship to the development of community.

These ideas, evolving out of positivism, had a powerful influence on British Fabians and Radical Liberals later on. Mill's arguments about the need to site development in 'uncivilised countries' within village communities was echoed in the concerns of many early African colonial administrators to protect 'natural African communities' from the ravages of industrial capitalism. British Neo-Hegelian ideologies, especially those associated with T.H. Green were also influential, especially in respect to communal land tenure. Following the ideas of Green, Viscount Haldane of Cloan, the Chief Justice of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, made a precedent setting judgement in 1921 on a Lagos land dispute. His judgement was premised on the idea that African society could only develop out of its own laws and customs and, therefore, that land disputes had to be judged on the basis of African 'customary' law. Under African customary law, Haldane believed, all land belonged to the community, under the trusteeship of a chief.¹⁸

By the late 1930s, however, Cowen and Shenton argue that a new colonial development policy began to be formulated, associated around the role of the state and constructive development rather than the community. This constructive state development policy was largely the result of a reaction against the idea of community which had become associated with the *laissez-faire* economic policies which were blamed for causing widespread unemployment. Immediately after the war the colonial state in Africa, under the influence of a Labour administration in London, became involved in development policies aimed at production and trade.¹⁹ Though this

¹⁸ See Cowen, M.P. and Shenton, R.W. 'British Neo-Hegelian Idealism and Official Colonial Policy in Africa: the Oluwa Land Case of 1921', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 22, 2, 1994, pp. 217-250.

¹⁹ Cowen and Shenton trace a continuity in these ideas about state-led development from nineteenth century positivism, through the theories of Frederic List and into British thought via Joseph Chamberlain.

involvement was fleeting it left a lasting impact on policy and a legacy of state directed development.

Their emphasis on state development of production and trade and on doctrine means that Cowen and Shenton miss the shift in colonial policy that occurred earlier in the 1930s and resulted in (state led) projects to protect the African environment. The context of this shift in policy was precisely the growth of a relative surplus population but it was not born out of a reaction to the perceived failures of the idea of community but to the devastating effects of the global depression. While these interventions have tended to be characterised as conservationist I would argue that they closely resemble the development doctrine of nineteenth century positivism. They involved an active intention to ameliorate the impact of capitalists growth, which was displaying its destructive potential on the face of the land and creating a relative surplus population in the rural areas. Furthermore the interventions were aimed at creating an ordered environment and an orderly population.

2.2. Population and rural development

The conservation or development schemes undertaken in East and southern Africa from the 1930s onwards are often explained in terms of the need to ameliorate the effects of population growth.²⁰ Fears about the effects of population growth were most acute in the settler states where the African population found itself crowded into the reserves, but total population figures were increasing in every colony.²¹ It was not, however, the absolute growth of population that was important in driving development or conservation policies but rather the spectre of rapid rural to urban migration in response to decreasing opportunities in the countryside. The counter to the threat of the growth of an urban proletariat was rural development to maintain the rural population in its rural home and conservation to break the perceived vicious cycle of soil erosion and increasing population density.

Cowen and Shenton note that development policies, both in colonial Africa and in other times and places, were primarily concerned with controlling the movement of population:

From the threat of emigration from Quebec or Victoria in the mid-nineteenth century to that of de-industrialisation in late-century Britain or rural

²⁰ Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought', and Iliffe, *Africans*, p. 250.

²¹ Though there were also fears, in various places and at various times, about 'disappearing tribes' and population decline in specific rural areas.

unemployment in Kenya a century later, the focus [of development] is on the disordered movement of population.²²

In colonial and post-colonial Africa the emphasis has been on controlling rural to urban migration and preventing the growth of a large relative ‘surplus population’ in cities and towns. This does not mean that the colonial state wanted to prevent rural to urban migration, but rather that they wanted to maintain control over it. In southern Africa the specific concern was to maintain control over the migrant labour system.

Harold Wolpe’s now classic thesis explaining the shift from segregation to apartheid postulates that an ecological crisis in the reserves during the 1930s and 1940s, the result of population growth in on a restricted land area, contributed to a crisis of social reproduction. The more draconian legislation of apartheid was implemented as a means of controlling this crisis and ensuring the continuation of the migrant labour system. Policies designed to protect the reserve’s environment were an integral part of this process. Concern about the environment of the South Africa’s reserves was therefore directly linked to their ability to provide for the reproduction of the labour force in the reserves.²³

Wolpe’s structuralist arguments say little about conditions in the reserves or the policies enacted to confront the supposed ecological crisis. Subsequent research on these issues has shown a more complex interplay of economic, political and ideological motivations. Nevertheless most research on conservation and development in South Africa does indicate that interventions in African rural environment, society and economy were essentially linked to the aims of segregation and, later, apartheid.

In the words of Beinart:

The discourse and justification of conservation in the African areas became bound up with the political imperatives of segregation: stemming African urbanisation, maintaining the migrant labour system and ‘developing’ Africans within their ‘own’ areas. In the words of the influential *Native Economic Commission* report of 1932: ‘the fundamental problem lies in the reserves’. The situation in the reserves of South Africa (and Rhodesia) was diagnosed as bordering on ecological disaster. This was inimical to agricultural development and it also posed a threat to the direction of ‘native policy’.²⁴

22 Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*, p. 476.

23 Wolpe, ‘Capitalism and Cheap Labour-power in South Africa’.

24 Beinart, W. ‘Introduction: The Politics of Colonial Conservation’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, pp. 143-162, p. 153.

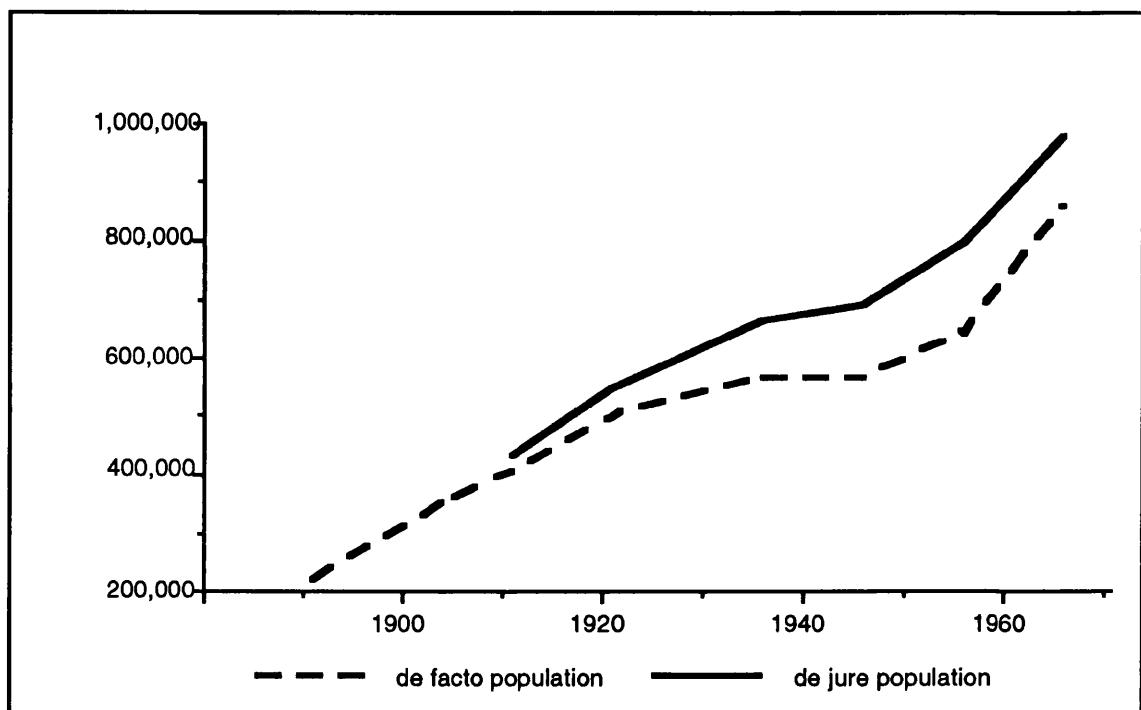
2.2.1. Population, conservation and development in colonial Lesotho

Much of the structuralist literature on Lesotho's economy has assumed that the colonial state simply acted in the interests of international capital invested in South Africa²⁵ and any policy shift in South Africa could, therefore, be expected to have its counterpart in Lesotho. Despite the fact that this line of reasoning simplifies the complex and often contradictory motivations of the Basutoland government, Wolpe's theoretical model of the transformation of the reserves' political economy fits Lesotho well. Colonial conservation/development policies were first put forward at a time when it looked as though the colonial authorities might lose control over the migrant labour system. After decades of stimulating the outflow of labour from Lesotho the colonial authorities began to be increasingly concerned about keeping the lid on the system, and especially to maintain control over the migration of women.

The population of Lesotho has grown steadily over the past century. Given the dependence of the country on migrant remittances and the large numbers of men (and some women) migrating to Johannesburg or the Free State farms and gold fields it is necessary, however, to disaggregate the *de facto* population from the *de jure* population (see Figure 2.1). During the heyday of colonial conservationist interventions, from the mid-1930s through to the mid-1950s the *de facto* population of Lesotho grew only very slowly, only rising again once the apartheid state started to apply influx control with renewed vigour.

25 Chapter 1 of Rugege, 'Chieftaincy and Society in Lesotho', surveys the literature on this issue.

Figure 2.1. *De facto* and *de jure* population for Lesotho during the colonial period.



The global depression of the early 1930s hit Lesotho hard:

The bottom fell out of wool prices as a result of the massive recession in world trade which followed the 1929 slump. The coincidence of acute economic depression with an exceptional drought in 1932-3 led to a loss of perhaps half the country's livestock. Wheat production survived and recovered but maize did not: in 1933 more than 350,00 bags of maize had to be imported... At the same time a resurgence in the price of gold stimulated the expansion of mining production and enormously increased the demand for labour on the gold mines. In the following decade a vast flow of emigration from Basutoland took place which, offsetting natural increase, explains the virtually static population recorded between the censuses of 1936 and 1946.²⁶

The Basutoland authorities were faced not just by increasing unemployment at home, but also pressure from South Africa to stem the flow of migrants, especially of women. The answer to this uncontrolled out-migration was rural development.

Colonial interventions into the rural economy of Lesotho were not motivated by simple demographic pressure, but by the increase in the gap between the *de facto* and *de jure* population. I am in no way suggesting that the colonial authorities wanted to bring the migrant labour system to an end. The colonial state wanted to ensure the continuation of an ordered and controlled system of oscillating migration, rather than the wholesale emigration of men and, crucially, women to South Africa's urban centres.²⁷ Nor am I suggesting that the interventions by the colonial state were in any way successful in stabilising the migrant labour system. The primary reason for the narrowing of the gap between *de facto* and *de jure* population figures after the late 1950s was the draconian influx control regulations employed by the apartheid state and the forcible expulsion of many Basotho living in South Africa.²⁸

Maintaining control over the migrant labour system was in the interests of not just the colonial state but also of the chiefs. In the Sesotho praxis, a chief is a 'chief by the people' and in the nineteenth century one of the controls on a chief's actions was the threat that his followers might shift allegiance to a new chief.²⁹ On the other hand, a

26 Murray, 'From Granary to Labour Reserve', p. 9-10.

27 When Anthony Sillery became the Resident Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, in 1947, he claims he was given one single instruction by the Dominions Office: keep up the labour supply to the Witwatersrand; Sillery, A., Unpublished memoirs, Rhodes House, Oxford; cited by Parsons, N. on H-SAfrica electronic mail discussion list (27 November 1997).

28 After Independence, development discourse in Lesotho shifted to an emphasis on changing the pattern of a labour exporting economy, and encouraging self-sufficiency and self help. Nevertheless the government of Lesotho remained fearful of any moves by the South African government to restrict the migrant labour system. In June 1996, for example, officials from Lesotho were vocal in their opposition to plans to give 90,000 long-term Basotho migrants permanent South African residency rights because of the potentially devastating impact on the Lesotho Bank (which receives direct transfers of a portion of migrants wages) and on the overall economy; Coplan and Quinlan, 'A Chief by the People', p. 50.

29 Coplan and Quinlan, 'A Chief by the People', p. 35.

chief's personal aggrandisement was often tied up with encouraging the out-flow of migrant labour, not least because of the payments made by labour recruiters to senior chiefs. In short it was in the political and material interests of chiefs to encourage the continuation of an ordered and stable migrant labour system, in which Basotho did not permanently leave for South Africa.

Maloka's research shows some of the ways in which an alliance between the chiefs and the colonial state (and the missionaries) maintained control of the migrant labour system. He notes that the 1920s and 1930s marked a crisis period for the chiefs and their control of the migrant labour system. The growth of a civil society in the 1920s threatened their national political position whilst the massive movement of labour to South Africa after the early 1930s drought and depression meant that many chiefs were concerned about losing their followers.³⁰ For both ideological and political reasons it was in the interests of the chiefs to support colonial calls for rural development.

2.3. Agrarian ideologies and trusteeship

In the mid-twentieth century anti-urban ideologies were widespread in southern Africa. Amongst settlers, an anti-urban ideology was strengthened by the linking together of ideas about urbanisation, environment, health, cleanliness and morality.³¹ Environmental decline in the countryside was seen as the root cause of an urban drift that was leading to the degeneration of both European (the 'poor white' problem) and African ('detribalisation') society. In 1938 one of the foremost conservationists in South Africa noted that:

All will agree that the greatest social problem confronting South Africa to-day is the drift of both European and Native populations from the country to the towns. The further complications that must inevitably arise as a result of this competitive association of races in the struggle for existence do not concern me here, but my present interest lies in the root cause of this country-to-town exodus. The root cause is not far to seek. The condition of the people tells its own tale and the state of the country speaks for itself. Poverty and hunger are indelibly written on both.... Land that formerly produced virile whites and healthy and contented natives no longer continues to do so. The original valuable vegetal cover has been removed, the soil has lost its fertility, and much of the precious land has been

30 Maloka, 'All Chiefs are Shepherds'.

31 Dubow, S. 'Race, Civilisation and Culture: the Elaboration of Segregationist Discourse in the Inter-war Years' in Marks, S. and Trapido, S. (eds) *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London, 1987), pp. 71-94, p. 75. See also Jochelson, K. 'Moral Tribes and corrupting Cities: Explanations of African Susceptibility to VD' paper presented to Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries seminar series, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 25 October 1991.

washed away. Man has misused the land that formerly gave him health and wealth.³²

Cowen and Shenton look to the metropolitan Fabian colonial nexus for the source of ideas about the need to preserve African (rural) communities but there was also a longer standing romantic agrarian ideology in southern Africa. A romantic agrarianism can be found particularly in nineteenth-century missionary ideologies and the celebration of a settled yeoman peasantry. John and Jean Comaroff trace the roots of this missionary ideology to the same experiences in early 19th century Europe that influenced French positivism, specifically the social disruption caused by rapid industrialisation. They note that many early members of the influential London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society were originally from the parts of Britain which were undergoing industrialisation.³³

Through-out the colonial period there were a number of influential administrators in the High Commission Territories descended from these early missionaries, especially from the LMS aligned Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) whose activities were based in Lesotho. Other locally recruited officials were also descended from a missionary background. Neil Parsons's has argued that these mission-connected administrators, recruited to the Union Native Affairs Department and the High Commission Territories, established a local southern African variant of trusteeship.³⁴

Mahmood Mamdani has noted that a shift in local to metropolitan recruitment to the colonial service took place in the early decades of this century as the practice of administration by indirect rule spread across Africa:

Both Britain and France ended the local recruitment of colonial administrators between 1890 and 1914 and reorganised the colonial administration into a formal service along lines of the upper echelon of the metropolitan bureaucracy. The corollary of district-level decentralisation was that the agents of district administration were recruited, trained and placed from the centre. This was not simply a territorial shift, from local to metropolitan recruitment, but also a change in social emphasis. During the 1920s, the Colonial Office began to recruit administrators chiefly from Oxbridge.³⁵

32 CAD, Havenga papers, A38/29, Memorandum by I.B. Pole Evans, 'The Needs of the Land and its People', 31 December 1938, quoted in Dobson, B. and Goudie, S.C. 'Environment, ideology and politics: soil conservation in South Africa 1910-1948' unpublished paper, Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, University of Cape Town, 1996.

33 Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, 1992), p. 196.

34 Parsons, N. 'Colonel Rey and the Colonial Rulers of Botswana: mercenary and missionary traditions in administration, 1884-1955' in Ade Ajayi, J.F. and Peel, J.D.Y. (eds.) *People and empires in African history : essays in memory of Michael Crowther*, (London, 1992), pp. 197-216.

35 Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (London, 1996), p. 77.

While a similar (though much later) trend towards metropolitan recruitment can be detected in the High Commission Territories many of those recruited through the British graduate recruitment programme had southern African roots not dissimilar to those of the local recruits. One early Oxford graduate recruit to the Basutoland service, Patrick Duncan, was the son of the first South African appointed to the post of Governor General.³⁶ Another recruit from Britain reported that the staff recruited directly from South Africa were not (except on the odd occasion) the 'brutal Afrikaner types ... Mostly they were a good bunch from mission stock'.³⁷

There were other strands to anti-urban ideologies in Southern Africa, including one linked specifically to Afrikaner nationalism. While it is not possible to fully disaggregate these diverse strands it is clear that the concern amongst Basutoland administrators to stabilise the rural population was not simply a reflection of the economic demands of the South African mines but also reflected of some deep-seated ideological beliefs.

2.3.1. Russell Thornton and development in the High Commission Territories

One noteworthy South African recruit to the High Commission Territories who was especially concerned with stabilising the African rural population was Russell Thornton, previously the Director of Agriculture in the Native Affairs Department.

Thornton had been one of the first senior officials in the Native Affairs Department to call for the economic development of the South African reserves. Visits to the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Lesotho in the early 1930s were important in convincing Thornton that Betterment policies did not go far enough and there was a need for both general economic development and territorial expansion of the areas occupied by Africans in order to support populations that were in excess of the agricultural carrying capacity.³⁸ In his report on Lesotho in 1931 Thornton's first recommendation was that the territory of the country should be expanded (something he admitted was not likely!), or else a significant number of Basotho should be resettled in the Bechuanaland Protectorate (which he believed could carry a higher population if

³⁶ See Driver, C.J. *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African* (London, 1980), p. 35-36.

³⁷ Transcript of a Tape Recording by Sir Robert Latimer, CBE (dated 3 May 1972), interviewed by Dr. A. Sillery, Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.1444, p. 27.

³⁸ Thornton, R.W. 'Bechuanaland Protectorate: Report on Investigations' Feb 1951, NTS 1034/46/419 quoted by Rich, P. *State Power and Black Politics in South Africa 1912-51* (London, 1996), p. 132.

economic development took place).³⁹ He was prevented from publicising similar views about the South African reserves by more senior officials in the NAD because of fears that any call for the increase in their area would be used by opponents of the ‘native bills’ being debated at that time in a parliamentary select committee.⁴⁰ His decision to move to the High Commissioner’s office was largely a result of his unhappiness with the piecemeal way economic development policies were carried out in the reserves.⁴¹

Thornton was central in the growth of a development ideology in colonial Lesotho and the conceptual link between the labour migration system and rural development. In a letter to the Principal Agricultural Officer in the Basutoland administration in 1931 Thornton wrote:

With a drop in the value of agricultural products more and more labour is becoming available, which labour it will be extremely difficult to absorb. At the present time... there is a big surplus of Native labour and, as it is only by going out to work that the people are able to exist, it becomes imperative... to find wages and means to enable people to live in times like the present. When a sufficient number of Natives can go out to work on the mines, on industries and in other industrial centres, and amongst European farmers, they are able, through the wages secured, to maintain themselves and pay their taxes. When this source of labour for securing money fails, this position becomes acute... As far as one can see, there is only one way of overcoming this ever increasing difficulty and that is by improving methods of stock raising and agriculture.⁴²

Thornton argued that Lesotho’s ‘bleak economic position’ was not the result of over-population *per se* but rather because of bad agricultural and pastoral practices. Environmental decline, especially pasture deterioration and soil erosion, was the result of these bad practices and it also made solutions to them more difficult. To return to Quinlan’s original dichotomy between conservation and development it is noticeable that Thornton’s recommendations to the Basutoland authorities included both development (increasing the output from agriculture) and conservation policies (such as the fencing-in of denuded grazing areas).⁴³ For Thornton, and for all the colonial administration, there was no contradiction between conservation and development.

39 LNA 212, Thornton, R. W. ‘Report on Pastoral and Agricultural Conditions in Basutoland, c. June 1931’.

40 Lucas, F.A.W. to Herbst, J.F., 8 January 1932 and Herbst, J.F. to Lucas, F.A.W., 11 January 1932, NTS 1769, quoted by Rich *State Power and Black Politics*, p. 132.

41 Milton, S. ‘The Apocalypse Cow’.

42 LNA 212, Thornton to Wacher, 28 March 1931. In the original document the last sentence of this passage was underlined in red; it is not clear by whom.

43 LNA 212, Thornton, R., Report on Pastoral and Agricultural Conditions in Basutoland, July 1931. In the livestock sector the emphasis was on increasing the output per beast and decreasing the total number of livestock.

The Basutoland authorities tended to label projects designed to prevent soil erosion, such as the massive contour bank building programme, as development projects. The Basutoland section of an article on ‘economic development’ by Evelyn Baring, the High Commissioner between 1944 and 1951, concentrated almost entirely on the contour bank building programme in the lowlands. The policy to close huge swathes of mountain grazing land to all livestock was also briefly described in the article (in keeping with many of his statements, Baring gave an exaggerated version of the policy and described grand future plans for its extension).⁴⁴

Recognising that development doctrine was concerned with ameliorating the negative impacts of capitalism means that the apparent contradiction between development and conservation simply disappears. As we will see in chapter 3, environmental decline was seen as one of the external indicators of the negative impacts of capitalist accumulation. Rural development and conserving the rural environment (in particular its soils) were regarded as part and parcel of the same development project. There was a strong connection between the aim of stabilising the rural population and stabilising the rural environment.

2.4. Colonialism, development and order

In most Africa colonies, including the High Commission Territories, the colonial state looked to indirect rule to create social stability. The political aim of indirect rule was to create effective hierarchical ‘native’ administrative structures ruling over clearly bounded and essentially homogeneous communities (usual defined as tribes). There is an extensive literature on the way in which early British colonial officials attempted to re-order African society to produce clearly hierarchical bounded communities.⁴⁵ A 1929 statement by the Secretary for Native Affairs in Northern Rhodesia is frequently cited in this literature. He noted that in 1924 when the Colonial Office took over

⁴⁴ Baring, E. ‘Economic Developments under the High Commission in South Africa’, *African Affairs*, 51, 204, 1952, pp. 222-230. In this article Baring wrote that the migrant labour system was ‘far from favourable to the happy growth of contented African farmers permanently resident on their holdings’. Contrary to my arguments above this statement might be seen as an indication that Baring was opposed to the migrant labour system. It is important, however, to note the audience the 1952 paper was written for. As the article was based on an address to the Royal African Society Baring was probably concerned to create a favourable impression amongst the London Africanist circles who were, on the whole, anti-South Africa and pro-indirect rule.

⁴⁵ Berry, S. ‘Hegemony on a Shoestring: Indirect Rule and Access to Agricultural Land’, *Africa*, 62, 3, 1992, pp. 327-355, provides a useful review of this literature.

administration from the British South Africa Company ‘the tribes were in a very disorganised state’, but since then tribal organisation had been ‘created’.⁴⁶

Mamdani argues that the main technique used by the British colonial authorities to create ordered communities was to identify and establish suitable leaders. Aware of the power this new position gave them the chiefs would ensure that the rest fell into place.⁴⁷ In line with ‘invention of tradition’ arguments, Mamdani stresses the fixed structure of African society created through colonialism and downplays the contradictions and ambiguities created through this process and the role of a continuing struggle over the form of African society and the meaning of African customary law. While I would reject Mamdani’s characterisation of a successful and relatively uncontested re-ordering of African society through colonialism, his concentration on the possibilities for control that colonial ideas about African society presented for chiefly authorities is pertinent.

In Lesotho members of the senior Koena lineage were able to take advantage of the colonial state’s desire to ensure a hierarchical structure of authority with the Paramount Chief at the pinnacle.⁴⁸ The colonial state also held out development policies as a mechanism for chiefs to maintain control. One of the earliest references to the threat of pasture degradation in Lesotho, the report of a conversation between the Assistant Resident Magistrate and a group of senior chiefs, makes the connection between conservation and political control explicit:

Assistant Resident Magistrate, Thaba Bosiu [Rolland] ... I foresee considerable inconvenience will arise from the rapidly increasing wealth and population. People who have been absent for many years are coming back with the wealth they have acquired and if you chiefs do not observe some arrangements in preventing the formation of new villages, and in setting the arable lands apart leaving enough room for pasturage, the country will not support either people or stock.

Moketse for Chief Moletsane ... I agree with Mr Rolland and others who say that the villages are too small and too much scattered about the country; they should be larger so as to have fewer of them, and thus bring the arable lands more with compass and make the pasture land more open and available.

Chief Tlalele but you are spoiling and wasting it (the land) by making separate villages; I say have large villages and when you move the presently widely scattered huts, plant pumpkins where your gardens (i.e. fields) and pasture land

⁴⁶ Quoted in Chanock, M. *Law, Custom and Social Order*, (Cambridge, 1985), p. 112.; also in Berry, ‘Hegemony on a Shoestring’, p. 332; and Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, p. 81.

⁴⁷ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, p. 81.

⁴⁸ Moshoeshoe I was of the Koena lineage or clan. Ian Hamnett notes that according to a 1956 survey ‘not more than about 30 per cent of the population are Koena, [but] the bulk of the chieftainship are Koena chiefs’; Hamnett, I. ‘Koena Chieftainship Seniority in Basutoland’, *Africa*, 35, 3, 1965, pp. 241-251.

ought to be. Every man that asks the chief for leave to form a village gets it at once and places it in the middle of what ought to be reserved for pastures.⁴⁹

In the 1940s and 1950s the Ward Chiefs of Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek both enforced villagisation programmes. This process was justified on the grounds of development/conservation but I would argue had as much to do with the Chief's concerns about maintaining control over far-flung mountain villages.⁵⁰ Certainly one of the aims of the programme was to break-up communities labelled as being the home of stock thieves.⁵¹

While colonial authorities in Africa modelled themselves as the trustees of African society, they, in turn, ascribed to chiefly authorities the role of trustees of customary law and communal land. Rural (community) development interventions were logically channelled through the trustees of community resources. In 1951 Basil Davidson interviewed L.H. Collett, the Basutoland Agricultural Officer in charge of the massive lowland contour bank building programme. In response to a question about how they had managed to implement the scheme successfully, Collett replied:

The tribal system. We can't do anything without that. We explain the methods to the chiefs, and the chiefs pass down our orders to the villages and see that the orders are carried out.⁵²

As custodians of customary law, chiefs were able to claim new legislation introduced in the name of conservation or development as customary matters to be tried in their courts. Colonial conservation regulations were enforced not through the colonial civil legal system but through the customary courts. In 1932, 776 people were convicted in customary courts in Malawi for offences against the Forest Laws, 387 for violating Township Regulations and 227 for breaches of the tobacco and cotton uprooting rules.⁵³ In Lesotho, Baring argued that the myriad minor offences that would cumulatively cause an environmental disaster would go unpunished if the authorities had to try the

49 Extract from the Minutes of a Public Meeting held at Maseru, 2 October 1874, Cape of Good Hope, *Blue Book* (Native Affairs, 1875, G21), quoted by Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, p. 66-67.

50 This contrasts with the situation in Northern Rhodesia where Bemba Chiefs were not generally amenable to the colonial state's attempts to enforce a minimum size to villages: 'When admonished that their authority would dwindle if they permitted their "subjects" to scatter, Bemba chiefs blandly countered that "the greater the number of villages, the greater the prestige of the chief".' Berry, 'Hegemony on a Shoestring', p. 340, citing Ranger, T. *The Agricultural History of Zambia* (Historical Association of Zambia Pamphlet 1, Lusaka, 1971).

51 In 1952 Bowmaker reported that a village established near the Koakoatsi Pass was known to be 'a haunt of stock theives'. He continued: 'This no doubt will be seen to by Chief Matlere when a village re-grouping scheme is effected'. LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker, 'A report on a visit to Mokhotlong from 6 - 28 March 1952'.

52 Collett in Davidson, B. 'Crisis in the Protectorates', *New Statesman and Nation*, 25 August 1951.

53 Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, p. 123.

cases ‘in due form before a major court’. Offences needed to be dealt with quickly, ‘near the scene’ and in ‘accordance with native law and custom’.⁵⁴

As I will discuss in more detail in chapter 7, the Paramount Chief of Lesotho was given the power to make rules and order for the ‘peace, good order and welfare of his people’.⁵⁵ Many of the areas in which the Paramount Chief could issue Orders related to agricultural development or conservation policies including the right to issue Orders to ‘regulate grazing’ and ‘prevent soil erosion’.⁵⁶ This Proclamation appears to be a more or less exact repetition of 1927 Native Authorities Ordinance enacted in Tanganyika. As in Lesotho, the initiative for these new orders came from the colonial state but they were reported as being locally formulated and imposed by the relevant ‘Native Authorities’ in response to local conditions and needs.⁵⁷

Conservation and development interventions were enacted through customary law in chiefly courts, but colonial administrators, in particular District Commissioners, supervised their activities and tried to act as arbitrators in disputes over the meaning of customary regulations. When the Paramount Chief in Lesotho instructed Ward and Principal Chief that they must implement grazing control policies in the areas under their jurisdiction, it was the District Commissioners who pressurised individual chiefs to enact the new ‘customary’ regulations.⁵⁸

2.5. Decentralisation and *The Anti-Politics Machine*

Mamdani argues that through indirect rule, and the role of District Commissioners in arbitrating or creating customary law, the colonial state was able to extend its control of the African population. A policy that ostensibly decentralising power to chiefs in reality lead to the triumph of ‘techno-administration’ and rule by ‘legal administration’.⁵⁹

Mamdani’s version of indirect rule looks very similar to James Ferguson’s ‘anti-politics machine’. Ferguson’s detailed ‘anthropology of a development project’ examines the working of one development project in the mountain areas of Lesotho.

⁵⁴ Baring, ‘Economic Developments’, p. 229-230.

⁵⁵ Proclamation 61/1938 (Chieftainship Powers Proclamation) in Basutoland, *Laws of Basutoland, 1960* (Cape Town, 1961), pp. 156-62.

⁵⁶ Section 8, Proclamation 61/1938.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, p. 124.

⁵⁸ See chapter 7.

⁵⁹ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.

Like most development projects in Lesotho the, Thaba Tseka area based project failed to meet its stated objectives. Indeed, as its objectives were essentially based on a totally false premise that the country was poor because its ‘traditional’ economy was ‘virtually untouched by modern economic development’ and needed to be brought into the twentieth century, failure to meet them was only to be expected.⁶⁰

Ferguson points out, however, that this ‘failure’ does not mean that the project had no impact on the local political economy. The most obvious impact of the project was the extension of ‘bureaucratic state power’ into the previously politically (though not economically) isolated central mountain zone. This extension of bureaucratic power took place within a development framework that denied that its role was in any sense political.

By making the intentional blue-prints for ‘development’ so highly visible, a ‘development’ project can end up performing extremely sensitive political operations involving the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost invisibly, under the cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one can object... If the ‘instrument-effects’ of a development project end up forming any kind of strategically coherent or intelligible whole, this is it: the anti-politics machine.⁶¹

In order to write an anthropology of a development project Ferguson emphasises the need for a ‘decentered’ analysis which locates ‘the intelligibility of a series of events and transformations not in the intentions guiding the actions of one or more animated subjects, but in the systematic nature of the social reality which results from these actions’.⁶² Ferguson’s thesis is theoretically grounded in the writing of Michel Foucault, in particular his ‘genealogy’ of the prison.⁶³ Foucault’s work shows how planned social interventions can result in powerful constellations of control that were never intended. In *Discipline and Punishment* Foucault argues that it is not enough to simply look at how the prison has failed, but to ask what it has succeeded in doing:

For the observation that prison fails to eliminate crime, one should perhaps substitute the hypothesis that prison has succeeded extremely well in producing delinquency, a specific type, a politically or economically less dangerous - and, on occasion, usable - form of illegality... The success of the prison, in struggles around the law and illegalities, has been to specify a ‘delinquency’.⁶⁴

From this theoretical point of departure Ferguson argues that an anthropology of a development project should not attempt to measure to what extent the development

⁶⁰ See World Bank, *Lesotho a Development Challenge* (Washington, 1975).

⁶¹ Ferguson, J. *The Anti-Politics Machine: ‘Development’, De-politicisation and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 256.

⁶² Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, p. 18.

⁶³ Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (translated by Sheridan, A. 1977, Harmondsworth, 1991).

⁶⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, p. 277.

agencies stated objectives have been meet, or not meet, but instead examine what the project has actually done.

In this analysis the discourse of development is not simply a smoke-screen behind which other actors conspire to achieve their unstated objectives. Rather the discourse of development is itself a instrument through which power acts in a particular way:

One must entertain the possibility that the ‘development’ apparatus in Lesotho may do what it does, not at the bidding of some knowing and powerful subjects who is making it all happen, but behind the backs of or against the wills of even the most powerful actors. But this is not to say that such institutions do not represent an exercise of power; only that power is not to be embodied in the person of a ‘powerful’ subject. A ‘development’ project may very well serve power, but in a different way than any of the ‘powerful’ actors imagined: it may only wind up, in the end, ‘turning out’ to serve power.⁶⁵

This is where Mamdani’s analysis of indirect rule and the extension of administrative control differs from Ferguson’s analysis of a development project and the extension of bureaucratic control. For Mamdani the discourse of indirect rule is no more than rhetoric behind which imperial interests extended their power. Indirect rule becomes a monolithic model that has shaped all African society in an image that benefited the colonial powers. The failure of post-colonial states in Africa has essentially been an inability to break-down these inherited structures.⁶⁶

Following Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm,⁶⁷ Mamdani regards communal land tenure, and other ‘customary’ legal practices, as invented or constructed.⁶⁸ The invented nature of customary law points to an analysis that emphasises the cleavage between a fluid pre-colonial and a rigid colonial system of customary law.⁶⁹ This sharp disjuncture between colonial and pre-colonial customary law has been challenged in some of the recent literature.⁷⁰ The emphasis has shifted to identifying the continued conflicts over the definitions of customary law into the colonial period and the way in which these conflicts feed into contradictory understandings of the customary. Berry notes that:

⁶⁵ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, p. 18-19.

⁶⁶ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.

⁶⁷ Ranger, T. and Hobsbawm, E. (eds) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

⁶⁸ Gocking, R. ‘Colonial Rule and the ‘Legal Factor’ in Ghana and Lesotho’, *Africa*, 67, 1, 1997, pp. 61-85, p. 61.

⁶⁹ See for example, Franklin, A. *Land Law in Lesotho: The Politics of the 1979 Land Act* (Aldershot, 1995), p. 47-49.

⁷⁰ Ranger has shifted his position in response to this new research, talking now of ‘contested imaginings’ of tradition, Ranger, T. ‘The Invention of Tradition Revisited: the case of Colonial Africa’ in Ranger, T. and Vaughan, O. (eds) *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa: essays in honour of A.H.M. Kirk-Greene* (London, 1993), pp. 62-111.

In general, the effect of indirect rule was neither to freeze African societies in precolonial moulds, nor to restructure them in accordance with British inventions of African tradition, but to generate unresolved debates over the interpretation of tradition and its meaning for colonial governance and economic activity. In seeking to maintain social and administrative stability by building on tradition, officials wove instability - in the form of changing relations of authority and conflicting interpretations of rules- into the fabric of colonial administration.⁷¹

One of the arenas where there were competing and shifting understandings of customary law was over resource-use rights. Competition for the use of natural resources tended to be fought in terms of competing understandings of the meaning of customary laws.⁷² Colonial officials were keen to restructure African rights to natural resources but when they intervened in usefuctory rights they became embroiled in intractable political battles. Colonial officials wanted to order African space to suit their purposes and ideologies but more often than not they simply became embroiled in political debates about the very nature of that space. If, in the end, things turn out to their advantage this was rarely via the intended route.

2.6. Order and the environment

In his introduction to the collection *Power of Development* Jonathan Crush quotes extensively from an 1895 address by Sir Harry Johnston, the Commissioner in British Central Africa, to the Royal Geographical Society in which he describes how British colonialism would transform African society and the African environment:

Johnston's was a highly stylised rendering of the reordering of space: the civilised, ordered white, male, English landscape erases its unordered, savage, chaotic, dangerous African predecessor. For Johnston, colonialism was about gaining control of disorderly territory and setting loose the redemptive power of development. The African landscape is rewritten, figuratively and literally, to reflect the substitution of one reality by another.⁷³

The ordering of a chaotic African space is a constant theme in colonial development discourses. Colonial ideas drawn from an industrialised and capitalist Europe, laid far more stress on rigid spatial division between land set aside for different purposes. At the national level this resulted in reserves for exclusive functions like forestry, or game reserves, or farming, while multi-purpose common land greatly diminished.⁷⁴

71 Berry, 'Hegemony on a Shoestring', p. 336.

72 Peters, P. 'Manoeuvres and debates in the interpretation of land rights in Botswana' *Africa*, 3, 62, 1992, pp. 413-434.

73 Crush, J. 'Introduction: Imagining development' in Crush, *Power of Development*, pp. 1 - 23, p. 2.

74 Beinart, 'Introduction, The Politics of Colonial Conservation', p. 158.

In Southern Rhodesia the 1939 McIllwaine Report noted that ‘for the regeneration of the reserves there are two essentials: organisation and control’ and advocated the establishment of fenced paddocks on communal rangeland.⁷⁵ E.D. Alvord, the Agriculturist in the Rhodesian Native Affairs Department, commented that after the implementation of centralisation policies the homesteads in Gwelo were ‘all in lines and look very nice’.⁷⁶ In Transkei officials borrowed military terminology and described re-organised model villages with homesteads arranged in a grid as being ‘dressed’.⁷⁷ It is not too far-fetched to suggest that part of the attraction of contour banks for the administration of Lesotho was they created a more orderly looking landscape.

These concerns about creating an ordered environment were obviously connected to policies of social control. The laying out of villages in straight lines aided administrative surveillance of the population and allowed more effective tax collection. The connection between an ordered landscape and an orderly society go beyond simple administrative demands, however, and it is also important to consider ideological connections between space and society. In recent years the interplay between ideas about society and ideas about nature has been a dominant theme in sociology, anthropology and the history of science.⁷⁸

Ideas and theories about society and the natural world have often converged in the production of knowledge about the environment.⁷⁹ The limited basis of scientific knowledge about the African environment meant that it was theoretical ideas, often related to understandings of social processes, that drove colonial thinking on the environment. In line with much of the recent literature on the history of science Michael Thompson disputes the notion that there is one ‘answer’ to areas of dispute within environmental sciences. He argues that perceptions of environmental problems are reliant upon the ‘world view’ of the person analysing the issue. Using the debate about environmental degradation in the Himalayas he shows how each

75 Southern Rhodesia, *Report on the Commission to enquire into the preservation of the natural resources of the colony* (Salisbury, 1939), p. 49 and 57, quoted in Scoones, I. ‘Politics, Polemics and Pastures’, p. 44.

76 Quoted in Beinart, ‘Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development’, p. 77.

77 Beinart, ‘Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development’, p. 77.

78 A particularly strong theme tracing the gendered nature of scientific thinking has come from feminist scholarship, see Haraway, D.J. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (London, 1989); Haraway, D.J. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Re-invention of Nature* (London, 1991).

79 Though it is an area that has received little research attention there was a clear exchange of ideas between ecology and political philosophy in early twentieth century South Africa; see Smuts, J.C. *Holism and Evolution*, (London, 1926); and Bews, J. *Life as a Whole*, (London, 1937).

point of view - each certainty - is largely a result of the assumptions held by the proponents of each competing approach.⁸⁰

As we will see in chapter 5, the facts to support a claim that Lesotho's mountain environment was being degraded were simply not available to sustain the argument during the 1940s and 50s. Nevertheless colonial officials and visiting range management experts were able to assemble the facts that were available in such a way that allowed them to be certain that environmental destruction was occurring. Following Thompson, I would argue that the way these facts were assembled was reliant upon the assumptions that they brought to the issue: and central to these assumptions was the view that nature acted through laws and created stability. Ideas about order and stability not only drove the process of policy-making, they also underlay the analysis of the 'problem'.

80 Schwarz, M. and Thompson, M. *Divided we Stand: Re-defining Politics, Technology and Social Change* (New York, 1990) and Thompson, M. 'Policy Making in the Face of Uncertainty: the Himalayans as Unknowns' in Chapman, G.P and Thompson, M. (eds) *Water and the Quest for Sustainable Development in the Ganges Valley* (London, 1995).

3. The history of environmentalism in colonial Lesotho¹

Fears about environmental decline have existed in Lesotho since the mid-nineteenth century. Despite the continuity in the overarching concerns there have been important shifts in the environmentalist ideologies that have informed these fears and corresponding changes in the specific sources of physical evidence cited and policies advocated to solve the problems. Developing ideas about environmental problems in the mountain areas of Lesotho followed a similar trajectory to the development of environmentalist ideologies in South Africa and beyond. Of particular interest to this thesis is the shift from fears about lack of tree cover to fears about soil erosion that occurred in the early decades of this century. This also needs to be understood in its specific local context and in particular the context of fears about the impact of drastically falling agricultural output on the ability of Lesotho to maintain its labour reserve economy.² Nevertheless the dramatic rise in environmental concern in Lesotho immediately after the Second World War was also heavily influenced by the growth of a South African environmental movement concerned about the impact of soil erosion on the sustainability of ‘white civilisation’.

3.1. Deforestation and desiccation

Fears about the impact of deforestation on hydrology were widespread in southern Africa from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, particularly amongst Cape colonial officials, and have been well documented by Grove.³ Nineteenth century scientific analysis of the inter-relationships between forest, climate and hydrology had resulted in a strong adherence to a desiccation theory, which linked deforestation to drought. Grove argues that the roots of this belief (and indeed of modern environmentalism) can be found in the colonial encounter with the fragile environments of a number of small island such as St. Helena and Mauritius which were strategically placed along the major shipping routes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Colonial

¹ In this chapter I have not discussed the development of environmentalist ideologies amongst Basotho. Robertson’s article on James Jacob Machobane indicates that environmental concerns did exist amongst Basotho by the 1950s, but there is no literature on earlier concerns (Robertson, ‘Popular Scientist: James Jacob Machobane’). Khan’s work on African attitudes to environmental issues across the Calendon in South Africa indicates that there is more research to be done in this field (Khan, ‘Re-writing South Africa’s Conservation History’). However, as the purpose of discussing the rise of environmentalism here is to explain its influence on colonial policy, that research is beyond the scope of this thesis.

² See Phimister, ‘Discourse and the discipline of historical context’, for a critique of studies that emphasise general colonial discourse rather than the local historical context.

³ Grove, ‘Early themes in African Conservation’, and Grove, ‘Scottish Missionaries, Evangelical Discourses and the Origins of Conservation Thinking’.

administrators quickly encountered the limits of these small islands to meet the demands placed on them for food, water and wood and resulted in some of the world's earliest conservation legislation. These early environmental fears were given added impetus during the mid-nineteenth as British officials in India and elsewhere came to believe that deforestation was leading to the drying-out and heating-up of the climate. These beliefs were backed by scientific evidence and became widely accepted by colonial officials.⁴

The Cape Colonial Botanist during the 1860s, John Crombie Brown, wrote extensively on the issue of desiccation, and proposed a number of radical solutions.⁵ His criticisms of the ecological impact of colonialism eventually led to his being sacked by the Cape government, though he continued to publish widely on the South African situation, including a monograph (published in 1875) entitled *Hydrology of South Africa*.⁶ The book quoted extensively from a report on a paper presented to the Royal Geographical Society by James Fox Wilson. The paper described a severe drought, in 1862, affecting the broad maize-growing belt of lowland Lesotho (much of which later became the Conquered Territories within the Orange Free State). Wilson ascribed this drought largely to the impact of grass-burning and tree cutting by the African population of the interior.

Dessicationist ideologies also arrived in South Africa via British officials trained in the Indian Forestry Service, such as F.E. Kanthack who moved from India to the Cape in 1907 to take charge of irrigation affairs.⁷ Kanthack was a strong adherent of the idea that deforestation of mountain slopes lead not only to increased rates of erosion and consequently to siltation of irrigation works but also to climatic changes. In an address to the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in July 1908, Kanthack explained that research findings from around the world indicated that temperatures inside forested areas tended to be significantly cooler than in deforested areas. This meant that condensation was more likely to take place above forests and hence precipitation would be higher. It therefore followed that if forests were cleared rainfall would decrease and the environment would become increasingly desiccated.⁸

4 Grove, *Green Imperialism*.

5 See Grove, R. 'Preacher of a Green Gospel'.

6 Brown, J.C. *Hydrology of South Africa: or Details of the Former Hydrological Condition of the Cape of Good Hope, and of Causes of its Present Aridity* (Edinburgh, 1875).

7 Beinart and Coates, *Environment and History*, p.43.

8 Kanthack, F.E. 'The Destruction of Mountain Vegetation: its Effects upon the Agricultural Conditions in the Valleys', *Agricultural Journal of the Cape of Good Hope*, 33, 2, 1908, pp. 194-204.

There was, however, a problem in applying these theories to southern Africa. Unlike the Himalayan foothills, where Kanthack had undertaken his previous work, or the European and North American mountains, where the scientific research he cited had been carried out, most of southern Africa's mountain environments did not support large areas of forest. Nevertheless, Kanthack argued that the beneficial effects of trees also held for other forms of vegetation and that efforts should be made to ensure as lush a vegetational covering of mountain slopes as possible. Where forests could be established they should be, but the main emphasis should be on protecting the vegetation of mountain slopes from burning and grazing. Kantack argued that this work should fall to the Forestry Department, whose role should be significantly expanded:

We must learn to clothe the word 'Forest' with a far wider meaning than is customary. It should stand for the veld in general and the mountain or forest-clad veld in particular. Its chief aim should be the restoration and conservation of the natural growth of vegetation on the mountain slopes or other places liable to erosion and denudation. Briefly the Department should have control of the land wherever the physical conditions are such that the removal of the protection afforded by vegetation must result after a longer or shorter period in the destruction or deterioration of agricultural conditions.⁹

In the same year as Kantack arrived in the Cape the Basutoland authorities invited A.W. Heywood, the Conservator of Forests, Kingwilliamstown, to write a report on forestry in Lesotho. The Basutoland authorities were initially interested in the commercial possibilities of forestry but Heywood's report emphasised the ability of forests to 'regulate and restrain the flow of water' (though he did not comment on the impact of forests on climate). Heywood admitted that, with the exception of some kloofs in the foothills, Lesotho was a tree-less environment. Nevertheless he argued that forestry was possible, at least below about 6,000 feet, and that the colonial authorities should embark on a programme of tree planting as well as ensuring the control of grass burning.¹⁰

K.A. Carlson, the Conservator of Forests in the Orange Free State, also argued that efforts should be made to plant a large number of trees in the Lesotho mountains. In a paper presented at the 1913 South African Irrigation Congress, Carlson argued that this forest planting scheme should be undertaken by the South African government, as the forests would act as a huge reservoir for the Orange river. Not only would the forest hold water and reduce evaporation; it would also increase the rates of precipitation, at least on a local scale. Although there were no indigenous trees which could survive the harsh climate, exotics introduced from elsewhere would be able to

⁹ Kanthack 'The Destruction of Mountain Vegetation', p. 196.

¹⁰ SAB FOR/158/A217/1. Heywood, A.W., Report on Forestry in Basutoland, 11 May 1908.

cope. Carlson simply brushed aside the thought that the local population might not agree to the project, arguing that the area was uninhabited:

Here is an area of about 3 million acres of uninhabited country in a neighbouring state, the afforestation of which, wholly or in part, is as much in the interest of that State as in ours. To expect a small native community to undertake a task of such magnitude is out of the question, but... not so for the Union of South Africa.¹¹

While his arguments concerning the positive impact that afforestation could have for South African irrigation schemes along the Orange were accepted by the other delegates, his proposals were treated with scepticism. There were a number of comments suggesting he was more concerned with enhancing his department's influence than anything else.

Carlson essentially conceived this afforestation programme as an improvement to the natural environment rather than as a programme to conserve or restore what was already there. Basotho livestock owners were blamed for starting veld fires and for overgrazing, but their role as agents of environmental destruction received significantly less emphasis than in subsequent publications. Though tree planting has regularly been advocated since these two reports this type of massive state sponsored afforestation was not suggested subsequently as a solution to hydrological problems. Subsequent afforestation policies have rather stressed small-scale village woodlots as sources of fuel, therefore encouraging people not to burn dung needed as fertiliser.¹²

Kanthack, Heywood and Carlson all made good use of the forestry discourse that dominated international environmental concerns during the period in question. They used this discourse to discuss not simply forestry but also other environmental issues

11 Carlson, K.A. 'Forestry in Relation to Irrigation in South Africa', *Agricultural Journal of the Union of South Africa*, 5, 2, 1913, pp. 219-234, p. 227. The obvious implications of this proposal for the transfer issue were made explicit in a 1933 comment by Jan Smuts: 'It is desirable in the interest of the Union, as well as Basutoland itself, that steps are taken on an extensive scale along the headwaters of several important rivers which arise in Basutoland and flow through the Union, to prevent, by means of afforestation and other methods, the erosion which is causing so much damage in the mountain parts of the country. These steps might have to be taken on both sides of the border and could be carried out satisfactorily only by the Union Government.' Memorandum on the Proposed Incorporation of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland in the Union of South Africa, submitted to Mr Thomas, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs on 28th July 1933 by General Smuts, Annex 13 of Union of South Africa (White Paper), *Negotiations Regarding the Transfer to the Union of South Africa of the Government of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland, 1910-1939* (Pretoria, 1952), p. 35. See chapter 6 for further details.

12 Aforestation for this purpose was first undertaken on a national scale during the Second World War in an effort to increase agricultural yields. See Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Reports*, 1941 and 1942. Between then and the end of the colonial period something in the order of 40 million trees were planted. Very few of these were still alive in the early 1970s when a new project, the Lesotho Wood-lot Project, was initiated; Food and Agriculture Organisation, *Advancing Forestry in Lesotho* (FAO Forestry Project Profile, Rome, n.d. [c. 1986]).

with little or nothing to do with forestry. While the reports and articles cited above were written by foresters and are full of references to trees, the environmentally destructive activities given most weight, over-grazing and veld-burning, were identical to the concerns raised in later reports which never mention forestry.

Grove records that the concentration on a forest and desiccation discourse within the Cape waned during the first few decades of the twentieth century and was replaced by more explicit concerns about over-grazing and soil erosion.¹³ He does not, however, explain why this shift occurred and, as Beinart notes, ‘a detailed history of the shifting emphasis in the debate has yet to be constructed’.¹⁴

One of the reasons the shift in the South African debate occurred at this time was probably related to the rapid expansion of the arable farming frontier into the dry Great Plains regions of the south western United States. The infamous sodbusters of the American west, heeding the slogan ‘Rain follows the plow’, turned thousands of acres of grassland into arable fields during the 1880s and 1890s. As early as 1894 this expansion brought dust storms to many areas and, combined with the 1890s economic crisis, led to the abandonment of huge swathes of farm land.¹⁵ In the wake of these environmental problems the US Department of Agriculture began a programme of research into soil conservation and published numerous pamphlets about the dangers of soil erosion. Many of these found their way to South Africa and fuelled pre-existing fears about environmental degradation. Despite the fact that the soil conservation movement in the USA lost ground during the agricultural boom of 1910s and 1920s, the new discourse of soil conservation had taken root and displaced the dominant desiccation and deforestation discourse that had previously dominated South African concerns.¹⁶

Another cause of this shift in discourse can be traced to the expansion of the British empire into the semi-arid regions of central and east Africa. There were numerous links between the officials in South Africa and their colleagues to the north, and fears about soil erosion were reinforced by case studies from different areas. Links of kinship and camaraderie drew the settler societies of East and southern Africa closer together and examples from one country were readily applied to the others.¹⁷ While late nineteenth-century Cape officials had to look to the woodier environments of

13 Grove, ‘Early themes in African conservation’.

14 Beinart, ‘Environmental Destruction in Southern Africa’.

15 Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, p. 229.

16 Beinart, ‘Soil erosion, conservation and ideas about development’; Worster, *Nature’s Economy*.

17 Anderson, ‘Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought’.

India, Europe and the eastern North America for their comparative examples, those in early twentieth century Southern Rhodesia could point to the semi-arid zones of South Africa.¹⁸

The shift from a discourse dominated by trees and climate to one dominated by grasses and soil did not mean, however, that the link between climate change and vegetational change no longer existed in popular environmentalism. This issue was discussed in the early 1920s in South Africa by a Drought Investigation Commission but no evidence was found to support the dessicationist hypothesis. Despite these findings the perception that there must be a link between vegetation and climate persisted in South Africa, and the 1951 Desert Encroachment Committee specifically aimed to examine whether ‘man-made desiccation had altered the natural conditions of the veld to such an extent that the climate itself had in turn been affected’.¹⁹ As in the 1920s no evidence was found to suggest that rainfall figures showed a longer-term downward trend.

Both the Desert Encroachment Committee and the earlier Drought Investigation Commission were primarily concerned with environmental degradation in the ‘white’ farming areas of South Africa’s interior. Despite the impression created by some of the literature that ‘the environmentally destructive activities of European farmers were virtually ignored’²⁰ in reality the initial emphasis of environmental concerns were the extensive settler farming regions. Anxiety over ecological decay on the settler farms of South Africa co-existed, however, with similar fears about the African-occupied reserves. Beinart argues that by the time of the 1932 Native Economic Commission ‘the basic points about environmental decline in the reserves were firmly entrenched and have permeated a great deal of literature since’.²¹

18 See for example Watt, W. M. ‘The Dangers and Prevention of Soil Erosion’, *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, 10, 5, 1913, cited in Beinart ‘Soil erosion, conservation and ideas about development’, p. 56.

19 Union of South Africa, *Report of the Desert Encroachment Committee*, UG 59, (Pretoria, 1951), p. 2, quoted by Beinart, ‘Environmental Destruction in Southern Africa’, p. 155.

20 Mackenzie, F. ‘Selective Silence: a Feminist Encounter with Environmental Discourse in Colonial Africa’ in Crush, *Power of Development*, pp. 100-114, p. 102.

21 Beinart, ‘Environmental Destruction in Southern Africa’, p. 155.

3.2. Dongas and falling agricultural output

The idea of environmental degradation was also firmly entrenched in Lesotho by the early 1930s. The concerns expressed by foresters and others associated with the (international) dessicationist ideologies need to be articulated with specific local concerns about gully (donga) erosion and falling output. Though the fears of donga erosion only really held in some very specific environments (the highly erodable duplex soils around the base of steep-sided kopies along the foothill-lowland boundary) their visually alarming presence helped create a general association between the words Basutoland and erosion.

The earliest recorded local concerns about the spread of dongas date from the 1870s and 1880s, specifically from a number of long-term missionaries who had observed their measurable spread during their lifetime.²² These fears about donga erosion were given added impetus and official recognition with the visit in 1901 of an irrigation engineer with long experience in India and Egypt, invited by Lord Milner to write a report on the possibilities and potentials of irrigation in the Cape, Transvaal and Orange Free State.²³ In a small departure from his brief the engineer, W. Wilcocks, also went to Lesotho. He reported that irrigation had little potential in the colony, but detailed his concerns about the rate of soil erosion on arable land.

Wilcocks's report suggested that the major cause of soil erosion was the intense cultivation of cereal crops that had occurred since the advent of British Protection. The root cause of soil erosion was a desire for peasant accumulation amongst a Basotho population not well versed in sound agricultural techniques. The implication was that the Basotho had experienced short-term gains but in the long-term their production techniques were unsustainable. The primary way to prevent soil erosion, according to Wilcocks, was, therefore, the establishment of 'small model farms' where manuring, rotation and the use of legumes would increase output:

If obviously satisfactory results were obtained, a people so intelligent as the Basutos would certainly imitate them.²⁴

Wilcocks also suggested a number of physical anti-erosion works, including the planting of trees and the damming of dongas.

22 Showers, 'Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho'.

23 Wilcocks, W. *Report on Irrigation in South Africa* (London, 1901), Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library, South African Pamphlets, Vol. 2.

24 Wilcocks, *Report on Irrigation in South Africa*, p. 32, emphasis in original.

Given that the stated policy of the Basutoland authorities at this time was ‘to induce labour [for South African farms and mines] by all reasonable means’²⁵ it is not surprising that Wilcocks recommendations to improve peasant cultivation were not acted upon. District Commissioners were charged with responsibility for tree planting and the construction of weirs in ravines, but the extent that these interventions were carried out largely depended on the actions of individual officers²⁶ and, as they were performed by *matsema* (‘tribute’) labour, the support of the local chief.

Wilcocks’s assumption that intensive cereal cultivation had only begun with the advent of colonialism is far from the truth. Despite the persistent threats from the neighbouring Boer republics and frequent insecurity Basotho farmers managed to produce significant yields of maize and other cereals from the 1840s onwards.²⁷ Nevertheless, Wilcocks was right in his identification of the 1870s as a boom time for Basotho agriculture, as farmers responded to the new opportunities brought about in the wake of diamond discoveries at Kimberley. This boom was accompanied by the widespread adoption of new techniques, especially deep ploughing. Indeed the increase in labour migration, especially to the mines at Kimberley, during this period has often been linked with attempts to raise capital to buy new ploughs and cattle to pull them (as well as guns and other manufactured articles).²⁸ During the 1880s and 1890s the fortunes of Basotho agriculturalists fluctuated, but in years with good rainfall and encouraging market conditions the territory continued to export large quantities of grain.

The period 1900 to 1930 saw agricultural output in Lesotho continue to fluctuate. The years 1908 and 1909 saw disastrous harvests as a result of pests and drought but the First World War brought about increased world prices and record-breaking production. This led one official to comment that ‘the theory which is sometimes propounded that the wheat lands of Basutoland are “worked-out” had been disproved.²⁹ Nevertheless the overall trend in production was downwards and the international depression of the early 1930s put the final nail in the coffin of Lesotho’s once vibrant maize-exporting economy. Wheat production, mainly on the fertile basalt soils of the mountain valleys, did recover as prices gradually rose in the late

25 Lagden, G. *Friend of the Free State*, 25 November 1898, quoted in Maloka, ‘All Chiefs are Shepherds’, p. 7.

26 Showers, ‘Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho’, p. 278.

27 Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom*.

28 Murray, ‘From Granary to Labour Reserve’.

29 Great Britain, *Colonial Annual Report: Basutoland 1919/20*, quoted by Murray, ‘From Granary to Labour Reserve’, p. 9 and by Showers, ‘Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho’, p. 269.

1930s but by then the economy had essentially undergone its transformation from ‘granary to labour reserve’.³⁰

It is unclear to what extent this downward trend was the result of environmental decline. James McCann’s recent work suggests that the agricultural boom in the last three decades of the nineteenth century may well have led to increased soil erosion, especially on the easily eroded lowland duplex, sodic soils. The introduction of new techniques, in particular deep ploughing, was probably largely responsible for the acceleration of soil erosion and the growth of the visually alarming dongas.³¹ It is impossible, however, to distinguish the result of environmental decline from the general transformation of the structural economy of Lesotho: the impact of South Africa import restrictions, competition from cheap grain production in the United States and Australia, the imposition of colonial taxes, demand for manufactured products, labour constraints due to absence of young men at the mines and relatively higher transport costs due to lack of rail access all played their part in the decline of Basotho agriculture and sucked Basotho labour into the migrant labour system.

Whatever the exact contribution of environmental decline to falling agricultural output what is clear is that by the early 1930s the Basutoland authorities were becoming increasingly concerned about the impact of soil erosion on the territory’s economy. Despite the impression created in some of the literature these fears pre-dated the 1935 Pim Commission. Tsidiso Maloka has argued that the decline in agricultural production was actually the deliberate policy of the colonial administration, citing the increased hut tax just after a drought in 1898 and a severely constrained budget for public works.³² While the policy in 1898 may well have been to undermine agriculture, and force Basotho onto the labour market, it is not enough to simply extrapolate forward from there and argue that the British were happy to see agriculture decline until ‘an outcry was raised by the [1935] Pim report’.³³

While the Basutoland colonial authorities were in general sympathetic to South African calls for increased outflows of labour from Lesotho, and did everything they could to facilitate labour recruitment, a number of officials were also concerned about the implications of the collapse in the agricultural sector that occurred during the first three decades of the 20th century. These fears about falling agricultural output were often expressed in terms of the impact of environmental degradation. The concerns

30 Murray, ‘From Granary to Labour Reserve’.

31 McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land*, Chapter 7.

32 Maloka, “All Chiefs are Shepherds”, p.7.

33 Maloka, “All Chiefs are Shepherds”, p.7.

about soil erosion expressed by the Pim Commission were actually largely based on the answers to pre-survey questionnaire sent to the Department of Agriculture in August 1934.³⁴ As we saw in chapter 2 Russell Thornton, the Basutoland Director of Agriculture from 1934 to 1942, was especially concerned that environmental degradation meant that the land would no longer be able to support a rural population and the urban labour market would be unable to absorb the surplus population.

Showers argues that accelerated soil erosion was not widespread in the 1930s. Using evidence contained in the Pim Commission and from oral history³⁵ she argues that accelerated gully erosion was confined to a few specific locations around the main government camps, along roads (both areas in the full view of colonial officials) and below the escarpment dividing foothills from the lowlands. Using this evidence Showers dates the on-set of widespread accelerated environmental degradation to the late 1930s, when the anti-soil erosion programme got underway. While Showers may be right to say that colonial reports of soil erosion exaggerated the picture there were undoubtedly some cases of fairly severe soil erosion on a local scale.

Unlike the concerns expressed by those following a dessicationist ideology these fears were primarily about erosion of arable land. There were, however, a number of expressions of concern about grazing land as well. In 1931 Thornton was invited to examine the mountain grazing areas specifically because it was feared that the pastures were deteriorating and leading to increased soil erosion. The Resident Commissioner commented that:

The question of preservation of pastures is an all important one as far as Basutoland is concerned, and any steps which could usefully be taken to further this object would be most valuable.³⁶

Thornton's report on the state of the mountain grazing sparked off a brief flurry of interest in the state of the mountain environment in 1931-32. This interest quickly waned, however, mainly because the rapid decrease in livestock populations in response to drought led most officials to conclude that the country was no longer overstocked. Thornton's report is discussed in more detail in the chapter 4.

34 PRO DO119/1051, Answer to Questionnaire sent by Sir Alan Pim in Preparation for Commission, 31 August 1934 and A Note on the Problem of Erosion, Showing Areas Affected and the Extent of Inquiry to the Cultivable and Grazing Areas.

35 Showers and Malahleha, 'Oral Evidence in Historical Environmental Impact Assessment'.

36 LNA 212, Sturrock to Tweedie, 31 March 1931.

By the time the Pim Commission arrived in the territory in 1935 the emphasis was firmly back on the cultivated lands in the lowlands. The Department of Agriculture's submission to the Pim Commission stated that:

We are fortunate... in that there is very little of this serious menace [soil erosion] in the mountain areas, due to the very favourable conditions of soil and climate.³⁷

Nevertheless the Pim Commission did express fear about the possibility of soil erosion in the mountains and advised that the services of an ecologist be sought in order to write a fuller report on environmental conditions in the mountains.³⁸ An ecological survey of the mountains was indeed carried out and, again, it is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Whatever the true extent of soil erosion in the early 1930s what is clear is that the colonial authorities were concerned about the impact of dongas and tended to express their concerns about falling output in environmental terms. Conversely, at the points during the 1910s and 1920s when exports of grain were healthy, they made a number of more positive reports on environmental conditions.³⁹ To understand why fears about falling output were primarily expressed in a discourse of environment decline it is necessary to return to the wider international environmental debates.

3.3. Dust bowl

In the 1930s soil erosion became an international concern; Anderson describes it as the 'first global environmental problem'.⁴⁰ A major reason for this international concern were the alarming images of dust storms blowing away huge amounts of top soil from the ploughed fields of the south-western states of the USA. As I have noted above, these areas had experienced dust storms in previous decades, especially in the depressed 1890s, but nothing prepared people for what was to occur in the 1930s. Rapidly expanding agriculture in the dry Great Plains met its limit as drought struck and the top soil simply blew away in the area's ever-present high winds. The winds deposited dust blown from the Great Plains as far east as Chicago, Washington D.C. and even on ships out in the Atlantic.⁴¹

37 PRO DO119/1051, *A Note on the Problem of Erosion, Showing Areas Affected and the Extent of Inquiry to the Cultivable and Grazing Areas*.

38 Pim, A.W. *Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland: Report of the Commission Appointed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs* (Cmd. 4907, London, 1935), p. 142.

39 Compare statements from colonial officials cited in Showers 'Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho', p. 269 with reports of fluctuating exports in Murray, 'From Granary to Labour Reserve', p. 9.

40 Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought', p. 327.

41 The dust bowl is discussed in numerous American environmental history texts; Worster, D. *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, (New York, 1979) is widely regarded as the classic text on the subject.

The alarming images of the dust bowl quickly found their way into the British imperial arena, especially through the copious literature emanating from the US Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service.⁴² To many writers at the time these events on the Great Plains appeared like the inevitable culmination of unsustainable agricultural practices. Reports on the problems were doom laden and a number of authors, most notably Paul Sears and G.V. Jacks and R.O. Whyte, set-out to determine where the plague of soil erosion was going to hit next.⁴³ Southern Africa received widespread attention in the work of both Sears and of Jacks and Whyte. In the *Rape of the Earth*, Jacks and Whyte pointed to South Africa (including the three High Commission Territories) as the place in the world where a catastrophe due to soil erosion was most imminent.⁴⁴

International fears about soil erosion during and after the US dust bowl did much to fuel concerns in British colonial Africa. Anderson's statement about the spread of concern about erosion in East Africa is equally true for southern Africa:

In a sense it became fashionable to be aware of soil erosion, and the zeal with which many young officers pursued the problem is testimony to the fact that the acquisition of a Diploma in Agriculture came to have a knowledge of this aspect of agricultural science as one of its essential requirements. Armed with their new perceptions, this small cadre of Agricultural Officers quickly identified the danger areas.⁴⁵

In southern Africa one of the danger areas was clearly Lesotho where the pre-existing fears about donga erosion were given added impetus by the images of the US dust bowl. As in the US a series of drought years in the early 1930s did much to concentrate colonial officials minds on soil erosion. These drought years were a significant turning point in the country's economic history and left a great impression on the population. One oral informant told Singh that:

So impressed on people minds were the drought years of the 1930s that people would name their birthdays as before or after the drought.⁴⁶

The images of the American dust bowl must have echoed especially strongly when compared with Lesotho's own dust storms of the early 1930s. Singh reports that another oral informant told her that:

In 1932[3] there was a terrible dust storm... Blacked out the whole country - South Africa and here - it came across from the Kalahari.⁴⁷

42 Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought', p. 326.

43 Sears, P. *Deserts on the March* (London, 1949, [1935]); Jacks, G.V. and Whyte, R.O. *The Rape of the Earth: A World Survey of Soil Erosion* (London, 1939).

44 Jacks and Whyte, *Rape of the Earth*, p. 264.

45 Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought', p.327.

46 Oral informant (Rev. Ruch) quoted in Singh, 'Geological, Historical and Present-day Erosion', p. 243.

Though these dust storms in Lesotho took place in the year before the worst storms began in the US, when stories of the American events arrived in the territory they must have resonated with pre-existing images in Lesotho. A report on soil erosion in Lesotho written five years later opened with a report on the ‘Great Dust’ that had ‘darkened the sun’ in 1933.⁴⁸

Through-out the 1930s British colonial concerns about soil erosion increased. The Colonial Office in London began to take an increasingly proactive role in discussion about soil erosion and it was an issue that was extensively discussed in influential forums like the Royal Africa Society and the Royal Geographical Society. In 1937 the Council of the Royal African Society passed a resolution declaring:

That this Council views with the gravest concern the widespread destruction of the African soil by erosion consequent on wasteful methods of husbandry which strike at the basis of rural economy and native welfare, and is of the opinion that immediate steps should be taken for the application of a common policy and of energetic measures through-out British Africa in order to put an effective check upon this growing menace to the fertility of the land and to the health of its inhabitants.⁴⁹

Frank Stockdale played a crucial role in increasing interest in the issue of soil erosion in the British Empire, using his position as Agricultural Advisor in the Colonial Office to make soil conservation policies an Empire-wide policy.⁵⁰

Stockdale and others at the Colonial Office were careful to ensure that the three High Commission Territories, administered by the Dominions Office, were not left out of the equation. They were included in a general instruction to furnish the Colonial Office with annual reports on soil conservation measures and were invited to conferences of the Colonial Directors of Agriculture.⁵¹ Off-prints of articles on soil erosion sent by the Colonial Office to colonial territories were also forwarded to the three High Commission Territories. In March 1938, for example, 59 copies of two articles by E.P. Stebbing were sent to the High Commission Territories.⁵² Given the tiny size of the administrations in the territories, 59 copies would have received a very wide distribution.

47 Oral Informant (Mr Thorn) in Singh, ‘Geological, Historical and Present-day Erosion’, p. 282. Archival evidence suggests that this was actually in 1933.

48 PRO DO35/940/Y600/146, Resident Commissioner, Basutoland, First Annual Report on Soil Erosion, October 1936-September 1937, submitted to Dominions Office, 21 June 1938.

49 PRO DO35/934/Y556/9, Resolution Passed by the Council of the Royal African Society, 20 October 1937.

50 Anderson, ‘Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought’, p. 341.

51 PRO CO 323/1641, Conference of Colonial Directors of Agriculture, July 1938.

52 PRO CO322/1620/7, the articles were ‘Erosion and Drought in Africa’, *Journal of the Royal Africa Society*, January 1938 and ‘The Man Made Desert in Africa’, *Journal of the Royal Africa Society*, January 1938.

By the late 1930s reports on environmental conditions in Lesotho by the Pim Commission and publications such as Jakes and Whyte's *Rape of the Earth* had made the name Basutoland synonymous with soil erosion within British African colonial circles. However, it was also held up as an example of how serious problems of erosion could be tackled. The programme of contour bank construction begun in the lowlands, under the auspices of Thornton, was seen as a model programme that could be emulated elsewhere. Before establishing a Soil Conservation Service in Kenya, for example, it was suggested that an Agricultural Officer should be sent to investigate the works carried out by the Basutoland administration.⁵³

By 1939 Thornton and his small but growing staff in the Basutoland Department of Agriculture were poised to expand their soil conservation programme, specifically by beginning to implement some of the findings of the ecological survey into the mountain zone. They were delayed, however, by the onset of war in Europe and the general instructions that for the duration of the war anti-erosion work be concentrated in areas where a start had already been made.⁵⁴ The Second World War was to have implications, especially in the South African context, beyond simply delaying the imposition of new policies.

3.4. Soil erosion and civilisation

One of the most persistent themes in colonial and wider international discussions of soil erosion was the connection between accelerated soil erosion and the decline of ancient civilisations. Many of the books and articles written in response to the dust bowl in the USA opened with surveys of soil erosion in past civilisations and how this had contributed to the decline of once great civilisations. The obvious implication was that if current generations were not careful Western Civilisation would go down the same path as the Romans, Egyptians, Greeks and Chinese. A 1946 South African children's textbook, written by two leading lights of the South African anti-soil erosion movement, reproduced the standard arguments:

History shows that great civilisations have flourished and disappeared again. It is certain that some, at least, of these great empires fell not only before the march of conquering armies, but because men did not understand that Nature would cast them off if they did not obey her rules. Ruins of great cities that lie in the deserts

53 Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought', p.340. In early 1938 three officials from Kenya did tour both Lesotho and South Africa; see Gurney, H.L.G., Edwards, D.C. and Barnes, R.O. 'Notes on a visit to the Union of South Africa and Basutoland, March - April 1938.' unpublished report in the Papers of R.O. Barnes, Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS Brit. Emp. t1(1).

54 PRO DO35/940/Y600/146, Sir Arthur Hill, Observations on Summary Reports on Soil Erosion in the Colonial Empire for 1939.

of the world were once, records tell us, surrounded by fertile soil, forest and broad lands. Men by ill treating the soil destroyed their plant and water supplies and so in the end destroyed themselves, for no one can live without food. This happened in China, Persia, North Africa and many parts of the world. It is happening to a certain degree to-day in the Middle and Far East, in the United States, in Russia, in Canada, Australia and New Zealand and in our own country.⁵⁵

The discourse of soil conservation policy was primarily concerned with how to mediate between civilisation and nature: if it was to survive civilisation had to find a way of living within the limits of nature.

The connection between civilisation and soil erosion had particular resonance in South Africa. Jacks and Whyte commented:

Given a stable and productive soil, Europeans should at least be able to hold their own in competition with the natives; without soil stability they are doomed to occupy at best a subordinate place in South Africa's economy. A clearer illustration cannot be found of the dependence of a civilised society on securing and maintaining absolute control of the soil.⁵⁶

The issue was not just the soil itself but also its connection to the issue of water resources and irrigation. According to S.J. Tighy, MP for Johannesburg West:

If we do not solve our water problem, it will not be necessary for us to worry over the colour problem. Then we will not have a non-European problem but a European problem, because if we do not find a solution, South Africa will no longer be a habitable country for Europeans and only the Kaffirs will be able to live here.⁵⁷

As we saw in chapter 2 soil erosion on the plaatland was seen as a direct cause of the 'poor white problem' and there were, therefore, implications that in South Africa white society was already tottering on the edge of a descent from civilisation.

The Second World War in Europe introduced a new factor to the soil erosion and civilisation discourse in South Africa. The War had shaken civilisation to its roots in Europe and the white population of South Africa, therefore, had a particular duty to ensure its preservation. Early editions of the *Veld Trust News* contrasted pictures of 'healthy natives' in South Africa with emaciated, starving white children in war-torn Europe. The language of national defence and of a war against the 'evil of soil erosion'

⁵⁵ Van Rensburg, C.J.J. and Palmer, E.M. *New World to Win* (Bloemfontein, 1946), p. 36.

⁵⁶ Jacks and Whyte, *Rape of the Earth*, p. 265. Interestingly they suggested that the threat of soil erosion made racial segregation impossible as the African population was unable to support itself on the congested reserves. As many white farmers had also proved themselves poor farmers the only solution was a system of feudalism where all land would be owned by the 'class of the dominant race) which shows itself capable or organising for the perpetuation of conservative land utilisation, and of appreciating that its individual and class interests are bound up with the future security of the soil... The South African native faces a period of serfdom as the price he must pay for his share in the benefits of a distant civilisation.' (p. 279-280). To Jacks and Whyte this severe form of 'trusteeship' was the only way that 'Nature's harsh harmony' could be restored (p. 280).

⁵⁷ Tighy, S.J., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 3rd Session, 10th Parliament, 1950, p. 2112.

came to dominate the debate: an early edition of *Veld Trust News* was entitled ‘A Nation Imperilled’.⁵⁸

The upsurge in public concern about soil erosion amongst white South Africans, culminating in the 1946 Soil Conservation Act, also had an influence on the Basutoland service. Many members of the Basutoland service were white South Africans and the social world most officials moved in was essentially the same as that of most South African government officers in the reserves.

One young Basutoland civil servant heavily influenced by the then-fashionable concern about soil erosion was Patrick Duncan, son of the Union Governor General and later on a committed anti-apartheid activist.⁵⁹ As a young man in the Basutoland service during the War, Duncan was, like many of his colleagues, extremely concerned about the country’s apparent soil erosion. His contribution to the struggle against erosion was a short pamphlet, entitled *The Enemy*.

As with many of the publications of the time the pamphlet started with a description of the world as it had been before the advent of civilisation and a description of how nature had kept human populations in balance. The rise of civilisation, on the back of agriculture, meant that ‘man had learnt to upset the balance in his favour’. The early civilisations, China, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome, had all failed because of soil erosion and European civilisation was only able to survive because it exported its soil depleting activities to the New Worlds. This meant that the crisis was now global.

The pamphlet finished with a call to action in military terms suitable for the era:

When Germany and Japan are beaten we must not cease to fight. We must realise, all of us, that there is another Enemy, whose attacks on Man are deadlier even than those of Hitler. We must go forward to this new war... with the same united purpose.⁶⁰

Though Duncan thought his colleagues, with the exception of Thornton and one or two others in the Department of Agriculture, were unconcerned about the issue of soil

⁵⁸ *Veld Trust News*, 1, 2, 1944. Under the banner headline was a photograph of Hugh Bennett, the visiting head of the US Soil Conservation Service, sitting in a field chair and surrounded by Dr. P.R. Viljoen (Secretary for Agriculture), Dr J.C. Ross (chief of the Division of Soil and Water Conservation), and C.J.J. van Rensburg (the officer in charge of the Rust-der-Winter Pasture Research Station) crowded around him anxiously showing him their plans: a scene reminiscent of a general and his staff planning an invasion.

⁵⁹ Driver, *Patrick Duncan*.

⁶⁰ Melanchthon [Duncan, P.] *The Enemy*, (Morija, 1943). The pseudonym ‘Melanchthon’ means black earth in Greek. In all 250 copies of the pamphlet were printed and mostly brought by or given to his colleagues in the Basutoland service; Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, p. 47 - 48.

erosion his views were probably similar to those of most Basutoland officers at the time.⁶¹

3.5. International discourse and local concerns

It may seem a bit far fetched to talk of an ‘environmentalist ideology’ amongst the tiny Basutoland civil service. Yet by the mid-1940s a clear concern about environmental decline infused every part of the administration and ‘saving the soil’ was seen as one of their essential jobs. The development of these environmental concerns can in part be explained by the international growth in concern but specific local factors also need to be taken into account. These include environmental factors, (such as the susceptibility of the lowland sandstone soils to gully erosion), political factors (such as the Union calls for transfer) and economic factors (such as the impact of the 1930s depression of Basotho agriculture). Furthermore the small size of the service meant that one individual, such as Thornton, could make a large difference to the way environmental concerns were understood.

Nevertheless the international discourse was important in driving the nature of the concerns about the environment in Lesotho. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dessicationist ideas were applied to Lesotho and there were calls for afforestation schemes to ensure a steady supply of water to the South Africa river systems. The early interest in the environment of the Lesotho mountains, especially the article from Carlson, had little to do with the actual state of the mountain grasslands but rather involved the application of international models of environmental change. The shift from concerns about vegetation to concerns about soil mirrored shifts in the international discourse, from the early 1930s driven mainly by the images of the US dust bowl. Colonial officials in the Basutoland service were heavily influenced by the general growth in environmentalism amongst white South Africans in the years immediately following the Second World War.

With the exception of the period immediately following Thornton’s visit in 1931 fear of soil erosion in the 1930s was mainly confined to the lowlands. Nevertheless the growth in environmental concerns in the lowlands, and the fact that Basutoland became synonymous with soil erosion in British African circles, meant that when post-War

⁶¹ Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, p. 47.

attention turned to the mountains the Basutoland administration, and their masters in London, were already convinced of the gravity of soil erosion.

4. A history of rangeland ecology and rangeland management in southern Africa

In order to understand why colonial officials in Lesotho became concerned about the country's mountain pastures it is necessary to understand not just the rise of fears about environmental destruction but also the science that informed these fears. A very specific ecological model, that of plant succession and climax community, was integral to the discursive structures conditioning the way in which the landscape was 'read'¹ by colonial officials and other individuals concerned about the state of the mountain environment.

This theory of ecology is strongly associated with the work of the American ecologist Frederic Clements, who has been described as 'the greatest individual creator of the modern science of vegetation'² and the chapter will start with an examination of his work and the concept of a climax community and plant succession. Clements was also strongly associated with the idea of 'complex organisms' which will be examined in connection with the work of John Phillips, probably the foremost South African ecologist in the early 20th century. The chapter then turns to the key concepts of carrying capacity and of indicator species before considering how these various ideas were spread around the British colonial empire. The final section looks at how these ideas were used in Lesotho and how they helped shape fears about environmental degradation and drove policy formulation.

4.1. Climax Community, plant succession and complex organisms

Frederic Clements early work in the 1890s, mapping the vegetation of his native Nebraska,³ lead him towards the theme that was to dominate his writing: that vegetation was dynamic and underwent a process of change. This process of change, however, had a direction: over time vegetation would tend towards a state of equilibrium to form what Clements called a climax community. He argued that in any given habitat vegetation will pass through a series of clearly distinguishable progressions ('seres'). A piece of land cleared of all vegetation would be initially colonised by pioneer species, which would in turn be replaced by new invaders, until eventually the climax

¹ Fairhead, J. and Leach, M. *Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest-savanna Mosaic* (Cambridge, 1996).

² Tansley, A.G. 'Frederic Edward Clements', *Journal of Ecology*, 34, 1946, pp.194-196, quoted in Worster, D. *Nature's Economy: a History of Ecological Ideas*, (New York, 1994, 2nd edition) p. 209.

³ Clements, F. and Pound, R. *The Phytogeography of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1898).

community was reached. An outside intervention, such as the impact of man, could alter the climax community but once the outside influence ceased nature would run its course and the system would return to its climax. Though Clements did allow for the influence of variable factors like soil type it was essentially climate that dictated the form of the final climax community, hence the terminology climatic climax.⁴

The influence of ideas emanating out of Darwin and Wallace's theory of evolution are clear in Clements' belief that vegetational communities began with simple forms and over time became increasing complex: contained within his ecological theory is the idea that time has a direction, unlike in theories of the physical world derived from Newtonian physics.⁵ Equally important for Clements was another ideology that arose in response to the theory of evolution: that of 'organismic philosophy' as expressed by the English nineteenth-century thinker, Herbert Spencer (perhaps best known for coining the phrase 'the survival of the fittest' and for being the foremost early Social Darwinist). Spencer likened society to one huge organism and saw the process of history leading towards progressively more advanced and complex organisms. Clements was much taken by Spencer's analogy and underlying his whole theory of climax communities was the belief that the development of vegetation must resemble the growth process of an individual plant.⁶

Clements' ideas about plant succession and climax communities have been hugely influential in twentieth-century ecology. From the early years of the century through to the 1970s his ideas have dominated ecology in southern Africa, even though individual scientists may have disagreed with specific aspects of his theories. One important ecologist who disagreed with very little of Clements' theories was the South African, John Phillips.

4.2. John Phillips, complex organisms, and organismic philosophy

It was through John Phillips that the most direct African link to Frederic Clements existed. Phillips had been introduced to the work of Clements whilst an undergraduate in Edinburgh University and he was so impressed by *Plant Succession* that in 1920 he

4 Clements' theory of plant succession was most comprehensively outlined in his book *Plant Succession: Analysis of the Development of Vegetation* (Washington, 1916). For a detailed description of Clements' theories and his wide ranging influence in Anglo-American ecology see Worster, *Nature's Economy*, chapter 11 - 12, p. 205-253.

5 Chapman, G. and Driver, T. 'Time, Mankind and the Earth' in Driver, T. and Chapman, G., (eds) *Time-scales and Environmental Change* (London, 1996), pp. 1-24, p. 12.

6 Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p.211.

wrote to Clements and initiated a correspondence that was to last from then until Clements death in 1954. In 1922 Phillips returned to South Africa to take up an appointment in the Forestry Department, where he carried out ecological research in the sub-tropical evergreen forests of Knysa. In 1927 he was appointed to the post of Ecologist in the Tanganyika Department of Tsetse Research before returning to South Africa, in 1931, as Professor of Botany at the University of Witswatersrand. In 1948 he returned to Tanganyika as an adviser to the East African Groundnuts Scheme and in the early 1950s carried out a number of consultancies in Asia and Central America and helped establish the Faculty of Agriculture at the new Gold Coast University.⁷

From his position in the University of Witswatersrand Phillips was able to influence a whole generation of both theoretical and applied ecologists in South Africa and beyond. In 1933 he initiated a programme of ecological research at the Frankenwald Research Station and many figures who were later to make their mark in various colonial departments of agriculture studied there.⁸ His earlier professional experiences, in both South Africa and Tanganyika, had also given him scope to influence the work of his colleagues. In the early 1920s he had numerous discussion with J.W. Bews⁹ who was already applying some Clementsian principals to his study of grasslands and forests in Natal, though he had more reservations about the utility of the theory.¹⁰ In Tanganyika his work on tsetse fly brought him into contact with a both colonial administrators and animal ecologists,¹¹ and made Phillips increasingly convinced of the need to consider both animals and vegetation as part of the same biotic community.¹²

From the mid-1930s onwards Phillips became increasingly interested in applied ecology, and in particular grazing management and pasture deterioration. In 1938 he published an influential article on the ‘deterioration in the vegetation of the Union of South Africa’ and made a call for a united ‘national fight’ against the three foes of ‘Deterioration, Ignorance and Procrastination’.¹³ Following the Second World War he

7 Phillips, J. ‘A Tribute to Frederic E. Clements and his Concepts in Ecology’, *Ecology*, 35, 1954, pp. 114-115, and Du Plessis, E. ‘Obituary: John Frederick Vicars Phillips (1899-1987)’, *Bothalia*, 17, 1987, pp. 267-8.

8 Scoones, ‘Politics, Polemics and Pastures’, p. 37.

9 Phillips, ‘A Tribute to Frederic E. Clements’.

10 Bews, J.W. *Plant forms and their evolution in South Africa* (London, 1925).

11 For details of this research programme see Swynnerton, C. F. M. ‘The entomological aspects of an outbreak of sleeping sickness near Mwanza, Tanganyika Territory’, *Bulletin of Entomological Research*, 13, 1922, pp. 317-370; Swynnerton, C. F. M. ‘An experiment in control of Tsetse flies in Shinyanga, Tanganyika Territory’, *Bulletin of Entomological Research*, 15, 1924, pp. 313-337; Swynnerton, C. F. M. ‘The tsetse-fly problem in the Nzega sub-district Tanganyika Territory’, *Bulletin of Entomological Research*, 16, 1925, pp. 99-109.

12 Phillips, J. ‘The Biotic Community’, *Journal of Ecology*, 19, 1931, pp. 1- 24.

13 Phillips, J. ‘Deterioration in the vegetation of the Union of South Africa’, *South African Journal of*

established an applied BSc course in Soil Conservation which became the training ground for several hundred men ‘who spread the conservation message to several parts of Africa and overseas’.¹⁴ His move towards more applied ecology mirrored that of his mentor Frederic Clements, who had become increasingly involved in American national debates, particularly those concerning the dust bowl, after his move to the Carnegie Institute in Washington D.C. in 1927.¹⁵

Through-out his career Phillips associated himself wholehearted with Clements and he was internationally recognised as one of Clements’s staunchest supporters. The leading light of early twentieth-century British ecology, A.G. Tansley, commented that Phillips was apt to simply accept any argument put forward by Clements¹⁶ and in his respected series of articles in the *Journal of Ecology*, Phillips certainly had a tendency to dismiss the work of other ecologists simply by referring to Clements.¹⁷

It was perhaps for his unstinting support of one of Clements’s more contentious ideas, that a biotic community was analogous to an organism, that Phillips received most note and criticism from fellow ecologists. One of Phillips’s major critics was Tansley. Tansley was willing to accept that a biotic community was in some senses *like* an organism;¹⁸ indeed in 1899 he had helped Spencer extend his theory of evolutionary organicism from the human to the ecological realm.¹⁹ He was, however, highly critical of Clements’s and Phillips’s view that a biotic community *was* a complex organism.²⁰

Though he based his idea that a biotic community was a complex organism on Spencer’s organicistic philosophy, Clements did not believe that ‘developed’²¹ societies could be part of the biotic community. He did consider the Native American population of the central plains to be part of the biome, but, as Worster has argued, ‘it was clear to

14 *Science*, 35, 1938, pp. 476–484; also quoted in Scoones, ‘Politics, Polemics and Pastures’, p. 37.

15 Scoones, ‘Politics, Polemics and Pastures’, p. 38, quoting Du Plessis, ‘Obituary: John Frederick Vicars Phillips’.

16 Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, p. 235.

17 Tansley, A.G. ‘The Uses and Abuses of Vegetational Concepts and Terms’, *Ecology*, 16, 1935, pp. 284–307.

18 Phillips, J. ‘Succession, development, the climax and the complex organism: an analysis of concepts’, *Journal of Ecology*, Part I, 1934, 22, pp. 554–571, Part II, 1935, 23, pp. 210–246, Part III, 1935, 23, pp. 488–508.

19 Tansley described a biotic community as a quasi-organism, Tansley, A.G. ‘The classification of vegetation and the concept of development’, *Journal of Ecology*, 8, 2, 1920, pp. 118–144.

20 Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, p. 213.

21 Tansley, ‘The Uses and Abuses of Vegetational Concepts and Terms’.

Clements substituted the word ‘development’ for Spencer’s term ‘organisation’. The word development was used by Clements and his followers in ecology to mean an inevitable process to a higher form, see Phillips, ‘Succession, development, the climax and complex communities: Part II.’ p. 210–216.

Clements...that the white was not part of it: he came as disrupter, an alien, an exploiter'.²²

Phillips's position was more unclear. In his 1931 article in *The Journal of Ecology* Phillips argued that man should be included in the concept of biotic community. He went on to say:

My inclusion of man doubtless will call for much criticism - so to anticipate such I would remind you that despite the ability of man to upset temporarily, to hold in check to some degree, and to accelerate to greater or lesser extent the responses, the reactions, the co-actions and the development of a community, it is more than he can do to alter fundamentally the trend of these. To him certain - and not all - things are possible.²³

In his 1934-5 series of articles, however, he retreated from this position and emphasised 'the need for restriction of the term biotic community to naturally associated organisms'.²⁴ For Phillips, as for Clements, however the line between man and nature was somewhat unclear: he stated that herding or farming societies could not be part and parcel of a biotic community but significantly remained silent on hunting and gathering societies.²⁵

Clements's and Phillips's view that 'modern man' had somehow stepped outside nature had been prevalent in much European ecological thinking since the eighteenth century and earlier. The idea is often traced back to the English politician Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and the view that society can and should use the technology at its disposal to achieve mastery or dominance over nature so as to satisfy human needs or wants.²⁶ Of course, intricately associated with 'domination over nature' are ideas about other axis of domination based on class, race and gender.²⁷ In early twentieth century European thinking on the relationship between people and nature in the African context there existed a clear hierarchy of societies, from hunter-gather societies which were regarded as being part and parcel of nature, through African farming and herding societies, regarded as being close to nature but nevertheless having the ability to adapt, and disrupt, the environment, and finally, 'developed' European society which had stepped outside of nature. During the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth

22 Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p.217.

23 Phillips, 'The Biotic Community', p. 19.

24 Phillips, 'Succession, development, the climax and complex communities: Part III', p. 500.

25 Phillips, 'Succession, development, the climax and complex communities: Part III', p. 502.

26 Leach, M. and Mearns, R. 'Environmental change and policy: challenging received wisdom in Africa.' in Leach and Mearns, *The Lie of the Land*, pp. 1-33, p. 11. See also Glacken, C. *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from ancient times to the end of the eighteenth century* (Berkeley, 1967).

27 See Merchant, C. *The Death of Nature: Women Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, 1980) and Leiss, W. *The Domination of Nature* (New York, 1972).

century environmental destruction in southern Africa was blamed primarily on the activities of European settlers.²⁸

There was, therefore, a hugely ironic contradiction in the supposedly unifying theories of climax community, complex organisms and evolutionary organismics. The ‘developed’ human societies, seen as being analogous with the climatic climax, were the very ones doing most to destroy those climates (or in the words of Clements and Phillips, to retard the succession and deflect it to sub or pro-climax community).²⁹ African society was at the early stages of an inevitable evolutionary transformation (development in Clementsian terminology) and therefore akin to a subclimax biotic community, but was, nevertheless, less likely, or less able, to deflect the African climatic climax to a pro- or sub-climax biotic community.

In the African context this tension was manifested in a contradictory attitude to the relationship between the development of African societies and the African environment. Colonial attitudes towards the impact of African society on the environment tended to vacillate between arguing that it was developing away from an environmentally benign ‘tradition’ and that at the same time Africans must rapidly adopt European economic and socio-cultural practices in order to conserve their environment.³⁰

I am not arguing here that these contradictory views were solely a result of Clementsian theories of complex organisms. To a large extent this contradictory impulse arises from the ever present tension in ecology between the two major traditions within the discipline; what Worster, in *Nature's Economy*, labels as the arcadian (or romantic) and imperial traditions. In the arcadian tradition, growing out of the work of thinkers such as Rousseau and Thoreau, the underlying belief is that human suffering is largely the result of mankind breaking its ties with nature. The imperial tradition, associated with writers such as Bacon and Linneaus, was premised upon the belief that human happiness could only result from our mastery of nature.³¹ Nevertheless the ecological

28 See page 72

29 Phillips did argue, however, that the activities of humans, for example through the use of fire, could on occasions accelerate succession towards the climax; Phillips, J. ‘Fire: its influence on biotic communities and physical factors in South and East Africa’, *South African Journal of Science*, 27, 1930, pp. 352-367.

30 This contradictory attitude is still prevalent in late twentieth-century thinking on the African environment. On the one hand there are ideas about ‘poverty being the greatest polluter’ and on the other there is the ‘limits to growth’ approach which teaches that rapid economic growth is at the root of environmental problems. To an extent this contradiction is resolved by blaming local environmental problems on poverty and global environmental problems on economic growth. Note that here I am using ‘development’ in its ecological sense; cf. with discussion in chapter 2.

31 In modern environmentalism this tension is still prevalent and reflected in the distinction between eco-centric and anthropo-centric environmentalism.

theories of Clements (and Phillips) have been, and continue to be, extremely influential in shaping the way ecologists, agronomists and policy makers thought (and think) about relationships between human society and the environment.³²

While John Phillips may have only been only one small player in the development of ideas about society and environment in southern Africa in the early twentieth century he was a key figure in the development of both theoretical and applied ecology in the region. Phillips's view that the health of a particular environment could be measured by the extent to which it diverged from the climatic climax has dominated twentieth century southern African ecology. Within the field of range science this idea was crucial and it became the basis upon which ecologists and range managers judged the deterioration of African pastures. The mere presence of species associated with 'invader' seres was enough to indicate that an environment was suffering from degradation.

Phillips's other crucial role in the development of range science in southern Africa was his insistence, following Clements's lead, that habitats grazed by domestic animals could not be considered biotic communities.³³ It was Phillips's and Clements's perspective, rather than that of another South African ecologists J.W. Rowland, that dominated southern African range science and domesticated animals were always considered as an external influence on the 'natural environment'.³⁴ I will return to both of these themes and their relevance to livestock policy in Lesotho later in this chapter, but first I examine the crucial concept of carrying capacity.

4.3. Carrying capacity

Range science was dominated by studies carried out in the United States of America and many of the assumptions about range management practices were based on American ranching experiences. This had important implications for the way in which range science theory and the range management practices based on the theory evolved. This is particularly apparent in the way in which the concept of carrying capacity came to be used.

32 One clear area in which Clementsian ecological theories influenced wider political theory is through Jan Christian Smuts and in particular his influential book *Evolution and Holism*; Smuts, J.C. *Holism and Evolution* (London, 1926).

33 Phillips, 'Succession, Development, the climax and complex communities: Part III', p. 502.

34 Rowland, J. 'Notes on the study of plant succession in relation to grazing', *South African Journal of Science*, 30, 1933, pp.307-316.

While the concept of carrying capacity was developed in range science during the early years of this century³⁵ it obviously owes a great deal to the influential work of Thomas Malthus, whose calculations concerning an exponentially growing population versus an arithmetically growing resource base have underlain much of modern ecological thought.³⁶ Malthus's thesis was used by P.F. Verhulst, a 19th century theoretical ecologist, and resulted in an equation giving the upper limit of population size based on fixed resources.³⁷ At this point, usually designated as K in modern ecological literature, the population will cease to grow because of limited food resources.

The concept of carrying capacity as used in range science is, however, somewhat more complex than an absolute limit on population growth. Within range science, carrying capacity does not refer to the absolute maximum number of animals a given habitat can support but to the density of population at which output can be maximised without causing environmental degradation. There is, therefore, a difference between an ecological carrying capacity (K) and an economic carrying capacity. The relationship between ecological and economic carrying capacity is represented in Figure 4.1.

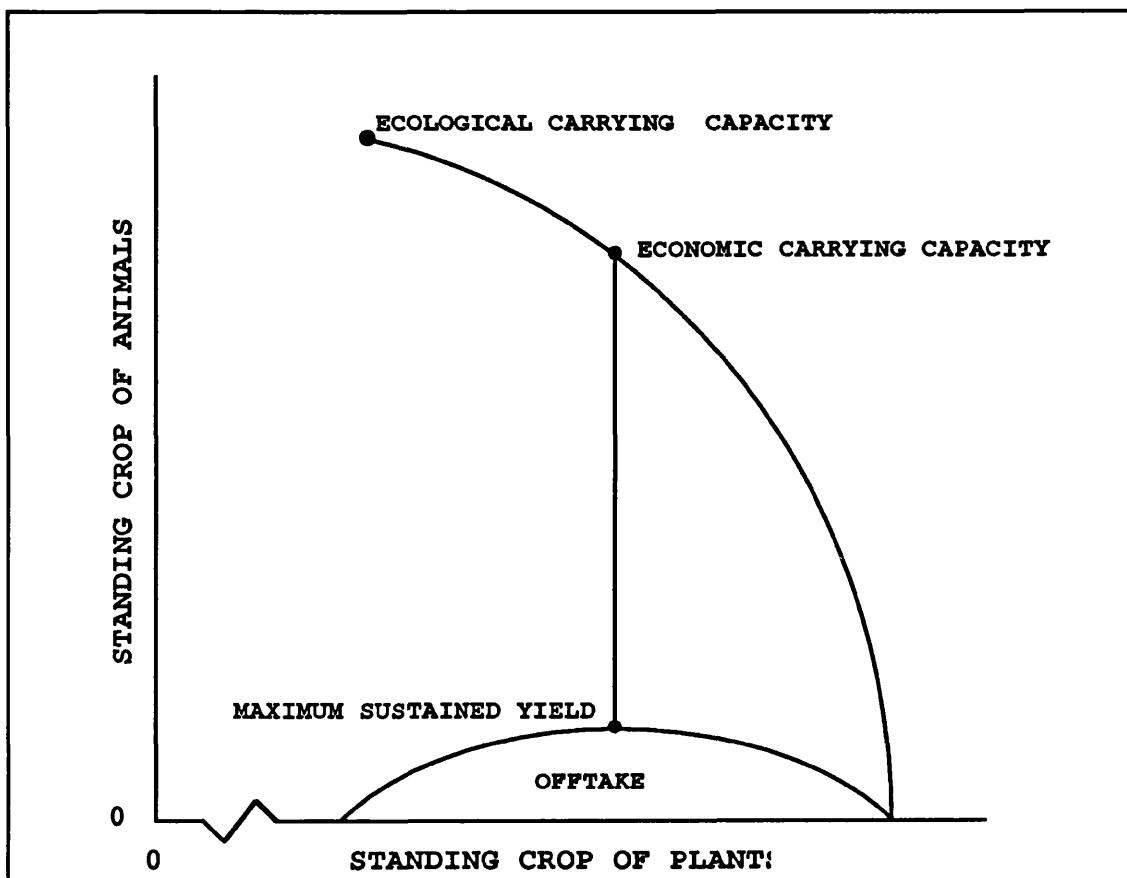
With a very low animal density (y axis of Figure 4.1) there will be a high density of plants (x axis on Figure 4.1) but as the number of animals increases the density of plants decreases. Eventually a point (K) is reached where the animal population can grow no further as all plant growth is consumed (this does not mean there is no more vegetation, just that it is consumed at the same rate it grows). When the animal population is zero there is obviously no output from the livestock population. As the population grows it is possible to extract a greater number of animals as offtake. There comes a point, however, when because of limitations in food supply this figure begins to decrease: the population growth rate slows down meaning less animals available for slaughter and animals of poorer quality. The point at which the possible offtake is greatest (maximum sustained yield) corresponds to the economic carrying capacity.

35 For example Cotton J.S. 'Range Management' in United States, Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook of the Department of Agriculture* (Washington, 1906), pp.225-238.

36 Malthus, T. *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (Harmondsworth, 1986 [1798]).

37 Bartels, G.B., Norton, B.E. and Perrier, G.K. 'An examination of the carry capacity concept' in Behnke, R.H., Scoones, I. and Kerven, C. *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium: New Models of Natural Variability and Pastoral Adaptation in African Savannas* (London, 1993), pp. 89-103.

Figure 4.1 The relationship between plant and animal populations in a grazing system.³⁸



This model bases the idea of an economic carrying capacity on the maximum offtake, where a herd of livestock is being managed primarily for slaughter. If the management objectives of the herd are not, however, simply the off-take the carrying capacity could be at a different point along the curve. In a game park, for example, where the primary management objective is to have as many animals as possible in order to facilitate game viewing it would make sense to aim for an animal population closer to the ecological carrying capacity; while in a biological reserve, where the aim is to preserve certain plant species, it would make more sense to have a smaller animal population.

As noted above the concept of carrying capacity was primarily developed in the ranching regions of the South West of the United States. The first federal range management research station were established in these areas around the turn of the

38 Based on Figure 1.2 in Behnke, R. and Scoones, I. 'Rethinking Range Ecology: Implications for Rangeland Management in Africa' in Behnke, Scoones and Kerven, *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium*, pp. 1-30.

century. All the research emphasised the commercial production of beef and the calculations of carrying capacity reflected this emphasis.

The concept of carrying capacity developed in the United States also included the idea of maintaining the output at a constant level over the years. The number of livestock on the range was to be managed to allow the vegetation to rejuvenate the following growing season. In 1923 A.W. Sampson, an influential American range scientist, defined carrying capacity as:

the number of stock... which an area will support in good condition during the time that the forage is palatable and accessible without decreasing the forage production for subsequent seasons.³⁹

Here the theory of climax communities came into play: evidence of a decrease in forage production could be judged from the presence of species from a series lower in the succession. As already noted range scientists used this theory to develop management systems where they looked for the presence of certain indicator species as a way of judging if the condition of the rangeland was deteriorating. If these species were present the obvious management solution was to reduce grazing pressure and allow the pasture to develop back towards its climax.

One way of reducing grazing pressure was to rotate the livestock between different paddocks. The basic idea behind this system was that it would allow each area a period in which it could recover (revert to its climax) before it was grazed again. A huge number of different types of rotational or deferred grazing systems were experimented with in both the USA and southern Africa. Different regimes were advocated for different areas and at different times but the basic principals remained more or less constant. The emphasis on fencing in areas of communal grazing land was largely a response to the belief in rotational grazing as a management strategy.

4.4. The spreading Karoo

US ideas about carrying capacity and indicator species were extremely influential in southern Africa. Colonial officials trained in range science were exposed to a large body of US literature during their academic and professional development.

Furthermore a number of influential South African soil erosion experts undertook periods of training in the United States. Two members of the influential South African Drought Commission, the chairman H.S.D. du Toit and R.J. van Reenen, both studied in the USA while exiled during the South African War.⁴⁰

39 Sampson, *Range and Pasture Management*, p. 328, quoted in Bartels, Norton and Perrier, 'An examination of the carrying capacity concept', p.101

40 Beinart and Coates, *Environment and History*.

The 1922-3 Drought Commission also borrowed terminology from the USA. The Drought Commission argued that over-grazing on settler stock farms was leading to the development of a ‘great South African desert’: a term taken from the Great American Desert marked on early 19th century maps as the region between the 98th meridian and the Rockies.⁴¹ The Drought Commission, and fears about vegetational change in the semi-arid interior of the Cape generally, proved to be highly influential far beyond the settler stock areas of the Cape interior. As William Beinart has noted:

The state of the settler stock farms and semi-arid areas more generally has been the trigger for broader debates and discourses about ecological decay in the region.⁴²

Observations about changing southern African rangeland vegetation patterns did not, however, only appear after the development of American-inspired range science. A third influential South African who studied in the USA, T.D. Hall, was the first person to attempt to trace the development of concerns about vegetation change in southern Africa systematically. He identified the earliest fears about pasture deterioration as far back as the mid-18th century and quoted officials of the Board of Heemraden, Stellenbosch and Drakenstein mentioning the ‘disappearance of grass’ in the older settled districts ‘and the springing up of small bushy plants in their stead’.⁴³ The ‘small bushy shrubs’ presumably referred to Karroid vegetation types, the same indicator of pasture deterioration used in the Lesotho mountains some two hundred years later. In 1775, Andrew Sparrman, a Swedish traveller noted an increase in inedible vegetation types. He blamed this on an increase in cattle numbers and their preference for grazing certain grasses, thus preventing them from ‘thriving and taking root’, while they ‘pass by and leave untouched’ the unpalatable species which ‘take root free and unmolested and encroach on the place of others’.⁴⁴

A century later John Shaw gave an address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science which highlighted one of the key ideas behind South African ecological thinking over the following century: that vegetation associated with the Karoo was expanding northwards and eastwards.⁴⁵ Under the influence of Clementsian ideas about succession, carrying capacity and overgrazing, these observations about changes in vegetation took on a new, and more potent, meaning. Overgrazing was

⁴¹ Beinart and Coates, *Environment and History*, p.51.

⁴² Beinart, ‘Environmental Destruction in Southern Africa’, p. 150.

⁴³ Hall, T.D. ‘South African Pastures: Retrospective and Prospective’, *South African Journal of Science*, 31, 1934, pp. 59-97, p. 66; also quoted in Beinart, ‘Environmental Destruction’, p.153.

⁴⁴ Sparrman, A. *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope 1785*, quoted in Hall, ‘South African Pastures’, p. 66-67, also quoted in Beinart, ‘Environmental Destruction’, p.153.

⁴⁵ Beinart, ‘Environmental Destruction’, p.153-4.

pushing vegetation back down an ecological succession and encouraging the spread of Karoo type vegetation out of its semi-arid heartland and into the wetter ‘sweetveld’ areas with higher productivity.

From the mid-1930s the bare bones of this ecological theory were filled out by an extremely influential ecologist, John Acocks, employed by the Department of Agriculture. Acocks’s fieldwork in and around the Karoo was highly influential in determining the findings of the 1951 Desert Encroachment Commission, on which he served. The report of the Commission and Acocks’s own *Veld Types of South Africa* both proved to be highly influential in setting the terms of subsequent debate in South Africa, and southern Africa more generally.⁴⁶

Acocks expressed particular concerns over the replacement of sweet *rooigras* species (especially *Themeda triandra*) with Karoo vegetation types: a derived climax community he labelled as False Upper Karoo.⁴⁷ This concern mirrored exactly the prime ecological theory used to explain pasture deterioration in Lesotho. Before specifically examining the development of ideas about range ecology and range management in Lesotho, however, I will briefly explore the nature of links between different pasture and soil erosion experts in the British Empire and beyond, and the manner in which ideas were circulated and reinforced.

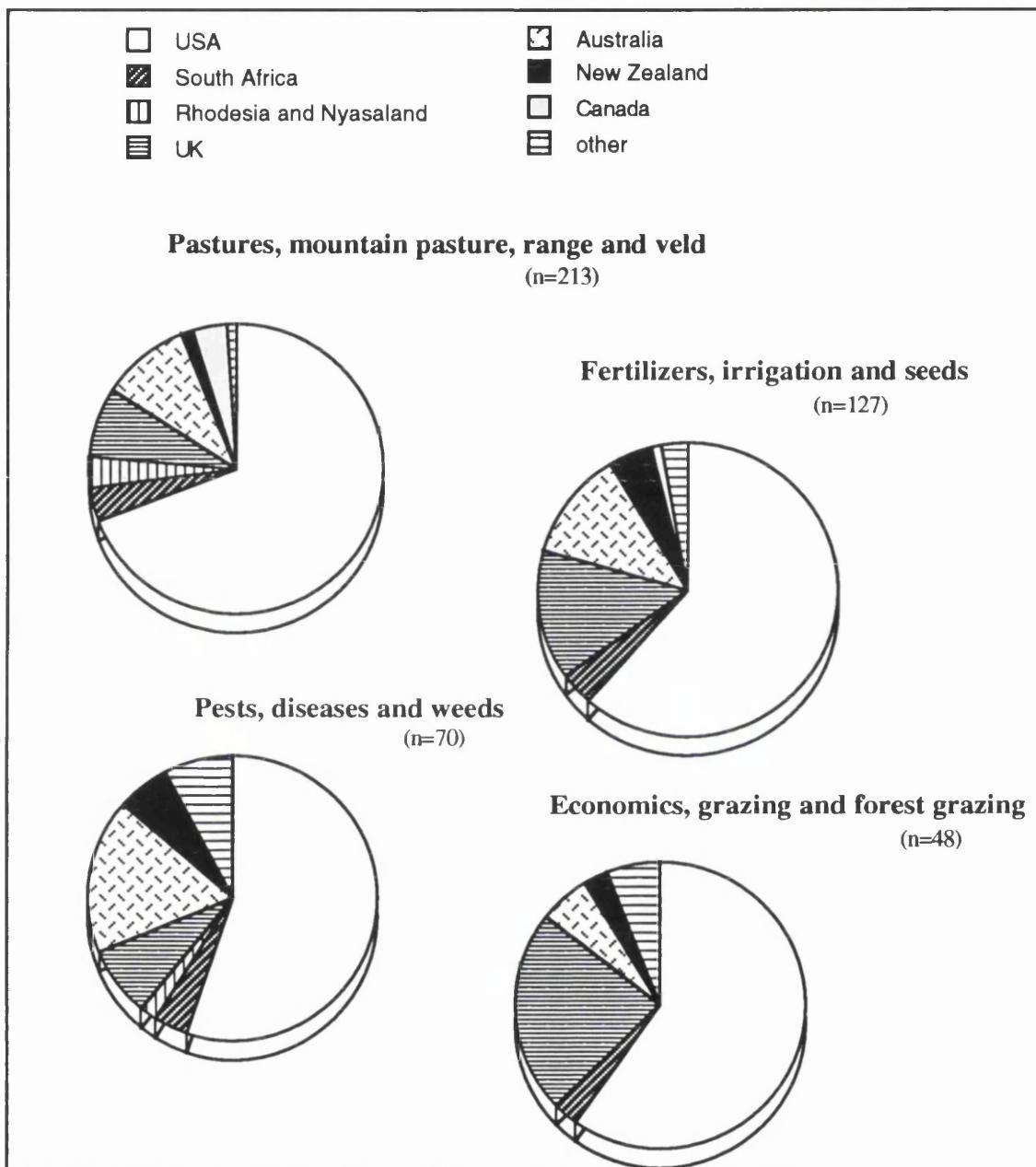
4.5. The network of range specialists in the British Empire and beyond

As I have already suggested American influences in the development of range science were extremely strong. At the foremost British colonial agricultural training institute, the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA) in Trinidad, the literature on range management was dominated by research carried out in the USA, as Figure 4.2 indicates

46 Beinart, ‘Environmental Destruction’. One example of this influence is the oft quoted figure that the Karoo is expanding at a rate of 2.4 km per annum. This statistic is derived from a (highly suspect) re-working of Acocks figures by B.H. Downing, a botanist at Fort Hare, in 1978; Downing, B.H. ‘Environmental Consequences of Agricultural Expansion in South Africa Since 1850’, *South African Journal of Science*, 74, November 1978, pp. 420-422. See Driver, T.S. ‘Political Ecology’, *Southern Africa Review of Books*, 33, 1994, pp. 12-13 for a discussion of the use of this statistic in recent environmental literature.

47 Acocks, J.P.H. *Veld Types of South Africa* (Pretoria, 1953). Also published as *Memoirs of the Botanical Survey of South Africa*, No. 40 (Pretoria, 1975).

Figure 4.2 Geographical origin of research reports in the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture catalogue in the Pasture and Grasslands category (A.30) (divided by sub-category)



Two of the most important colonial officials in the Basutoland Department of Agriculture, P.A.O. Bowmaker and J.G.M. King, both undertook the rigorous IICTA training course before embarking on careers in the colonial service.⁴⁸ After his training at IICTA Bowmaker worked at the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation Experimental

48 Bowmaker was at IICTA from 1926-1927 and King from 1930-31, Complete IICTA Register, Records Management Centre, University of the West Indies.

Station, in Natal, South Africa before moving to Swaziland for a brief period and then to the Basutoland Department of Agriculture from 1946-1957, first as Principal Agricultural Officer and then as Director of Agriculture. He was the officer in charge of the grazing closure policy in Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek between 1947 and 1956. King's first post after the IACTA was as a District Officer and then Senior Agricultural Officer in Tanganyika, before he was seconded as a lecturer in tropical agriculture to Cambridge University just after the Second World War. He became Director of Agriculture in Lesotho in 1948, then transferred to Uganda in 1954 and eventually ended up in Swaziland in the early 1960s. Though both King's and Bowmaker's early interests were primarily in cash crops they presumably would have been exposed of the US literature on range science and American ideas about carrying capacity.⁴⁹

Nevertheless it is probably a mistake to see the development of range science in British East and southern Africa as simply the wholesale application of models developed in the USA. As concerns about vegetational change in the Cape interior indicated, Clementsian ideas about succession complicated, reinforced and provided scientific validity for pre-existing beliefs rather than creating wholly new ones. Perhaps the greatest significance of the new range science emanating from the United States was that it provided a new language and a scientific justification for the pre-existing fears over deterioration. Writing in the *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal* in 1932 Illytd Pole Evans argued:

Uniform grazing of the veld should be aimed at. This can only be obtained by a complete system of camping... In the US, an ingenious system, known as 'deferred grazing' has been worked out and practised, with highly satisfactory results. There is no reason whatsoever why the same system should not be appointed in the Union.⁵⁰

It is noticeable that Pole Evans pointed to the US for inspiration and not to domestic South African schemes based on the same principals (even if precise details were different). As early as 1802 General J.A. de Mist (after whom the town of Uitenhage was named) commented that:

By allowing cattle to graze only in small paddocks of ground, moving them from one field to the next in rotation, the veld itself will gradually improve and in time the stock will be in better condition.⁵¹

49 Bowmaker, P.A. 'An experiment designed to determine the optimum date to sow cotton' (unpublished AICTA thesis, 1927); King, J.G.M. 'The diversification of cocoa' (unpublished AICTA thesis, 1931), both in University of West Indies Library, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago. Biographical details from Kirk Greene, A.H.M. *A Biographical Dictionary of the British Colonial Service, 1939-1966* (London, 1991).

50 Pole Evans, I.B. 'Pastures and their Management', *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, 29, 1932, pp. 912-920, p. 917 quoted by Scoones, 'Politics, Polemics and Pasture', p. 36.

51 Hall, 'South African pastures', p.69

For twentieth century proponents of grazing control, however, it seemed to make more sense to associate their ideas with the projects taking place in the USA, projects which were written up in suitable scientific and technically language.

Within the region people such as Pole Evans, who frequently visited Rhodesia, Kenya and other colonies, were extremely important in spreading ideas about carrying capacity, plant succession and climax communities. There was a high degree of movement between the different colonies on official visits, research trips and through job mobility. Most of these links were concentrated within southern and East Africa but both the United States and the United Kingdom were also important. There appeared to be few obvious links between the southern and eastern African pasture and soil specialists and their colleagues in West Africa. Figure 4.3 indicates just some of these links amongst pasture and soil erosion experts mentioned in this thesis.

As we have already seen the South African Department of Agriculture and its related institutions, such as the Rust-der-Winter Pasture Research Station, provided one important sphere in which ideas about vegetation change were developed, especially for semi-arid environments. There were, however, other equally as important nodes in this network.

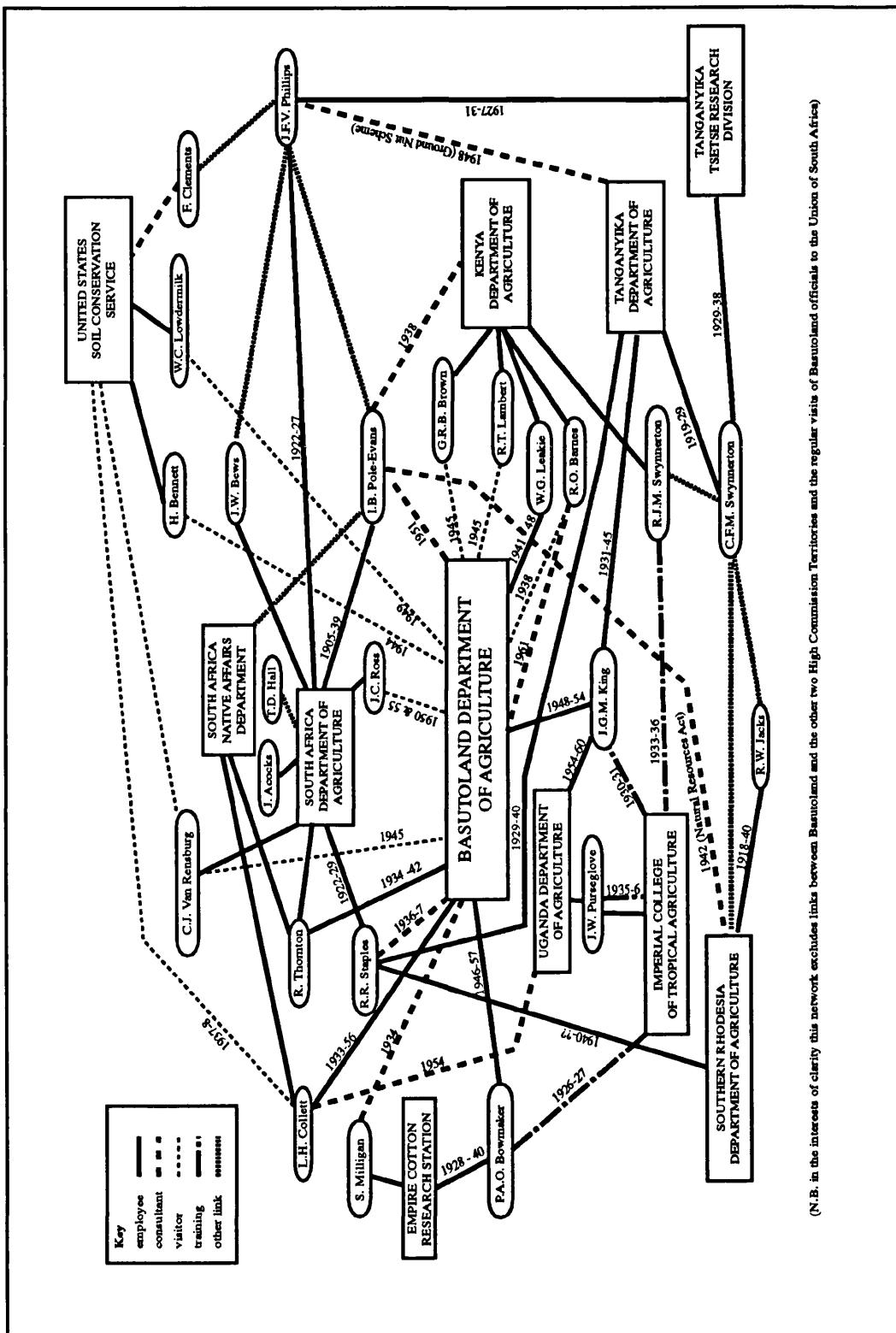
One interesting sphere is Tanganyika in the 1930s. Here C.F.M Swynnerton, who had also had a farm in Rhodesia,⁵² played a significant role in gathering together various plant and animal ecologists to investigate ways of controlling tsetse fly and provided an important link between southern and East Africa. His son, R.J.M. Swynnerton, was later to find fame as the author of the *Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya*.⁵³ Under the influence of Swynnerton senior the Tanganyika Department of Agriculture and the Tsetse Research Division provided important links between more theoretically minded ecologists, such as John Phillips, and more practically minded individuals such as Raymond Staples (later to become the Chief Pasture Officer in Rhodesia). Swynnerton himself had earlier expressed views in line with Clementsian ideas of complex organisms⁵⁴ and he and John Phillips must have found each other stimulating colleagues.

52 Anon. 'Obituary: C.F.M. Swynnerton.' *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, 35, 8, 1938, pp. 611-616.

53 Swynnerton, R.J.M. *A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1954). Thanks to Luise S. White and Ralph Austin for confirming the relationship between the two Swynnertons in response my query on the H-Africa electronic mail discussion list (21 April 1997).

54 Swynnerton, C.F.M. 'Nature Notes: Adaptation', *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, 14, 3, 1917, pp. 339-356.

Figure 4.3 The network of soil conservation and livestock management experts mentioned in the thesis.



N.B. in the interests of clarity this network excludes links between Basutoland and the other two High Commission Territories and the regular visits of Basutoland officials to the Union of South Africa)

Though they do not appear on Figure 4.3 the Dominion/ Commonwealth Relations and Colonial Offices in London also provided an important link. Reports from one colony tended to be circulated to other colonies for their information. A report from L.H. Collett, the Basutoland civil servant with prime responsibility for the massive contour bank building programme, written after he had returned from an investigation of anti-erosion measures in the US in 1938 was later circulated to all the East and southern African territories.⁵⁵ Frank Stockdale, the Agricultural Adviser to the Colonial Office, had circulated a copy of his own notes on soil conservation in the USA some months earlier.⁵⁶

The importance of the US influence does not mean that research from the imperial metropole was not also highly significant. During the 1920s research on beef production and pastures expanded rapidly in the United Kingdom. The work of Woodham and co-workers appearing in a series of articles in the *Journal of Agricultural Science* from 1926 to 1930, were often referred to in southern African publications, for example.⁵⁷ Journals produced by the various Imperial research institutions were also circulated to the colonial Departments of Agriculture. In the late 1930s the Director of Agriculture in Maseru received quarterly publications of the *Review of Applied Entomology*, *Plant Breeding Abstracts*, *Animal Breeding Abstracts*, *Field Crop Abstracts*, *Herbage Abstracts*, *Herbage Reviews*, (the latter two published by the Imperial Bureau of Pastures and Forage Crops in Aberystwyth) and a bibliography from the Imperial Bureau of Soil Science in Harpenden.⁵⁸

Colonial civil servants also met up at various conferences⁵⁹ and after 1952 at the annual Southern African Regional Committee for Conservation and Utilisation of the Soil.⁶⁰ Given these myriad links it is hardly surprising that many of the same ideas about overgrazing, plant succession and soil erosion would arise in all the British colonial territories in the region.

55 Unfortunately it was not returned to the correct Dominions Office file (PRO DO35/936/Y579/12) and I have not been able to locate a copy of the report elsewhere.

56 PRO DO35/940/Y600/146, Notes prepared by Sir Frank Stockdale on Soil Conservation in America, sent to the High Commissioner's Office, South Africa, 7 February 1938.

57 Scoones, 'Politics, Polemics and Pasture', p. 39.

58 PRO CO323/1619/1, Distribution of Journals issued by Imperial Agricultural Bureau, November 1938.

59 See for example PRO CO323/1621 & DO 35/930/Y526/7 on the 1938 Conference of the Colonial Directors of Agriculture, 1938.

60 The first SARCCUS meeting was held from 20 - 23 August 1952 in Pretoria. The Director of Agriculture, J.F.M. King and Collett represented the Basutoland government, LNA 361.

4.6. The ‘Cattle Complex’ and overgrazing

One of the ideas that was shared through-out the region was that Africans had uneconomic socio-religious attachments to cattle and managed their herds to ensure maximum herd size rather than maximum output. This belief has proved to be especially robust, despite numerous attempts to disprove its validity, and can still be found in many policy documents on the post-colonial African livestock sector.

Perhaps part of the reason the belief has proved to be so robust is that it based its validity on the existence of widely recognised pre-colonial institutions. In many southern and East African pre-colonial societies political power was based on the ability to accumulate cattle. Once herds had been built up cattle could be loaned out under systems like the Basotho’s mafisa arrangements in order to attract new followers to a particular patron or political leader.⁶¹ Associated with this political and material significance was a symbolic significance.⁶²

Observations of this pre-colonial phenomena fed directly into the idea of a ‘cattle complex’ amongst African livestock owners.⁶³ An influential 1926 article by Melville Herskovits was the first to introduce the idea of a ‘cattle complex’.⁶⁴ Herskovits used the term complex in the sense of a unifying set of cultural traits in a given area but the physiological undertones of the term complex (in the sense of an obsession) soon attached themselves to the phrase.⁶⁵ The label ‘cattle complex’ was subsequently used by both anthropologists and colonial administrators to describe African attitudes to livestock.⁶⁶ Colonial rangeland experts used these ideas as a way of explaining high

61 On the political importance of mafisa arrangements in 19th century Lesotho see Sanders, P.B. ‘Sekonyela and Moshweshwe: Failure and Success in the Aftermath of the Difaqane’, *Journal of African History*, 10, 1969, pp. 439-455 and Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom*, p. 34.

62 See Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, chapter 5 for a discussion of the relationship between symbolic and material significance of cattle amongst the Tshidi and how this altered with the arrival of colonialism and capitalism.

63 Parsons and Palmer, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

64 Herskovits, M. J. ‘The Cattle Complex in East Africa’, *American Anthropologist*, 28, 1926, pp. 230-272, 361-388, 494-528, 633-664.

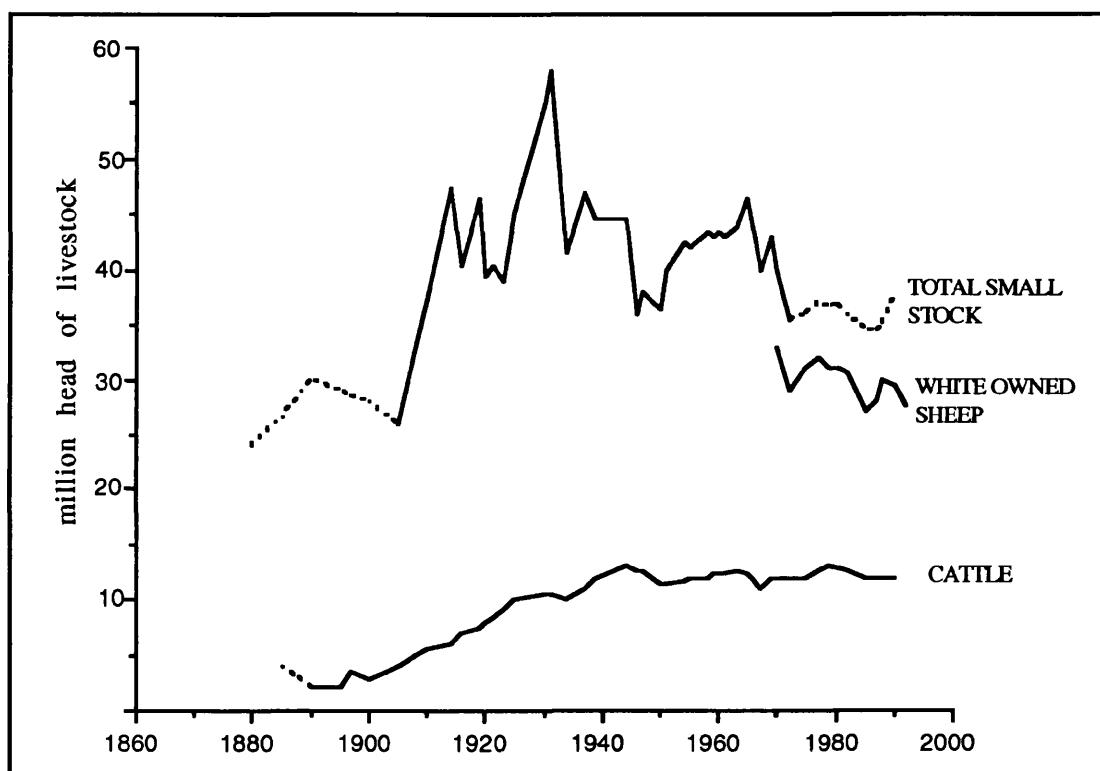
65 Mair, L. ‘Correspondence: The Cattle Complex’, *Man*, (n.s.) 20, 1985, p. 743

66 For example Vernon Sheddick (using the term as Herskovits intended) recorded that ‘the people of Basutoland are sometimes regarded as being within the “cattle complex” cultural area of Africa’; Sheddick, V. *The Southern Sotho*, (International African Institute, Ethnographic Survey of Africa, Southern Africa, Part II, London, 1953), p.21. The existence of a ‘cattle complex’ was also used by some Africans to argue against colonial de-stocking measures: in an article on the Witzieshoek uprising in November 1950 the Sesotho/English newspaper *Mochochono* (9 December 1950) argued that ‘the Bantu through-out Southern Africa have cattle complex founded on hundreds of years of a closely integrated pastoral economy, in which cattle held a paramount place’.

levels of overgrazing. Africans had uneconomic attitudes towards cattle and their prime concern was to have as many animals as possible.

Through-out Africa colonial rangeland experts encountered livestock densities that appeared to be in excess of their calculations of carrying capacity. In the late 19th and early 20th century rinderpest and East Coast fever had decimated African livestock population but during the 1910s and 1920s they tended to rise rapidly, as Figure 4.4 and Table 4.1 indicate for South Africa and southern Zimbabwe respectively.

Figure 4.4 Cattle and small-stock numbers in South Africa.⁶⁷



⁶⁷ Based on Beinart, 'Environmental Destruction', Figure 8.1. Note on original graph: The figure must be seen as representing approximate stock numbers. It attempts to include all the stock in South Africa, whether owned by black or white. The original figures in various censuses and agricultural censuses are somewhat suspect and numbers are especially weak since the 1970s as statistics for the black homelands are decreasingly reported in the national figures. For example there has probably been a significant increase in goat numbers in the homelands which is not fully reflected in available figures. An attempt has been made to present total figures rather than to segregate out those for whites only, for three reasons [the paper is primarily concerned with environmental change on white farms]. First, at least till the 1950s, many of the stock on white-owned farms belonged to black tenants and workers. Second, totals also allow for local boundary changes: the reserve or homeland areas have approximately doubled in size since the early twentieth century and the white owned farmlands have declined in extent. Third, environmental impacts, while they can be localised, often spill over political boundaries.

Table 4.1 Cattle population change in southern Zimbabwe⁶⁸

pre-1896	Before the rinderpest pandemic of 1896, cattle populations in the area were probably high, competing with extensive wildlife populations. Records indicate that Ndebele herders were utilising much of the area as extensive grazing grounds for large herds.
1896	Rinderpest devastated cattle populations across the country, reducing populations to a fraction of their previous size. The removal of power from the Ndebele state and the seizure of cattle by settlers also reduced cattle populations in the area.
1896-1945	This period showed a marked recovery of cattle populations to densities of 0.23-0.3 animals/ha in the study areas. Average growth rates between 1923 and 1935 ranged from 5-20% per annum in different areas. The establishment of dipping facilities from the early 1920s also reduced disease related mortalities.
1945-1960	The destocking policy, instituted by the colonial government in all the study areas, saw a major reduction in cattle populations. In some areas densities were reduced to 0.15 animals/ha, little more than the population density recorded in the early 1920s.
1961-1975	The abandonment of destocking allowed populations to recover again. The high rainfall levels of the 1970s provided plentiful fodder, and cattle populations recovered to levels not seen since the 1930s. In some areas populations increased even more. Average growth rates between 1961 and 1978 were 3-7% per annum in different study areas.

Initially estimates of carry capacities were often based on US experience but as the regional research establishment developed more calculations were generated locally. Through-out southern and East Africa rangeland experts calculated that both African and white livestock owners had far too many cattle. While estimates of carrying capacity obviously varied with soil fertility and rainfall the basic method of calculation was universal. Areas of rangeland were fenced off and different stocking rates and different management strategies (especially rotation) were attempted. The presence of sub-climax indicator species was taken as evidence of a stocking rate in excess of the carrying capacity which could, therefore, be arrived at through a process of trial and error.

4.7. Range science and management in Lesotho

Following the lead of other southern and East African territories the Basutoland authorities were keen to establish their own pasture research station where experiments to establish the country's carrying capacity and suitable management strategies could be

⁶⁸ Based on Table 4.1 in Scoones, I. 'Why Are There So Many Animals: Cattle Population Dynamics in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe' in Behnke, Scoones, and Kerven, *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium*, pp. 62-76.

determined. In early 1931 they invited Russell Thornton to visit the country and advise them on the establishment of a pasture research station.

4.7.1. Thornton's Report on Pastoral and Agricultural Conditions in Basutoland

As we saw in chapter 2 and 3 Thornton's association with range management in Lesotho was to continue long after this initial trip and he proved to be extremely influential character in setting the agenda for pasture control in the country. Three years after his initial visit Thornton became the Director of Agriculture in the Basutoland administration. His responsibilities also extended to the other two High Commission Territories via his role as the Agricultural Adviser to the High Commissioner. Between 1934 and his retirement 1942 he presided over a period of rapid expansion in all three Departments from admittedly exceedingly humble beginnings.

Thornton had studied agriculture at Guelph, Canada, before he returned to his native South Africa and became, in 1911, the first principal of the Grootfontein School of Agriculture. After a spell as Chief of the Division of Field and Animal Husbandry in the Department of Agriculture, where he was primarily responsible for promoting the settler beef industry, he moved, in 1929, to the Native Affairs Department.⁶⁹ His primary personal interest was in livestock, especially cattle and horses,⁷⁰ but he also played an important role in developing the technique of building contour banks as a attempt to controlling storm water run-off and preventing sheet erosion.⁷¹ Thornton was, in short, a central character in the development of ideas about environmental decline in both the reserves and on the 'white' farms of South Africa, as well as in the three High Commission Territories.⁷²

The report that Thornton wrote in 1931 after visiting the mountain areas of Lesotho went far beyond his brief of investigating the feasibility of establishing a pasture

69 Anon. 'Farming Personalities: Mr R.W. Thornton', *Farmers Weekly*, 27 May 1936, p. 839.

70 See Thornton, R. W. and Leckie, W. G. *The African and his Livestock* (African Welfare Series, Cape Town, 1944); and Thornton, R. W. *The Basuto Pony*, (Morija, 1938). Thornton vehemently disliked goats, see page 201.

71 Thornton, R. W. 'Anti-erosion measures and reclamation of eroded land', *Proceedings of the South African Society of Civil Engineers*, 40, 1942, pp. 79-104.

72 See Rich, P. 'The Origins of Apartheid Ideology: the case of Ernest Stubbs and the Transvaal Native Administration, c. 1902-1932' *African Affairs*, 79, 315, 1980, pp. 171 - 194; Milton, S. 'The Apocalypse Cow: Russell Thornton and State Policy towards African Cattle Husbandry in the Union of South Africa, 1929-39', unpublished paper presented to African History Seminar, School of Oriental and African Studies, 30 November 1994; Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development'; Beinart, 'Introduction: the politics of colonial conservation'.

research station. His basic ecological arguments have been repeated, with some modifications, in just about every report on Lesotho's rangelands right through to the present-day. The first published source to use the same arguments, Staples and Hudson's 1938 *Ecological Survey*,⁷³ has frequently been cited in literature on Lesotho's rangelands but the link back to Thornton in 1931 is not recognised.⁷⁴

Thornton's basic argument was that some of the best sheep pasture in southern Africa was being senselessly destroyed by 'wanton vandalism'. He believed that high stocking rates were leading to the area's climax community of 'wonderful rooigras' (dominated by *Themeda triandra*) being overgrazed. This was allowing the invasion by the inedible plant succession of 'bitter karoo bush' (*Chrysocoma tenuifolia*) and a significant decrease in the nutritional value of the pasture. Furthermore the 'bitter karoo bush' did not provide good ground coverage and was therefore accelerating the process of soil erosion.⁷⁵

Thornton's understanding of the ecology of the mountain rangelands of Lesotho was clearly based on Clementsian ideas about climax communities and plant succession. He described the climax community of the mountain zone as being *rooigras*, a sweetveld recognised as being one of the most productive in southern Africa. This climax was, however, subject to an increased domestic livestock population; a factor external to the area's climax biome. Overgrazing was pushing the vegetation back down its succession and the 'bitter karoo bush' represented a lower seres.

The sub-climax seres was less productive than the climax and this further reduced the carrying capacity of the country. Thornton estimated that a shift in vegetation away from *rooigras* towards 'bitter karoo bush' represented a loss of something in the order of 50,000 acres of grazing land. The implications, Thornton argued, were grave and something needed to be done quickly if the pastures were not to deteriorate further; 'a pasture station alone will not save the country'. The theory of plant succession also suggested the solution that the Basutoland authorities should enact:

73 Staples, R.R. and Hudson, W.K. *An Ecological Survey of the Mountain Areas of Basutoland* (Letchworth, 1938).

74 See for example Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1949, p. 27-33; Sheddick, *Land Tenure in Basutoland*, p. 48; Smit, *Lesotho*, p. 6-9; FAO and World Bank, *Draft Report of the Lesotho First Phase Mountain Development Project Preparation Mission* (Report No. 11/75, LES 1, Rome, 1975), p. 5-6; Swallow, Brokken, Motsamai, Sopeng and Storey, *Livestock Development and Range Utilisation*, p. 20.

75 LNA 212, Thornton, R.W., Report on Pastoral and Agricultural Conditions in Basutoland, n.d. [c. July 1931].

If the area affected is protected from stock, the plant succession will be reversed and the natural grasses of the area, when allowed to seed and reproduce themselves, will oust this intruder.⁷⁶

Thornton's assessments of the ecological changes taking place on the mountains were based solely on observations made on a trek from Maseru to the Maletsunyane Falls. His understanding of the ecology was, therefore, based mainly on an application of models of vegetation constructed elsewhere. The expansion of the Karoo was represented by conversions of *rooigras* sweetvelds into woodier Karoo type vegetation. When Thornton observed patches of Karoo type vegetation and *rooigras* species intermingled in Lesotho's mountain environment the obvious explanation was that the *rooigras* species were the climax and Karoo type vegetation represented a sub-climax (invader) seres.⁷⁷

4.7.2. Staples and Hudson's *Ecological Survey*

Staples and Hudson ecological survey, begun in 1936, involved significantly more fieldwork and the collection of a much greater quantity of data. Between October 1936 and January 1937 Staples, at that time the Botanist to the Tanganyika administration,⁷⁸ and W.K. Hudson, of the Basutoland Public Works Department, travelled the bridle-paths of the mountain area on horseback along with a party of six (unnamed) Basotho assistants, a police guide and 13 pack horses. Hudson's primary role was both to act as a surveyor for the ecological survey and to draw up a separate report on the state of the mountain bridle-paths.⁷⁹ It is safe to assume that Staples was primarily responsible for the ecological findings in the final report.

Staples and his assistants collected over three hundred different botanical specimens and mapped out the incidence of different communities of vegetation. Like Thornton,

76 LNA 212, Thornton, R.W., Report on Pastoral and Agricultural Conditions in Basutoland, n.d. [c. July 1931].

77 The term invader species, and Thornton's reference to an 'intruder', should not imply that the climax community was altering because of internal ecological dynamics: it should be remembered that the basis of Clements's theory was that climax communities could only be altered by external influences, such as the impact of domestic livestock. The term 'invader' refers to the fact that under a succession model certain species (invaders) would move onto a piece of land vegetated only by pioneer species. Over time invader species would, in turn, be replaced by species of the climax community.

78 After studying agriculture at Cambridge University, Staples became, in 1922, a botanist in the South African Department of Agriculture. In 1929 he moved to Tanganyika, first as an Agricultural Economist, then a Research Officer on pastures and finally as Botanist. Later on he transferred to Southern Rhodesia as the Chief Pasture Officer; Kirk Greene, *A Biographical Dictionary of the British Colonial Service*.

79 Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 2.

Staples identified the sweetveld *rooigras* species as forming one distinct climax community. He also, however, identified a second climax community, this time consisting of sourveld species such as *Festuca caprina*. In line with Clementsian ecology Staples argued that these variations in vegetation were primarily due to climatic variability caused by aspect and relief. Staples did admit that edaphic variability, especially the transition from basalt to sandstone, could affect the frequency of dominant species within the two climax communities but the effect was not marked enough to produce a shift from one climax to another.

Staples identified these two separate climaxes using Sesotho terminology. The sweetveld *rooigrass* communities he named *seboku*, the Sesotho name for the species *Themeda triandra*. This was the dominant climax community in the mountain zone, but also the one that had suffered most from overgrazing or conversion into farm land. It was found up to an altitude of 7,500 feet on slopes with a southerly aspect and high as 9,000 feet on slopes with a northerly aspect.

On the best soils *seboku* grasses were dominated by a rich sward of *Themeda triandra* but on poorer soils other species could be important. Thinner stony soils with a northerly aspect often had stands of *mohlololo* thatching grass (sp. *Hyparrhenia hirta*) while on ‘immature’ soils the biotic community could include significant numbers of seral species (i.e. lower down the succession), such as the unpalatable *Aristida Braedii*. Staples described the rich swards of *Themeda triandra* growing on the rich black loamy soils of the mountain basalt as ‘some of the finest, if not the best, sheep pasture in South Africa’.⁸⁰ The similarity between this statement and one from Thornton’s 1931 report suggest that Staples was highly influenced by the earlier work.⁸¹

The second climax community, Staples labelled as *letsiri*, the Sesotho word used to describe the two dominant species *Festuca caprina* and *Festuca rubra*. This sourveld climax community was to be found above 7,000 feet on slopes with a southerly aspect and above 9,000 feet on slopes with a northerly aspect. Though grasses in this community were generally less palatable than the *seboku* grasses they did provide adequate pasture during the summer months.

80 Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 16.

81 LNA 212, Thornton, R.W., Report on Pastoral and Agricultural Conditions in Basutoland, n.d. [c. July 1931]. Thornton described Lesotho’s mountain *Themeda triandra* stands as ‘the best sheep pasture in South Africa’.

Both of these climax communities had suffered from overgrazing. Staples agreed with Thornton's assessment that the major result of overgrazing was the increase in the area occupied by 'bitter karoo bush' (*Chrysocoma tenuifolia*). Again Staples labelled the vegetation according to its Sesotho name, sehalahala (meaning simply small bush). Sehalahala was to be found mainly on slopes with a northern aspect at altitudes between 7,000 and 9,500 feet. In some areas it formed a more or less pure stand, whilst in others it was mixed with seboku or letsi species. It was found to be more prevalent on the drier southern and central mountain ranges than in the wetter northern regions.

As sehalahala was not a naturally occurring seral species in Lesotho, coming from the more arid mixed grassland Karoo bush areas of the Cape Province, Staples did not consider it a sub-climax but rather a dis-climax. Continuous close grazing reduced competition from grass species and allowed the unpalatable sehalahala to establish itself. Furthermore a decrease in the incidence of fire, itself related to an increase in grazing (resulting in less flammable biomass), also favoured sehalahala. Staples argued that reducing grazing pressure and the regular burning of areas covered by sehalahala would rapidly lead to the re-establishment of seboku or letsi climax communities. He recommended that the nascent experimental programme begun in 1933 be expanded as soon as possible to examine the stocking rates and burning regimes that would allow the climax to be re-established (the experimental programme is examined in more detail in chapter 8).

While Staples and his assistants carried out a much more detailed survey than Thornton in 1931 it should be recognised that their basic research methodology was similar. Staples and Hudson noted that their job of mapping the vegetation pattern was made easier by the fact that 'almost at the start of the fieldwork ... it became apparent that, from the pasture viewpoint, there were three main types of vegetation only'.⁸² From then on their task became simply to allocate every area to one of the three categories and map the distribution. This was done simply by observation.

While some efforts were made to investigate vegetation changes over time (mainly questioning Basotho informants) the data simply did not exist for Staples to generate the model of ecological change which he produced. This model was principally the result of placing observations from the field into a framework provided by both Clementsian ecological theory and pre-existing southern African concerns over an expanding Karoo. Staples 'reading' of the mountain environment was structured by the

82 Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 12.

accepted ecological theories of the time. Both Staples and Thornton took a spatial pattern of vegetation, a mix of three veld types, and ‘read’ a process (pasture degradation) from the pattern.

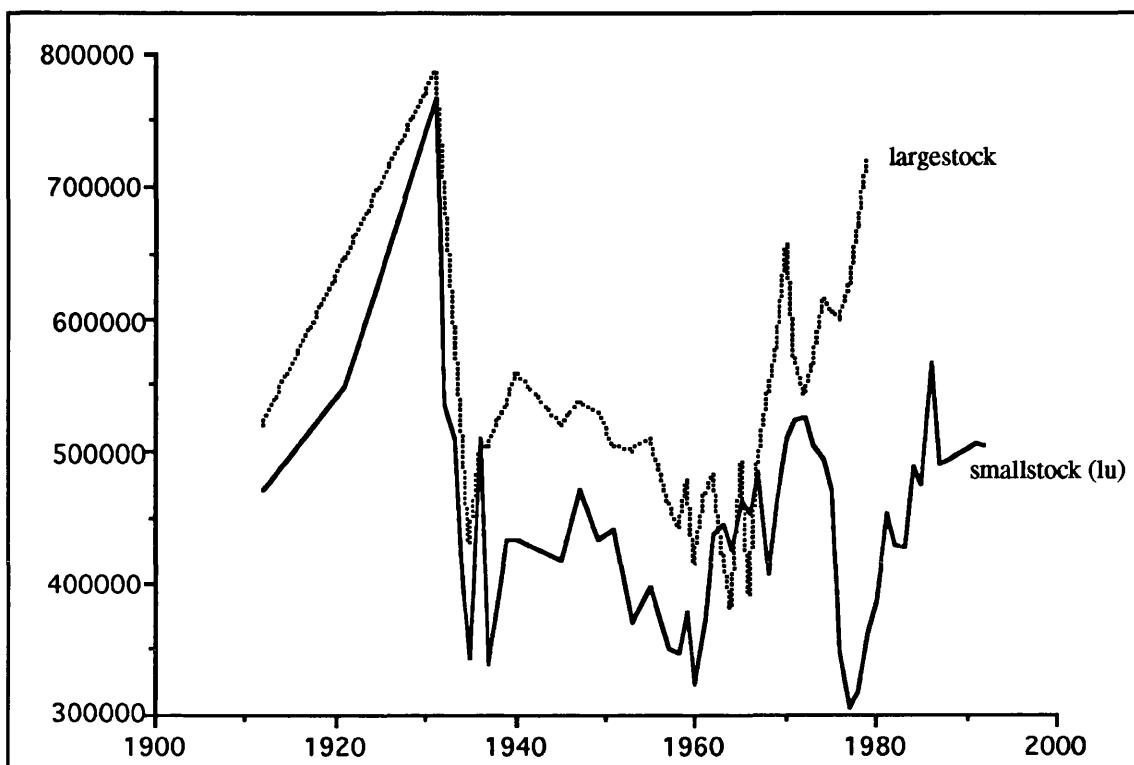
In the past two to three decades range ecology has shifted away from Clementsian ideas quite dramatically. These new approaches of African rangelands could offer significantly different ‘readings’ of Lesotho’s mountain environment. In chapter 5 I will try to explore some of the implications of these different ‘readings’ of the environment and suggest that they indicate the colonial fears about one-way pasture deterioration may have been misguided.

4.7.3. Carrying capacity and livestock populations

Both Thornton and Staples concluded that the only way of restoring the climax community was to reduce the grazing pressure. When Thornton visited Lesotho in 1931 the livestock population of the area was at a peak. As in South Africa the 1920s had been a period of growing smallstock populations in response to generally good rainfall and high prices for wool and mohair. The early 1930s saw a precipitous decline in the livestock population with a succession of drought years and a huge fall in the price of mohair and wool. Through-out the rest of the colonial period livestock populations remained at levels significantly lower than those achieved in the late 1920s. Smallstock figures have never again approached those high levels and largestock figures have only climbed back towards that level in recent years.

In 1931 Thornton did not suggest a specific livestock population for the country’s carrying capacity. He calculated that the country’s average stocking rate was something in the order of four and a half acres per livestock unit and that this was ‘far more than the country can carry’. He recommended that the smallstock should be reduced by about 50 per cent.⁸³ This suggests he was thinking of a carrying capacity somewhere in the region of 7 or 8 acres per livestock unit.

83 LNA 212, Thornton, R.W., Report on Pastoral and Agricultural Conditions in Basutoland, n.d. [c. July 1931].

Figure 4.5 Livestock populations in Lesotho, 1912-1992⁸⁴

In their 1938 *Ecological Survey* Staples and Hudson gave some more precise figures for suggested carry capacities on different types of grasslands. They admitted, given the total lack of experimental data, that these figures were no more than estimates. On rangelands above 8,500 feet (where pastures were mainly letsi) they recommended 400 smallstock units per sq. mile, between 6,500 and 8,500 feet (where pastures were mainly seboku) they recommended 500 smallstock units per sq. mile and below 6,500 feet (dominated by seral communities of the seboku climax) they recommended 300 smallstock units per sq. mile. These carry capacities convert to 8.0 acres per livestock unit above 8,500 feet, 6.4 acres per livestock unit between 6,500 and 8,500 feet and 10.7 acres per livestock unit below 6,500 feet.⁸⁵ It is unclear how they arrived at these figures, although my assumption is that they were probably derived from data from research plots in other colonial territories.

84 Figures derived from a variety of official sources. As in Figure 4.4 the numbers needed to be treated with extreme caution. Many statistics were generated by adding estimated birth rates and imports and subtracting death rates and exports from previous years figures. As livestock censuses were sometimes not carried out for 5 or 6 years there was obviously considerable scope for error to compound upon error. Note that (unlike in Figure 4.4) I have given the smallstock population in livestock units using the calculation of five heads of smallstock to one livestock unit.

85 Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 26.

These figures give carrying capacity figures more or less in line with those estimated by Thornton in 1931. Given the huge decrease in both small and large stock populations in the first half of the 1930s (see Figure 4.5) Staples and Hudson calculated that the territory's total livestock population could actually increase by 1,034,000 head of smallstock from its 1936 figure of 4,290,000 smallstock units without causing overgrazing, so long as it was properly distributed between the different climax communities at the correct stocking rates. Furthermore if deferred and rotational grazing systems were introduced the livestock population could increase even further, by 2,365,000 smallstock units.⁸⁶

Staples and Hudson recommended a series of experimental plots be set-up to investigate the effects of different grazing and burning regimes on the carrying capacity and on sehalahala. These plans were never put into action, but, as I show in chapter 8, the experimental programme begun at Thaba Putsoa and Thaba Tsoeu in 1933 was later expanded in an attempt to collect data on carrying capacity.

The research programme carried out at Thaba Putsoa between 1945 and 1947 indicated that the correct carrying capacity for seboku grasslands at 8,500 feet was somewhere in the region of 1 livestock unit per 3 acres if the area was only grazed in the summer months (see Table 8.1). A rotational grazing experiment at Thaba Tsoeu also on seboku grassland had originally been stocked at a rate of one livestock unit per 10 acres, but this was subsequently reduced to one livestock unit per 5 acres when it was found that the pasture was becoming 'rank' (clogged up with dead and rotting vegetation).⁸⁷

During the 1940s and early 50s the figure of one livestock unit per 8 acres was used as rule of thumb measurement of carrying capacity. At this stocking rate, the Department of Agriculture argued, sehalahala would be replaced by the climax community. Once this had occurred the carrying capacity could be increased to approximately one livestock unit per 6 acres, or even higher if grazing was rotated.⁸⁸ There were, however, other calculations made during this period which produced starkly different figures.

The most notable of these were the figures given by Pole Evans after his visit to investigate the Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek closure schemes in February 1950. Unlike Staples and Thornton, Pole Evans did not admire Lesotho's mountain Themeda triandra pastures. He argued that even where there was the short dense sward of

86 Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 27.

87 See page 213.

88 LNA 2476/II, P.A.O. Bowmaker's Comments on I.B. Pole Evans Report, May 1950.

Themeda triandra it was an unproductive species and easily damaged by heavy grazing. As it was susceptible to invasion by sehalahala it had to be considered 'the weakest spot in the mountain pasture'. In line with this belief Pole Evans recommended an extremely light grazing regime of 1 livestock unit per 25 acres.⁸⁹

Not surprisingly the Basutoland Department of Agriculture dismissed Pole Evans recommendations. Bowmaker commented:

A stocking rate of 25 acres to a beast means that the Territory can only carry say 100,000 head of large stock and 700,000 head of smallstock, as compared with the present 580,000 large and 2,170,000 smallstock. Such a reduction is an absolutely unpractical [sic.] suggestion, and is unnecessary in view of our experimental results.... My impression of Dr Pole Evans, which is backed up by his report, is that he is so much a lover of nature and pure botanist that he does not really grasp the practical side of getting things put right.⁹⁰

These hugely different estimates are a good example of how different objectives need to be taken into account in order to understand the concept of a carrying capacity. As Figure 4.1 indicates the concept of carrying capacity as usually used in range science does not represent an absolute limit on the number animals (the ecological carrying capacity). Thornton, Staples and Bowmaker all stressed that the carrying capacity they advocated was designed to maximise output of beef, wool and mohair; in his 1931 report Thornton argued that a 50 percent decrease in the smallstock population would result in a five fold increase in output of wool and mohair.⁹¹ Pole Evans, on the other hand, was primarily interested in maintaining as great a diversity of grass species as possible in Lesotho's mountain areas.

Pole Evans's primary interest was in the native vegetation of southern Africa; he consistently argued that a full understanding of the country's vegetation, especially the grass species, was essential to agricultural development. His lobbying led to the establishment, in 1918, of a Botanical Survey of South Africa and the setting aside of various botanical reserves in vegetatively representative parts of the country.⁹² In 1950 Pole Evans was excited to find a number of species thriving in Lesotho's grasslands

89 LNA 2476/II, Pole Evans, I., Visit to Basutoland in February, 1950, 23 March 1950.

90 LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker's Comments on Pole Evans Report, May 1950. J.C. Ross, the Chief of the Division of Soil and Veld Conservation in the Union of Agriculture, had made a similar comment a few years previously when discussing the Department's research programme under Pole Evans: 'A good deal of criticism was directed at these [research] stations in the ground that their policy was to exalt grass for its own sake, without reference to the practical issues of farming'; J.C. Ross to L. Esselen, 18 September 1942, A6.14, J.C. Smuts Papers, University of Cape Town.

91 LNA 212, Thornton, R.W., Report on Pastoral and Agricultural Conditions in Basutoland, n.d. [c. July 1931].

92 Carruthers, 'The Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary'. For details on Pole Evans career see also Scoones 'Politics, Polemics and Pastures'; and Gunn, M.D. 'Illytd Buller Pole Evans (1879-1968)', *Bothalia*, 10, 1968, pp. 131-5.

not found in abundance elsewhere. He recommended that a pasture research officer be appointed to fully investigate the grasses of the area and to carry out trials with exotics. He felt that these species could only be fully investigated in an environment with an extremely light stocking rate, or better still in a totally de-stocked area.

4.8. Conclusion

It is clear from Pole Evans report that he saw domestic livestock as an external factor that could only serve to disrupt the area's natural climax community. This view was shared by just about every range and soil erosion expert who commented on the area. This view was reinforced by a belief that it had only recently been occupied by African agro-pastoralists.

Staples and Hudson's *Ecological Survey* reported that the first agro-pastoralists to settle in the mountain areas of Lesotho were a group of 'Zulus of the Matooane tribe' in the early nineteenth century. They had left the area during 'the wars of Chaka's time' and from then until the 1880s the area was 'occupied solely by the Bushman and the game on which they preyed'.⁹³ It was only with the arrival of the Batloka⁹⁴ that domestic livestock were re-introduced into the area. Increasing population in the lowlands, especially with the influx of people from the Free State in the aftermath of the South African 1912 Land Act, had resulted in the internal migration of people to the mountain valleys and the rapid increase in the livestock populations of the mountain pastures. This history of occupation was accepted as a matter of course by the Basutoland administration and they believed that it largely accounted for the recent environmental degradation.

Phillips's and Clements's arguments that hunter-gatherers could be considered part of a biome but agro-pastoralists were not was reflected in the colonial attitudes expressed towards the Basotho population of the mountain zone. They were recent arrivals, disrupters and destroyers.⁹⁵ Despite Staples and Hudson's use of Sesotho terminology for rangeland types the general assumption was that the Basotho had few pre-existing

⁹³ Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 19. This section of the report was based on information from R.C. Germond. The archaeologist Mitchell agrees that agropastoralist settlement of the highlands was a nineteenth century phenomenon, Mitchell, P. J. 'Archaeological research in Lesotho: a review of 120 years', *African Archaeological Review*, 10, 1992, pp 3-34, p. 27.

⁹⁴ See chapter 9.

⁹⁵ This argument seemed to mesh with more general ideas about the recent arrival of 'Bantu-speakers' in southern Africa. In June 1938 the Resident Commissioner, Sturrock commented: 'The Bantu as an agricultural race are comparatively inexperienced and the Native methods of cultivation and pasture management are often destructive'; DO35/940/Y600/146, Report on Soil Erosion submitted by Resident Commissioner, Basutoland, 21 June 1938.

systems for managing grazing systems. Indeed Hugh Ashton, who wrote a standard colonial ethnography on the Basotho, argued they had little interest in the country's rangelands:

Though they may notice that the pastures are being destroyed through over-grazing and soil erosion, they do nothing to remedy this condition and stubbornly resist Government proposals for reduction of stock or temporary closure of affected areas. They have responded slowly, suspiciously and apathetically to the various experiments which are being conducted by the Government and to efforts being made to introduce better methods.⁹⁶

Social Darwinism was hugely influential in creating Clementsian ecology, which in turn regulated the way in which colonial range experts 'read' the African environment.

Social Darwinism also taught, however, that the solution to the environmental deterioration they perceived could only be found through the 'trusteeship' of European colonialism.

Although I have attached great significance to the intellectual framework used by range specialists in southern Africa, an analysis that attempted to explain livestock development policies in Lesotho simply via the history of ideas would be very flawed. Policy arose in response to specific political events, and the form policy took was largely due to the nature of the colonial state in Lesotho. These two issues will be addressed in the chapters 6 and 7, but first I examine the evidence for environmental change in the mountain zone during the colonial era.

96 Ashton, *The Basuto*, p.139.

5. Environmental Change in the Mountain Zone

In the chapters 1 and 4, I suggested that recent shifts in range ecology have led a number of ecologists to reject the view that African grasslands have undergone a unilinear process of environmental decline. In the following chapter I examine some of these ideas in more detail and suggest some of the ways that they could be used to suggest an alternative analysis of the mountain environment. I have not, however, drawn any firm conclusions about environmental change in the mountain areas of Lesotho in the period in question. This is because the data simply does not exist to indicate any significant trends in the period in question, at least not in a form usable to someone trained in the social sciences and the humanities. My purpose here is essentially to show how the belief that the mountain grasslands were being overgrazed was based more on theory than on empirical evidence. The facts that colonial officials, and people such as Pole Evans, assembled to support their claim that the mountain environment was being degraded could be re-assembled to provide a different ‘reading’ of the environment.

5.1. Indicator species

The primary fact used to determine whether the mountain grazing areas were being degraded was the presence of indicator species in the veld. The most important indicator species was Chrysocoma tenuifolia (also known as ‘bitter Karoo bush’ and sehalahala) but other were mentioned as well. These species were thought to be indicative of a sub-climax seres for Lesotho’s mountain environment and, therefore, an indicator that over-grazing was taking place. The presence of indicator species was always described as a recent occurrence and the outcome of increasing livestock populations during the colonial period.

There is some evidence to suggest, however, that these indicator species had been present prior to the advent of colonialism and the movement of Basotho and their livestock into the mountain zone. Chrysocoma tenuifolia was always described as a recent arrival in the mountain zone. The evidence for its recent arrival was based on oral testimony from Basotho informants. In 1932, for example, Chief Tebesi responded to a question from Sturrock about ‘bitter Karoo bush’ by reporting that they ‘began to see it in the days of Leretholi’ (1891-1905).¹ Staples and Hudson reported that oral

¹ LNA 212, Notes of an interview with representatives of the Paramount Chief, 24 February 1932.

informants indicated that the species had first been seen around the turn of the century and had become widespread during the 1920s.²

There is, however, evidence that Chrysocoma tenuifolia as present prior even to the advent of the British Protectorate in Lesotho. In 1840 Thomas Arbousset, of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, accompanied Moshoeshoe and a group of his followers on a trek from Thaba-Bosiu to the headwaters of the Malibamatso River (in the highland area of present day Butha-Buthe District). In the foothills of the Maluti, Arbousset noted:

Here goats and sheep can nibble at a host of little bushes or fragrant plants, rather than the tall bitter and scarcely nourishing kind of grass.... The soil is fertile everywhere and is much blacker here than in the lowland plain, because of the shrubs I have just mentioned.³

In his annotations to Arbousset's text David Ambrose has interpreted this to refer to a contrast between sweetveld (seboku) grasses in the foothills and sourveld pastures in the northern lowlands. According to Staples and Hudson, however, the dominant species in Lesotho's seboku pastures was the grass Themeda triandra and there were few non-grasses in the vegetational type. It is possible that Arbousset was referring to the cheche bush (Leucosidea sericea) that Staples and Hudson report in the valley areas of the foothills. They also note that areas of these bushes tended to be reserved as leboella for fuel-wood and building materials, and therefore unlikely to be grazed by sheep and goat.⁴ I would suggest that a more likely explanation is that the small bushes Arbousset mentions were Chrysocoma tenuifolia, especially as the Sesotho name for the species is sehalahala, meaning 'little bush'.

More precise reports of the widespread presence of Chrysocoma tenuifolia date from 1893. The Colonial *Annual Report* for the year mentions the intrusion of 'bitter Karoo bush' and burrweed into the country's pastures as a problem.⁵ Presumably if the amount of Chrysocoma tenuifolia and burrweed growing in the country was sufficient for it to be seen as a problem it was already fairly widespread.

Other species used by Staples and Hudson as indicators of pasture degradation also appear to have had a longer history. They reported that a species of ragwort poisonous to horses (Senecio spp.) had invaded the seboku pastures during the past quarter of a

² Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 28.

³ Arbousset, T. *Missionary excursion into the Blue Mountains : being an account of King Moshoeshoe's expedition from Thaba-Bosiu to the sources of the Malibamatso River in the year 1840*, edited and translated by Ambrose, D. and Brutsch, A. (Morija, 1991), p. 58.

⁴ See also Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, p. 124.

⁵ Quoted by Singh, 'Geological, Historical and Present-Day Erosion', p. 15.

century. Though it was a naturally occurring species in the *seboku* grasslands it was very rare in the past and had increased rapidly under heavy grazing pressure. Archaeological evidence, however, suggests that the prevalence of the species may not have been related to increased grazing by domestic livestock: pollen from *Senecio* spp. is dominant in assemblages of charcoal deposits dated to the Last Glacial Maximum (15-20,000 cl.yr BP).⁶

5.2. Longer-term anthropogenic impacts

The presence of these species from periods prior to the advent of British colonialism could indicate that a negative impact of humans on the mountain environment had a much longer history. Most colonial officials assumed that the pre-colonial San population of the mountain zone had no or little impact on the environment. This belief reflected the arguments of ecologists such as Clement and Philips who saw agro-pastoralists but not hunter-gatherers as being able to alter (i.e. destroy) their environment. Mike Meadows has argued, however, that San hunter-gatherers often set fire to the mountain slopes to encourage new grass growth to attract wildlife as well as to aid in hunting.⁷ Fire was an ecological factor that the colonial officials tended to ignore, yet recent research as indicated that both natural and anthropogenic fire has played a significant role in the formation of southern African mountain eco-systems.⁸

Most reports on the ecology of *Chrysocoma tenuifolia* during the colonial era indicated that burning of the veld decreased its prevalence. This was reported by Chief Tebesi in 1932⁹ and Staples in Hudson in 1938.¹⁰ Despite the possibility that annual burning led to an increase in sweetveld grasses at the expense of *Chrysocoma tenuifolia* (and other shrubs and trees) the colonial authorities were more or less consistently opposed to veld burning. Under the Laws of Lerotholi grass burning was outlawed and any area burned was supposed to be declared as *leboella* for 12 months.¹¹ An exception was made, however, for burning with the aim of destroying *Chrysocoma tenuifolia*.¹² Increased

6 Mitchell, P. 'Revisiting the Robberg: new results and a revision of old ideas at Sehonghong Rock Shelter, Lesotho', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, L, 161, 1995, pp. 28-38, p. 35; cl.yr BP is short for calibrated years before present.

7 Meadows, M. 'Vegetational Changes in the Afro-Montane Regions of Southern Africa' paper presented to seminar in Department of Botany, University of Cambridge, 1993, quoted by Singh, 'Geological, Historical and Present-Day Erosion', p. 164.

8 Meadows, M. and Linder, H.P. 'A Palaeocological Perspective on the Origin of the Afromontane Grasslands', *Journal of Biogeography*, 20, 1993, pp. 345-355.

9 LNA 212, Notes of an interview with representatives of the Paramount Chief, 24 February 1932.

10 Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 30.

11 Rule 32, Part II, Laws of Lerotholi, quoted by Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs*, p. 74

12 Rule 32 (2a), Part II, Laws of Lerotholi, in Basutoland, *Laws of Basutoland*, 1960 (Cape Town,

levels of grazing probably had a negative impact on rates of burning: closer grazing resulting in less dried bio-mass available for burning. Climate change also plays a role in the incidence of burning. Long dry spells obviously increase the risk of fire, though lightning strikes are also a significant factor in starting natural grass fires.

These factors indicate the need to take longer-term changes in the mountain environment into account. The assumption that the human impact on the mountain environment dates only from the last decades of the nineteenth century ignores the longer-term anthropogenic impact over time-scales of thousands of years. Longer-term environmental fluctuations probably also played a role: the Last Glacial Maximum corresponded with a period of cooler and drier weather across much of southern Africa, a situation which, according to Meadows and Linder, would have promoted fire and favoured grasslands.¹³ This last point suggests the need to take account of the possibility of environmental change (on a variety of time-scales) which is unrelated to humans.¹⁴

5.3. Dis-equilibrium and uncertainty

The presence of Chrysocoma tenuifolia and other indicator species was seen as important by ecologists in the colonial era because they indicated the presence of a sub- or dis-climax seres. Recent ecological explanations of African grasslands have, however, tended to reject the whole concept of climax communities and stress rather the dis-equilibrium of the grassland ecosystem:

Equilibrium models - and succession theory in particular - fail to explain some situations. Arid and semi-arid rangelands - that cover most of South Africa - display large spatial-temporal switches in herbaceous species composition and production that are not consistent with simple successional pathways. The fluctuations are associated with episodic events (such as rainfall, herbivory and fire) which themselves vary greatly in space and time.¹⁵

External 'disturbances' to the ecosystem do not just push the ecosystem back down a linear progression, rather they often deflect the ecosystem onto an entirely different trajectory. The interplay between climatic variability, grazing, fire, soil behaviour and plant behaviour, all acting along different time-scales, adds up to an extremely complex system. Different patches of vegetation in a landscape also needs to be taken into

1961), p. 14.

13 Meadows and Linder, 'A Palaecological Perspective', p.353.

14 See Tyson, P.D. and Lindsay, J.A. 'The Climate of the Last 2000 Years in Southern Africa', *The Holocene*, 2, 3, 1992, pp. 271-278. During the 'Little Ice Age' (c. 1300-1850) summer rainfall regions of southern Africa were probably drier (and cooler) than at present.

15 Mantis, M.T., Grossman, D., Hardy, M. B., O'Connor, T.G. and O'Reagain, P.J. 'Paradigm Shifts in South African Range Science, Management and Administration', *South African Journal of Science*, 85, 1989, pp. 684-687, p. 684.

account, as different vegetational patches will interact in different ways with neighbouring patches, for example through the rate of surface flow of water or sediments.¹⁶

Recent ecological research has identified drought as the primary cause of complex dynamics in semi-arid and arid African grasslands:

Severe droughts devastate plant communities and decimate animal populations. Where droughts are frequent, population fluctuations prevent plants and herbivores from developing closely coupled interactions, ecosystem development and succession are abbreviated or non-existent and ecosystems seldom reach a climatically determined equilibrium point. Uncertainty abounds.¹⁷

The very complexity of these systems makes it very difficult to determine if dis-equilibrium dynamics are acting on a particular ecosystem. Detailed analysis of the pattern of drought, the patterns of reaction of the important plant species to drought and the impact of changing vegetation on the herbivores all need to be taken into account. Research of this nature simply has not been done in the mountain environment of Lesotho, making it difficult to determine if the grassland ecosystem falls within the realm of dis-equilibrium.

Ecologists have, however, found that there is a rule-of-thumb threshold based on rainfall variability that is a good indicator of ecosystems at equilibrium or dis-equilibrium. Environments with inter-annual co-efficients of variability (CV) for precipitation of over 30 percent are thought to be at dis-equilibrium, where the system is dominated by variability rather than average conditions. They also suggest that environments with CV of less than 20 percent are at equilibrium, where animal populations will remain relatively stable and strong feedbacks will develop between herbivores and plants.¹⁸ In general the lower the total annual rainfall the higher the CV.

The rainfall records from stations in mountain zone of Lesotho indicate CV's in the region of 20 percent to 30 percent (see Table 1.1).¹⁹ These figures indicate that the mountain grasslands are neither entirely at dis-equilibrium nor at equilibrium. Under similar climatic conditions in the southern Ethiopian highlands Layne Coppock has

¹⁶ Stafford Smith, M. and Pickup, G. 'Out of Africa, Looking In: Understanding Vegetational Change' in Behnke, Scoones and Kerven, *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium*, pp. 196-226.

¹⁷ Ellis, J. 'Climate Variability and Complex Ecosystem Dynamics: Implications for Pastoral Development' in Scoones, I. (ed.) *Living with Uncertainty: New Directions in Pastoral Development in Africa*, (London, 1995), pp. 37-46, p. 38.

¹⁸ Ellis, 'Climate Variability and Complex Ecosystem Dynamics'.

¹⁹ Contrary to expectations the higher rainfall areas, along the eastern escarpment, have a higher CV than the drier stations in the valley. This is probably not just a function of the shorter-runs of data used to calculate the CV for these stations: for the period 1935-1955 the precipitation figures for Mokhotlong Camp still produce a CV of 21%.

argued that ample time exists between drought events for Borana livestock populations to build up to levels which negatively affect vegetation. Coppock therefore postulates an ecosystem in which equilibrium dynamics among vegetation and herbivores exist between dis-equilibrium periods when external forcing influences vegetation change.²⁰

The paucity of data on either livestock populations at a district level or on patterns of vegetation change make it difficult to draw any conclusion about the nature of ecosystem dynamics in the mountain zone of Lesotho. CVs between 20-30 percent suggest that dis-equilibrium dynamics hold at least periodically, especially as other unpredictable factors external to the system, notably the occurrence of frost, might also play a role.²¹

Rainfall data from Mokhotlong Camp indicates that the period from 1930 to 1955 was unusually dry (see Figure 5.1). Contrary to the widely accepted model of the southern African climatic system of switches between runs of wet and dry years every nine years or so,²² during this period years of above average rainfall tended to be followed by an immediate return to drought.

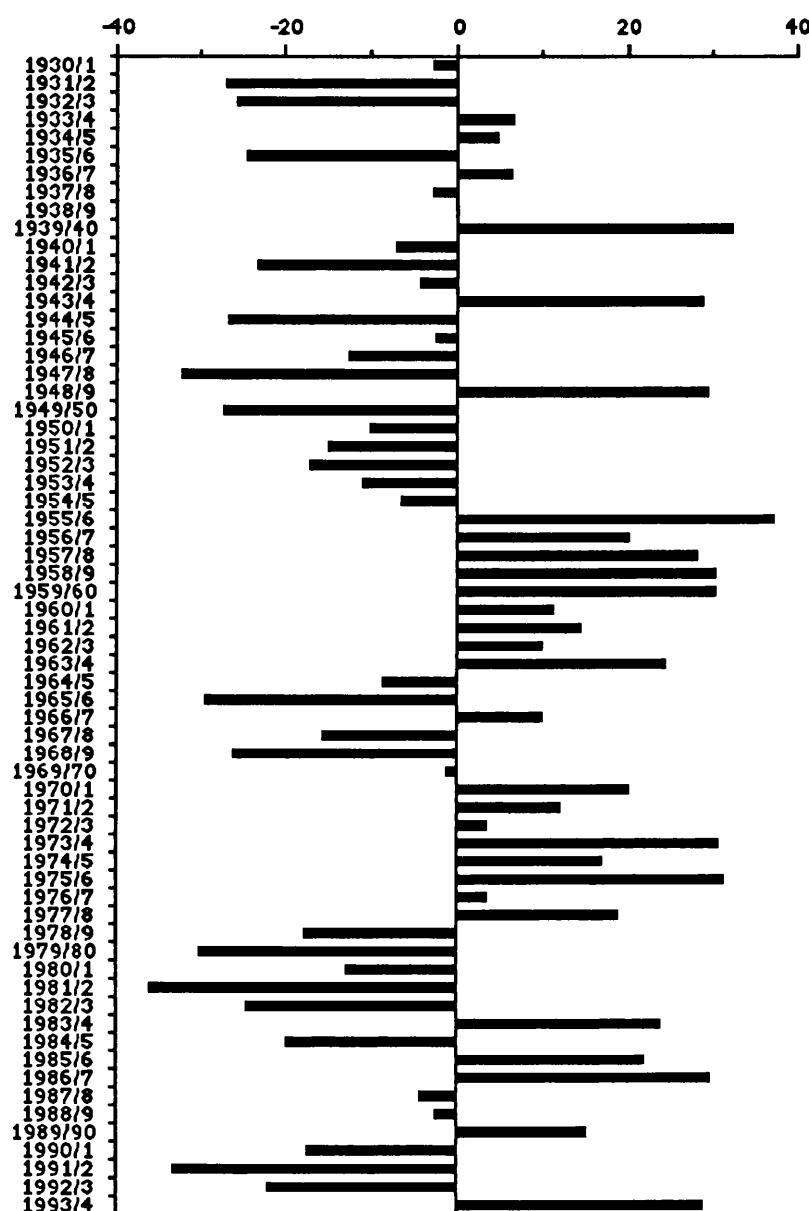
As in the rest of the country (see Figure 4.5) livestock populations drastically declined in Mokhotlong district during the drought in the early 1930s. It is important to note, however, that this rapid decrease in the sheep and goat population was not simply the

²⁰ Coppock, D.L. 'Vegetation and Pastoral Dynamics in the Southern Ethiopian Rangelands: Implications for Theory and Management.' in Behnke, Scoones and Kerven, *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium*, pp. 42-61.

²¹ Scoones notes that mountain environments often display disequilibrium ecosystem dynamics, Scoones, I., pers. cors., 11 September 1997.

²² Tyson, P.D. *Climate Change and Variability in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, 1986).

Figure 5.1 Percentage deviation from long-term mean for precipitation at Mokhotlong Camp, 1930-1994



(Mean = 596 mm)

result of increased mortality created by lack of forage. Rather, Basotho livestock owners responded to the spectacular decrease in wool and mohair prices by selling off their flocks or slaughtering them for consumption. In 1933 over 40,000 head of cattle were exported from Lesotho (compared to figures of 8-14,000 in previous years), as Basotho livestock owners took advantage of encouraging market conditions in the Union.²³

The 1931 livestock census recorded 477, 921 sheep in Mokhotlong district, by 1936 it had dropped to nearly half that population (254, 684). The drop in the goat population was proportionally even greater, from 103, 719 head in 1931 to 43,458 in 1936.²⁴

Figures from 1937 indicate that the downward trend in Mokhotlong's livestock population had ceased, but as no district level figures were produced from then until 1965, it is impossible to determine exactly what happened to livestock populations at a district level. In 1965 Mokhotlong district sheep populations had risen back up to 313,347, while goat populations had risen beyond the 1931 figure to 120, 899.²⁵

With low livestock densities and frequent droughts, the 1940s were probably a period in which ecological factors which did not depend on density were important in any changes in the pattern of vegetation and species composition. Evidence about vegetation change in the mountain area between 1930 and 1955 is sparse. Staples and Hudson reported that the area covered with sehalahala had decreased since 1931, in response to lighter grazing pressure and 'a few seasons of exceptionally good rains'.²⁶ The two areas where the decline in sehalahala was most marked were the western ridges of the Maluti, around the watershed of the Senqunyane river, and in the area around Qacha's Nek and Sehlabathebe, along the border with East Griqualand.

Rainfall data from Sehlabathebe indicate that the mid 1930s did see good rainfall figures (Figure 5.2). During Staples and Hudson's survey (October 1936-January 1937) the Sehlabathebe rainfall station received 975mm of precipitation compared to a mean of 736mm. This contrasts with the rainfall data from Mokhotlong Camp (Figure 5.1), where the mid-1930s saw rainfall figures at or below the longer-term mean. As the

²³ Figures from PRO DO119/1051, Answers to a Questionnaire sent by Sir Alan Pim in Preparation for Commission, 31 August 1934. See Milton, S. "To make the crooked straight": settler colonialism, imperial decline and the South African beef industry, c. 1902-42' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1996).

²⁴ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1936.

²⁵ Lesotho, Ministry of Agriculture, *Statistical Bulletin*, 1967.

²⁶ Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p.29.

mid-1930s saw low livestock population densities through-out the country the different rate of sehalahala decline in the mountain zone probably had more to do with this variable rainfall pattern than with a decrease in grazing pressure.

Figure 5.2 Percentage deviation from long-term mean for precipitation at Sehlabathebe, 1912-1956.

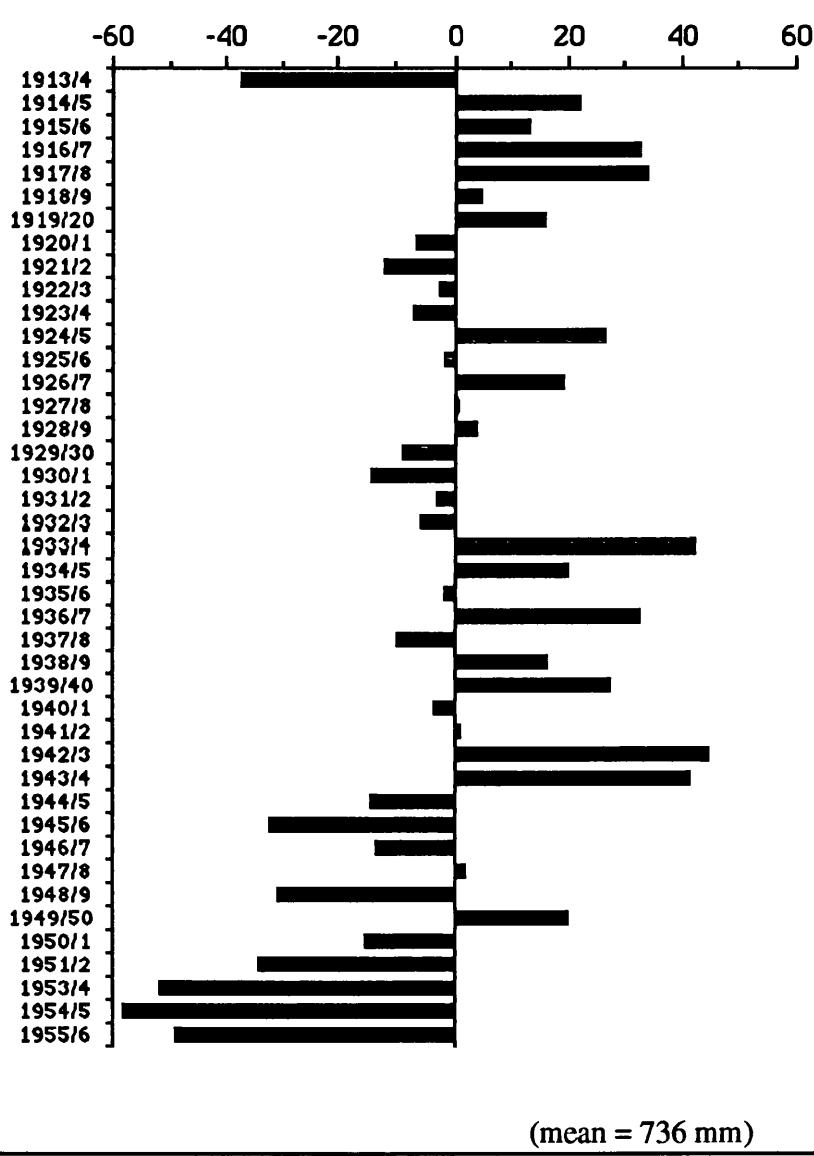
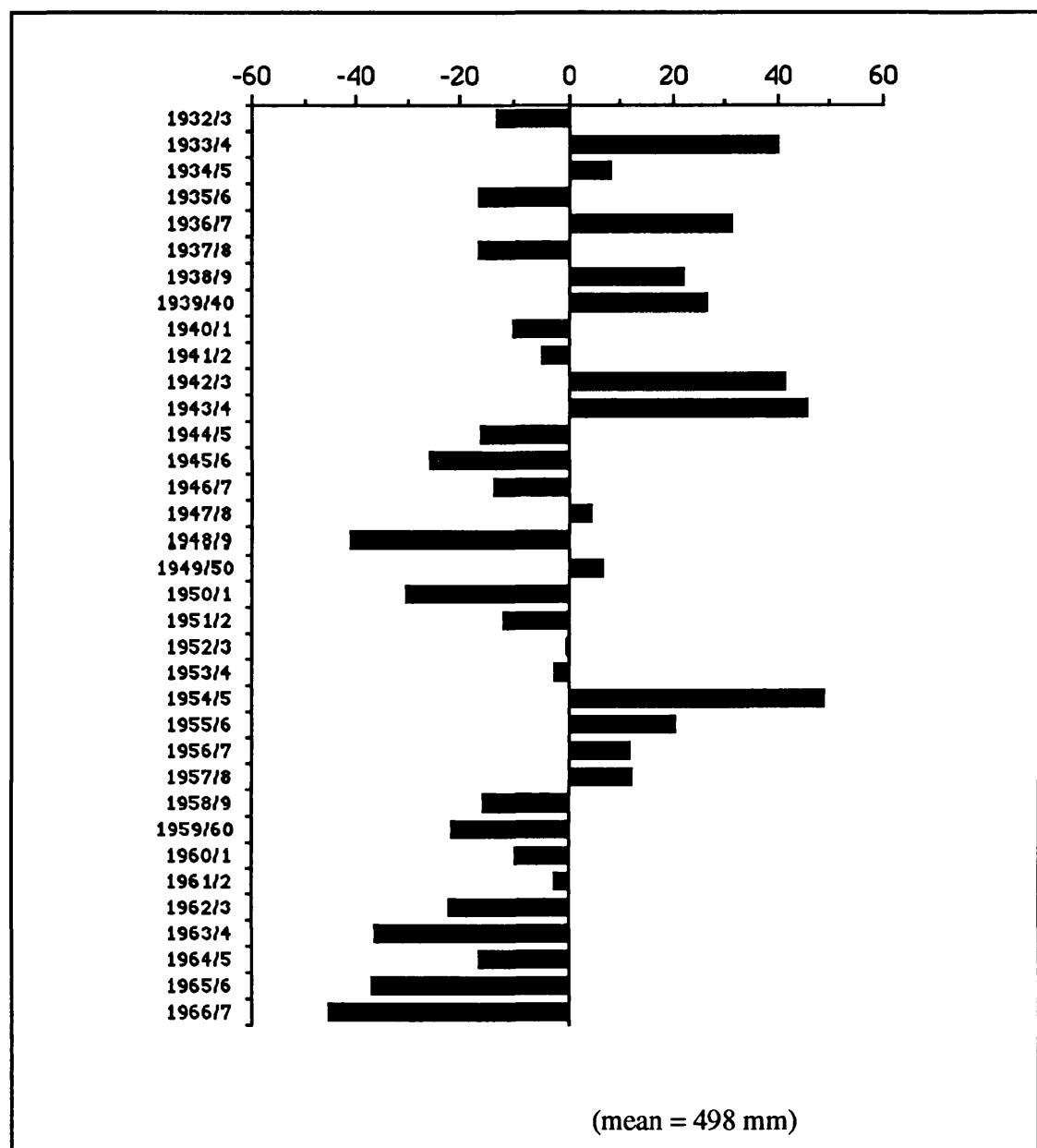


Figure 5.3 Percentage deviation from long-term mean for precipitation at Mashai, 1932-1967



Other conclusions about vegetation change can be drawn from comparisons between observations made by Pole Evans and Bowmaker²⁷ and the vegetation map produced by Staples and Hudson.²⁸ The most obvious point is that Pole Evans and Bowmaker both described the area around Mashai and Sehonghong as suffering from the most serious

²⁷ See chapter 9.

²⁸ Though the map produced by Staples and Hudson was based on Dobson's 1911 survey which, as I show in chapter 9, was extremely inaccurate.

pasture degradation and intrusion of sehalahala.²⁹ Staples and Hudson's map indicates, however, that the area was largely covered by seboku grasses in the late 1930s.

As livestock populations remained low it seems unlikely that the intrusion of sehalahala was simply the result of grazing pressure. Rainfall data from Mashai (Figure 5.3) indicate that the period from the mid-1940s to mid-1950s saw generally low precipitation, with 1948-9 recording figures some 40 percent below average.

On his 1952 trek Bowmaker described the area around the source of the Qaqa stream (which was officially open to grazing) as being in good condition and able to accommodate greater livestock densities. Yet Staples and Hudson's map indicates significant areas of sehalahala along the small tributaries to the east of the stream. By contrast Bowmaker reported overstocking and sehalahala encroachment in the eastern tributaries of the Matsoku river while Staples and Hudson's map records a mixture of seboku and letsiri veld types.³⁰ The pattern of vegetation change was clearly not unilinear between the late 1930s and late 1940s, and strongly suggests that factors other than simple grazing pressure account for the changing pattern in vegetation.

Some observations on the condition of vegetation can quite clearly be linked to specific short-term local factors. The National Veld Trust party who visited the mountain areas in March/April 1945 observed low bio-mass production and high rates of surface flows of water, especially in the northern areas.³¹ These observations are consistent with the pattern of rainfall recorded at Mokhotlong Camp for the period in question. The main rainfall months had seen figures below monthly averages but towards the end of the rainy season there was heavy rain, producing figures for the month of March far in excess of average (see Figure 5.4). Low rainfall in the peak months would result in low levels of bio-mass production and an unhealthy looking veld. This in turn would have decreased the infiltration rate for the late burst in rainfall and led to higher than normal surface flows of water. The pattern of degradation noted by the National Veld Trust party was probably more to do with factors specific to the time of their visit than a long-term process of degradation.³²

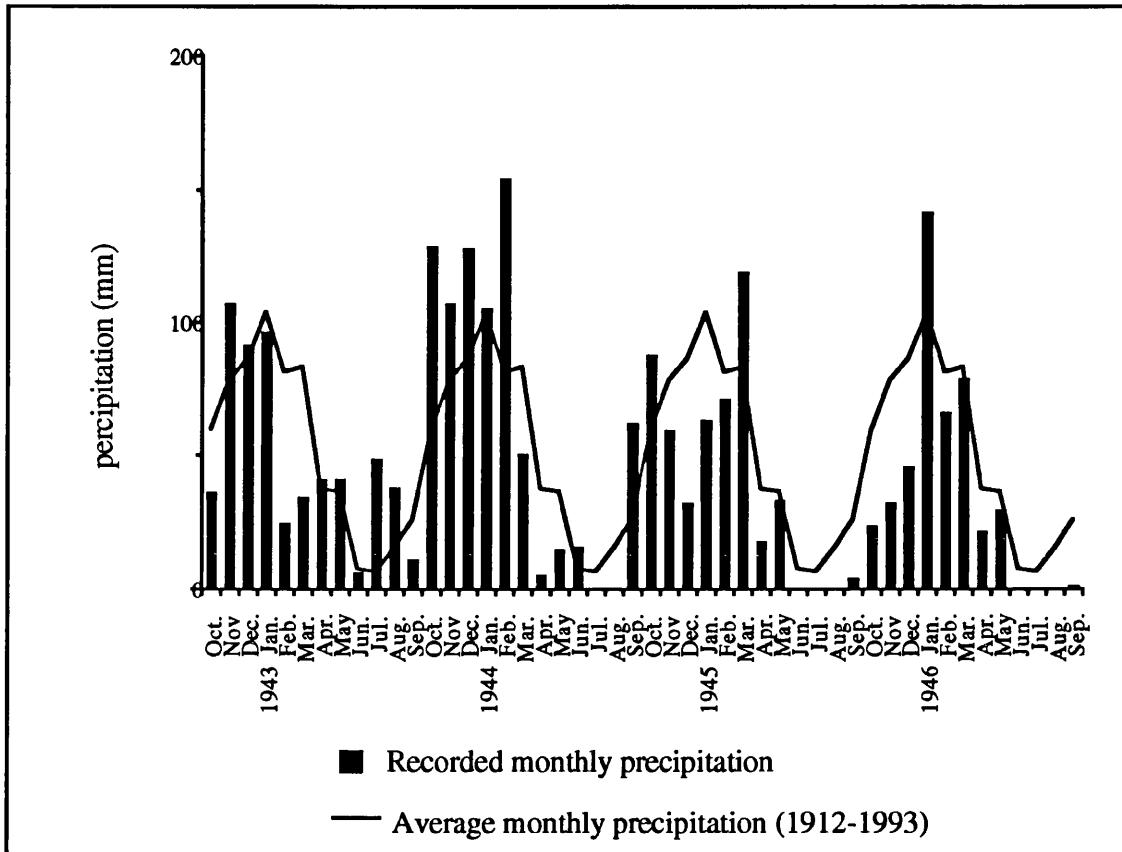
²⁹ LNA 2476/II, Pole Evans, 'Visit to Basutoland in February, 1950'; LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker, Cattle Post Trek, 14 - 26 November 1949.

³⁰ LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker, 'A Report on a Visit to Mokhotlong from 6 - 28 March 1952'.

³¹ E.M.P. [Palmer, E.M.] 'Basutoland-Heart of the Union', *Veld Trust News*, 1, 2, 1945, pp. 3-17. See chapter 6 for a discussion of the importance of this visit.

³² Note that the emphasis on the high plateau as the worst area for pasture degradation conflicts with reports from Staples, Baring and Bowmaker that drove the policy of closing valley grazing and moving livestock to the high peaks.

Figure 5.4 Recorded and average monthly precipitation for Mokhotlong Camp, 1942 - 1946 (mm).



The data on vegetational change I have presented here do not conclusively disprove the hypothesis that changes in the species composition of the mountain zone were dependent largely on the density of livestock populations. Nevertheless they do suggest a more complex situation in which non-density dependent factors played at least some role. I would, therefore, suggest that the process of environmental change 'read' into the spatial pattern of vegetation by people such as Thornton, Staples and Pole Evans was based largely upon theory and not empirical evidence.

5.4. The uncertainty of environmental change

The process of pasture degradation indicated by these early ecological investigations has been repeated in most of the subsequent literature on Lesotho's mountain rangelands. The pattern of vegetation has constantly been seen as an indicator of degradation. The very length of these claims of environmental decline provides some opportunity to assess their validity. As D. Tapson points out for a similar history of reported decline in KwaZulu:

Had they been true over all or even part of this time, the decline in primary productivity, as a consequence of the collapse over time of the basic resource, would have resulted in a decline in stock numbers.³³

After the precipitous plummet of the early 1930s the livestock population has fluctuated but the country continues to support livestock populations in excess of most estimates of carry capacity.

Despite the lack of evidence about the process of ecological change, studies of the range management industry in Lesotho turn out precise figures for the rate, and seriousness, of pasture degradation. One study, produced by a team of range management experts, gives a precise figure of the increase in the area covered by Chrysocoma tennifolia between 1938 and 1986. This was calculated by comparing Staples and Hudson's estimate of the area covered by Chrysocoma tennifolia to a 1986 survey by the Land Conservation and Range Development Project. In 1938, 13 percent of the mountain area was reported covered by Chrysocoma tennifolia, while in 1986 12.4 percent of the entire country was covered by Chrysocoma tennifolia. Making the highly dubious (un-stated) assumption that there was no Chrysocoma tennifolia in the lowlands at the time of the 1938 survey, they calculate that the area covered by Chrysocoma tennifolia had increased by 'approximately 4.3 percent of the total area of the country'.³⁴

Even setting aside the dubious nature of this calculation, it is clear that the data simply can not generate such a precise number. Staples and Hudson's estimate of 13 percent was no more than a guess and was based on a mapping exercise using the extremely inaccurate 1911 map. Even the figures from the Land Conservation and Range Development Project indicate a 3.2 percent error between the sum of their survey and the total area of Lesotho. Yet Swallow et.al. give a precise figure down to one decimal place.

³³ Tapson, D. 'Biological Sustainability in Pastoral Systems: The KwaZulu Case.' in Behnke, Scoones and Kerven, *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium*, pp. 118-135, p. 122-123.

³⁴ Swallow, Brokken, Motsamai, Sopeng and Storey, *Livestock Development*, p. 20-21.

The precision of the figure for expansion of Chrysocoma tennifolia creates an impression of knowledge about the mountain environment and certainty about the processes at work. Colonial officials also attempted to create an impression of certainty about both their knowledge of the mountain environment and the implementation of development projects. As we will see in subsequent chapters, however, the colonial state appeared to rarely know what was actually going on in the Lesotho mountains

6. South Africa, Britain and the Senqu/Orange River

The blue mountain ranges of Basutoland, towering upwards fold upon fold hold the key to South Africa: the abundant waters that make her greatest and many of her lesser rivers and give life to plants, animals and humans.¹

6.1. Introduction

Somewhere in the first couple of paragraphs of just about every development studies text on Lesotho there is a statement something along the lines of ‘Lesotho is a small-land locked country completely surrounded by South Africa’.² Unfortunatley almost all of these texts then ignore this fact in their anaylsis of Lesotho’s ‘development problems’ or whatever it is they are discussing.³ Lesotho’s geopolitics are, however, crucial to any understanding of the country’s society, economy or political system. One crucial element in the country’s geopolitics is the fact that the majority of South Africa’s major rivers have their headwaters in Lesotho.

Commercial agriculture in the dry interior of South African is heavily reliant upon irrigation water from the Orange river (known as the Senqu in Lesotho). Most of this vital water does not fall as rain on South African soil but as rain and snow in the mountains of Lesotho. South Africa’s biggest river, the Senqu/Orange river receives the majority of its flow from headwaters and tributaries in the Lesotho mountains.⁴ At various times over the past century fears have been expressed over the impact of soil erosion in the mountain areas of Lesotho on South African water resources. These fears have, on occasion, been translated into political pressure on Lesotho to implement anti-erosion policies in the mountain areas. In this chapter I will argue that the enactment of policy designed to control soil erosion in the years 1947 - 1956 had little, or nothing, to do with the reality of environmental conditions in the mountains and everything to do with the changing attitudes towards African occupied land amongst white South African politicians.

International disputes over water resources are commonplace and have received much attention from politicians, academics and the media. In the Middle East, for example,

¹ EMP[almer], ‘Basutoland - Heart of the Union.’, p.3.

² See for example Food and Agriculture Organisation, *Advancing Forestry in Lesotho*.

³ Crush ‘Introduction: Imagining development’, p. 15.

⁴ Lesotho contributes a Mean Annual Run-off of 4,750 million metres³ to the flow of the Orange River compared with 2,240 million metres³ from South Africa, Conley, A.H. ‘A synoptic view of water resources in southern Africa.’ unpublished paper presented to SAFER Symposium, Zimbabwe, 16 November 1995.

many commentators have made alarmist predictions pointing to water disputes as the most likely cause of future conflict in the region⁵, while in South Asia there is a long running debate about the impact of soil erosion in the Himalayas on the hydrology of the Ganges Valley.⁶ South African-Lesotho water relations have received surprising little attention, even with the current construction of the massive Highlands Water Project. One reason for this has obviously been that South Africa's ability to influence Lesotho's politics has been so overwhelming that dispute seems impossible. Indeed it seems that some commentators on water resources get around the issue by simply pretending Lesotho does not exist: there are numerous maps of 'South Africa water resources', for example, which neglect to show the international border of Lesotho.⁷

The evidence to suggest that high stocking rates in the mountain areas of Lesotho have caused problems for South African water management on the Senqu/Orange river is at best shaky. The necessary long-term detailed hydrological data on the Senqu/Orange river within Lesotho does not exist even today and certainly did not exist in the 1940s and 50s. Two officially sanctioned surveys of siltation in the Senqu/Orange river inside Lesotho were carried out in the 1950s but the techniques used for determining the rate of siltation appear to have been confined merely to observation.⁸ Furthermore neither survey involved the sort of long term data collection necessary to determine the impact of grazing on the levels of silt in the river (i.e data covering a number of seasons and over a number of years).

5 See Beschorner, N. *Water and Instability in the Middle East* (IISS Adelphi paper 273, Winter 1992/3), for a realistic assessment of the strategic risk of conflict over water resources in the Middle East.

6 See Chapman, G. and Thompson, M. (eds) *Water and the Quest of Sustainable Development in the Ganges Basin* (London, 1995); Haigh, M.J. 'Deforestation in the Himalaya' in Roberts N. (ed.) *The Changing Global Environment* (Oxford, 1994); Ives, J.D. and Messerli, B. *The Himalayan Dilemma: Reconciling Development and Conservation* (London/New York, 1989).

7 See for example Readers Digest, *Atlas of South Africa* (Pretoria, 1984), pp. 20-21 ('Water in a dry land'), which includes six water resource maps, four of which include both Lesotho and Swaziland within the Republic and one which includes Swaziland but excludes Lesotho. The only map to show the correct international boundaries is the '% of farmland under irrigation' map. See also a map entitled 'South Africa's main rivers' (p. 131), which shows no international boundaries and a number of rivers that are certainly not 'South Africa's' in Coetzee, H. and Cooper, D. 'Wasting Water: Squandering a Precious Resource' in Cock, J and Koch, E. *Going Green: People Politics and the Environment in South Africa* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 129-138.

8 In 1949/50 Green and Germond, of Hawkins, Jeffares and Green Civil Engineers, Johannesburg, carried out a survey, funded by the CD&W, of possible sites to build a dam in the lower reaches of the Senqu/Orange River inside Lesotho; PRO DO35/4061, Jeffares and Green, 'Water Resource Survey of Basutoland.' January 1951. N. Shand did a further survey of water resources in Lesotho in 1956, Shand, N. 'Report on the Regional Development of the Water Resources of Basutoland.' (unpublished, Feb. 1956).

Nevertheless, international disputes, or indeed agreements, over the causes of environmental problems are not dependent upon good evidence. The limited factual basis to knowledge of most environmental issues and the enormous scope for collision between conflicting value or knowledge systems means that it is often not the issue itself which steers the debate but the preconceptions that different proponents bring to it (see chapter 2).⁹ In order to understand why the colonial authorities in Lesotho came under pressure from the South African state to institute anti-erosion policies it is important to not only understand the political dynamics of the relationship but also to place the events within the context of colonial ideas about the African environment. It is important to trace the way in which these ideas intersected with wider views about African society and how they developed over time; crucial to this story about the rise and fall of one environmental policy were the changing ideas about African occupation of land that went hand-in-hand with the rise of an apartheid ideology.

6.2. Early South African fears of the impact of soil erosion

As we saw in chapter 3, fears about the impact of deforestation on hydrology were widespread in South Africa from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. It was not, however, until 1933 that the issue of soil erosion was specifically linked to the transfer debate. In that year Smuts specifically mentioned the need for afforestation in the mountains of Lesotho when calling for the transfer of administration of the country from Britain to South Africa:

It is desirable in the interest of the Union, as well as Basutoland itself, that steps are taken on an extensive scale along the headwaters of several important rivers which arise in Basutoland and flow through the Union, to prevent, by means of afforestation and other methods, the erosion which is causing so much damage in the mountain parts of the country. These steps might have to be taken on both sides of the border and could be carried out satisfactorily only by the Union Government.¹⁰

The Pim Commission, published in the following year, also emphasised the impact of soil erosion on hydrology, arguing that the development of dongas would speed-up run off and therefore reduce infiltration rates, lower water tables and result in greater seasonality of river and stream flows.¹¹ The Commission concentrated, however, on

9 Chapman, G. 'Environmental Myth as International Politics: the Problems of the Bengal Delta' in Mukherjee, A. and Agnihotri, V.K. (eds) *Environment and development: views from the East and West* (New Delhi, 1994), pp. 223-256, p 225.

10 Memorandum on the Proposed Incorporation of Basutoland, Bachuanaland and Swaziland in the Union of South Africa, submitted to Mr Thomas, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs on 28th July 1933 by General Smuts, Annex 13 of Union of South Africa (White Paper) *Negotiations Regarding the Transfer to the Union of South Africa of the Government of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland, 1910-1939*, (Pretoria, 1952) p. 35.

11 Pim, *Financial and Economic Position*, p135.

the lowland arable areas where mass aforestation was obviously not an option. Instead the report advocated a programme of physical anti-erosion works to protect arable land. Nevertheless their report still emphasised the importance of Lesotho's water resources for South Africa:

The conservation of the rainfall in the soil is of importance not only locally but also to the countryside lying across its borders to the south and west, because it affects the flow of the two main rivers, the Orange and its tributary, the Caledon.¹²

Both London and Maseru took note of Smuts's linking of the issues of soil erosion and transfer. The anti-erosion works in the lowlands were used by the British as an important element in the propaganda battle over transfer. In 1938 at the invitation of the Union government a party of chiefs from Lesotho and Swaziland, accompanied by Charles Arden Clarke, then Resident Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate (later of Basutoland), Douglas Smit, the South African Secretary for Native Affairs, and a number of other High Commission officials' visited the Transkei and Ciskei. The South African government's idea seems to have been to so impress the chiefs by development schemes in these areas that they would be immediately converted to the cause of transfer of the High Commission Territories. According to Arden Clarke:

Smit started the tour with the idea in his mind that he had only to show the development work that is being carried on in the native areas of the Union to win over the Basutoland and Swaziland Chiefs...and that the transfer of the Territories was a matter of months, not years, a view which appears to be prevalent in Union government circles in Pretoria. As the tour progressed and Smit saw the reactions of the Basutoland Chiefs, and as a result of conversations he had with Bruton and myself, he began to take a realistic view of the situation. After he had seen...something of what was being done in the way of anti-erosion and development work in Basutoland he became somewhat depressed.¹³

When the South African government suggested, in 1953, that chiefs from Transkei should undertake a reciprocal visit, the Basutoland government organised a tour for them that mainly consisted of visiting anti-erosion works. The reaction of the Transkeian chiefs is not recorded but the Basutoland officials clearly felt they had organised a successful public relations exercise.¹⁴ Basutoland officials were always confident about receiving a positive reaction to the lowland anti-erosion works and encouraged visitors to the country to view them.¹⁵ In this respect, if no other, the massive lowland anti-erosion works begun in the mid-1930s could be considered a great success.

12 Pim, *Financial and Economic Position*, p.134.

13 Botswana National Archives (BNA) S337/16, Arden Clarke to Huggard, 8 May 1938. The Swazi and Basotho chiefs were also not impressed by the refusal of white Union officials to shake their hands, see LNA 153/46, Visit of Union Officials to Basutoland, 1953.

14 LNA 153/46.

15 For example see LNA 153/56, Mrs Bertha Solomon, MP: Visit to Basutoland, 1954.

6.3. Post-war South African fears and the British response

Since the late nineteenth century the importance of Lesotho's mountains for South African water resources had been recognised by all commentators on the mountain environment. In 1933 the issue had been raised by Smuts during discussion about transfer and the 1935 Pim Commission reiterated the economic and hence political importance of these water resources. Nevertheless before the war the issue did not seem to raise much interest on either side. South African press response to the anti-erosion works in the lowlands during the late 1930s and early 1940s were, on the whole, complimentary. The *Johannesburg Star*, for example, twice reported on the success of Lesotho's anti-erosion works, stating that they could provide a model for South Africa.¹⁶

As we saw in chapter 3 in the mid-1940s South Africa experienced a huge increase in fears about the impact of soil erosion. The 1944 tour of Dr H.H. Bennett, head of the U.S.A. Soil Conservation Service, did much to raise South African (white) public interest in the issue and the newly formed National Veld Trust gave itself the mission of taking his message to the country.

During his tour of South Africa, Bennett also paid a visit to Lesotho to investigate the anti-erosion works begun in the 1930s. To the great pleasure of the Basutoland administration Bennett was very complimentary about their work, and in an article in *Veld Trust News* suggested that South Africa should follow their example.¹⁷ The Basutoland authorities made much of this ringing endorsement from the man one official described as 'the greatest soil conservationist of all'¹⁸ and quoted his words in the Agriculture Department's *Annual Report*.¹⁹

Just over a year later, however, they received a much less flattering assessment in another article in the *Veld Trust News*, written after a trip through Lesotho by a party of Veld Trust officials.²⁰ While the piece again praised the anti-erosion work carried out in the lowlands, it expressed grave concern that the issue of soil erosion in Lesotho's

16 16 and 23 November 1944, cuttings in PRO DO35/1180/Y950/3.

17 Quoted in Anon. 'A Nation Imperiled - Dr Bennett Views South Africa', *Veld Trust News*, 1, 2, 1944, p. 3.

18 Duncan to Roberts, 2 October 1944, Patrick Duncan Papers, University of York, DU5-81/10.

19 Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1945, p.2.

20 EMP[almer], 'Basutoland - Heart of the Union.' The other important member of the party was C.J.J. Van Rensburg, a figure credited by many South African politicians in the 1940s as being the main impetus behind the rise in public interest in soil erosion (see chapter 3). Sections of the 1945 article were reproduced in a joint book by Van Rensburg and Palmer, *New World to Win*, p. 61.

mountains was not being addressed. They argued that soil erosion there, caused mainly by over-grazing, could have disastrous consequences for the flow of the many South African rivers that had their head-waters in the Lesotho mountains.

The mountain areas were described as the ‘sponge of South Africa’, collecting and slowly releasing water, but the effects of rapid soil erosion meant that ‘the sponge... [was] slowly being squeezed dry’.²¹ They expressed particular concern for the high mountain area of the North West that forms the watershed of the Tugela and Senqu/Orange river valleys. Here they observed:

mountain sides with great patches of bare rock glittering in the sun where chunks and layers of the mountain had slipped away and were reminded that an eroded mountain loses in time, along with its soil and vegetation, the power to attract and hold water.²²

The article argued that the mountain areas were until recently uninhabited and that the deterioration had been rapid, largely taking place since about 1915; and that the only solution was the ‘most prompt, widespread and drastic limitation of stock and agriculture in the mountains’.²³ There was a clear implication (though not explicitly stated) that the human population of the area also needed to be removed.

Shortly after the article first appeared in *Veld Trust News* Tom Fraser, a Basutoland Assistant District Commissioner, sent a letter to William Ormsby-Gore (Lord Harlech), who had retired as High Commissioner the previous year (Fraser had been his private secretary). In his letter Fraser, who seemed to have been generally dissatisfied with the Basutoland government, declared that he was delighted by the article as it would force the government into action.²⁴ He agreed with its arguments and explicitly stated that ‘the inescapable conclusion [is] that depopulation is really the only solution’.²⁵ Ormsby-Gore later circulated the letter to Dominions Office officials.

The criticisms expressed in the article and in Fraser’s letter were treated very seriously by the Dominions Office, and it was felt that:

a great deal of difficulty seems to have been caused in the Union especially by exaggerated or misleading statements in the article.²⁶

21 E.M.P. ‘Basutoland - Heart of the Union’.

22 E.M.P. ‘Basutoland - Heart of the Union’, p.5.

23 E.M.P. ‘Basutoland - Heart of the Union’, p.17.

24 See Ormsby-Gore to Emry-Evans, 8 October 1944, Correspondence between William G.A. Ormsby-Gore (Lord Harlech), High Commissioner, Cape Town/Pretoria, 1942-45 and Paul V. Emry-Evans, M.P., Under Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 1942-45, P.V. Emrys-Evans Papers, British Library Add.Mss.58244, p 103.

25 PRO DO35/1180/Y950/3, Fraser to Harlech, 28 July 1945.

26 PRO DO35/1180/Y950/3, file note [by Roddan?], 14 March 1946.

Dominions Office concerns about the implications of the criticisms were essentially two fold. Firstly they felt that the criticisms made it more difficult for them to go to the Treasury for further CD&W Funds for anti-erosion work in the three High Commission Territories begun before the war. Secondly, and most importantly, they were concerned that the South African government, or more probably the Nationalist opposition, might use the alleged impact of soil erosion in Lesotho on the flow of South African rivers as a bargaining chip to pressurize the British into transferring the administration of the High Commission Territories to Union control.

In March 1945 the Basutoland administration had applied for a free grant from CD&W in order to continue the anti-erosion work it had started in the lowland areas during the 1930s.²⁷ In the climate of post war austerity the Dominions Office was cautious about applying to the Treasury for further funds for development projects that could come in for criticism. Though there were no adverse public criticisms of the lowland contour bank schemes, and indeed most reports were highly complimentary, the Dominions Office did receive a critical briefing from G.R.B. Brown, a district officer from Machakos, Kenya, who had been sent to investigate the scheme in February 1945. The file minutes on the briefing record that Brown was 'clearly not in the least impressed by what he saw in Basutoland' and that 'he appeared to think that Basutoland was looking on the provision of contour bunds as an end in itself'.²⁸ With the addition of public concerns about erosion in the mountains the Dominions Office decided to delay the application for further CD&W funds.²⁹

In response to the article and Fraser's letter the Dominions Office requested that W.G. Leakie, the Basutoland Director of Agriculture, write a report on soil erosion. The report, sent to the Dominions Office in August 1945, lends support to Brown's criticism that the Basutoland authorities were looking on the provision of contour bunds as an end in itself. The Dominions Office's request had clearly been in response to Palmer's fears about soil erosion in the mountains but the subsequent report by Leakie was exclusively about physical anti-erosion works in the lowlands. The report acknowledged a number of problems, in particular with a lack of maintenance, but argued that these problems could be 'overcome by perseverance'.³⁰ Not surprisingly Leakie's report failed to allay the Dominions Office's fears about soil erosion in the

27 PRO DO35/1187/Y1136/23, Applications for Colonial Development and Welfare Funds.

28 PRO DO35/1180/Y950/4, Minute from Roddan on discussion with G. Brown. See also Marcant, W.S., Lambert, R.T., and Brown, G.R.B. 'Notes on a visit to the Union and Basutoland, February - March 1945', unpublished, Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS Afr.s.397(9).

29 See file notes on PRO DO35/1180/Y950/3 & 4.

30 PRO DO35/1180/Y950/3, Leakie, 'Report on Soil Erosion Work in Basutoland', August 1945.

mountains and they decided to delay the application for further funds until they were satisfied that the Basutoland government was taking some form of action.

It is unclear whether the Basutoland government were completely aware of the reason for the Dominions Office delaying the application. A telegram was drafted explaining to the High Commissioner the reason for the delay, but before it could be sent out the Dominions Office had reversed its decision. In correspondence from the Basutoland Department of Agriculture and in a meeting with Arden Clarke, the retiring Resident Commissioner, at the Dominions Office in September 1945 the situation in the mountain areas was increasingly emphasised.³¹ It seems highly likely that the Basutoland government became aware of the need to be seen to institute some sort of anti-erosion work in the mountains if they were going to ensure further funds.

The meetings with Arden Clarke and correspondence from the Basutoland Department of Agriculture reassured the Dominions Office that the Basutoland authorities were aware of the sensitive nature of the issue of soil erosion in the mountains. Evelyn Baring, the newly appointed High Commissioner, supported the Basutoland authorities, telling the Dominions Office that ‘the authorities are fully alive to the seriousness of erosion in the mountain areas’.³²

In late 1945 the Dominions Office agreed to recommend the application for further CD&W funds to the Treasury, but the implication was that the Basutoland authorities had to implement some sort of soil conservation scheme in the mountain cattle post areas.

The question of transferring the three High Commission Territories to Union control had not been explicitly on the political agenda since 1939. At that date a decision had been taken to delay the publication of a memorandum on the terms for transfer and the publication of report of the Joint Advisory Conference.³³ Nevertheless transfer was a constant factor in British-South African relations. Indeed in 1946 the British half expected South Africa to renew its formal application for transfer and the Dominions Office prepared a draft White paper for this eventuality.³⁴ The issue was brought even

31 PRO DO35/1180/Y950/3, Minutes on a meeting between Arden-Clarke and C.W. Lawrence at the Dominions Office, 13 September 1945.

32 PRO DO35/1180/Y950/3, Baring’s comments on a letter from the Acting Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, circulated to the Dominions Office, 8 September 1945.

33 Spence, J.E. ‘British Policy Towards the High Commission Territories’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 2, 2, 1964, pp. 221-46.

34 PRO DO 35/1172/Y/766/13, Draft White paper on Transfer.

closer to the political agenda when South Africa applied to the United Nations for the full incorporation of Namibia into the Union.

As with many South African issues the British attitude towards the incorporation of Namibia was ambiguous. The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs was minded to support the South African application but under pressure from Creech-Jones, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Cabinet agreed on a more circumspect approach. Creech-Jones was concerned about the possible public reaction in other British colonial possessions and, crucially, the reaction of the Indian government to their support for South Africa's incorporation of Namibia.³⁵ The British Cabinet faced a dilemma: if they did support South Africa's application they would encounter opposition both at home and abroad (including from the USA) but if they spoke out against incorporation they could potentially weaken the strong alliance with South Africa. In the context of the developing Cold War and European economic reconstruction this alliance was seen as a primary aim of British foreign policy for political (anti-Communist), strategic (gold and uranian deposits, Simonstown naval base) and economic reasons (South Africa lent Britain £80 million in 1946).

British policies towards South Africa in the immediate post war era always had half an eye on their impact on domestic South African politics and great trouble was taken to avoid giving the National party any political capital to use against Smuts's United Party. Smuts was viewed as the supreme statesman and held in exceptionally high regard, bordering on hero worship, and the British were extraordinarily keen to maintain good relations with him. The political relationship with Smuts was reinforced by the close personal friendship between Smuts and the British High Commissioner, Evelyn Baring.³⁶ The British Labour government attempted to keep issues where public opinion opposed to Smuts's policies off the political agenda. One such issue was the incorporation of the three High Commission Territories into South Africa. Tshekedi Khama's public pronouncement of his intention to challenge any South African application for the incorporation of Namibia, on the grounds it could set a precedent for the High Commission Territories, was a clear indication of the strength of feeling and the sort of opposition that could be expected to any moves to transfer their administration. In this context the British interest was best served by keeping the High Commission Territories off the political agenda.

³⁵ PRO CAB 128/5, CM 45(46)8, South West Africa: Cabinet Conclusions on South Africa's proposed incorporation in the Union, 13 May 1946 and PRO CAB 128/6, CM 88(46), South West Africa, Cabinet conclusions on UK attitude to proposed incorporation, 18 October 1946.

³⁶ Douglas-Home, C. *Evelyn Baring: The Last Proconsul* (London, 1978).

Unfortunately for the British the *Veld Trust News* article sparked off a great deal of interest in Lesotho's mountain environment in South Africa. This was not simply confined to water and soil experts. During debates about the new South African Soil Conservation Bill in early 1946 the issue of soil erosion in Lesotho was raised on a number of occasions. H.H. Johnson, the MP for Port-Elizabeth-North, for example, told the House:

I have been given to understand by people who know something about it that in the Basutoland mountains there are sources of supply which feed the streams and rivers of the Union of South Africa... I would like to know how the Minister and his department propose to deal with those sources, because... it is no good playing with soil erosion. It is no good restoring a patch here and a patch there, unless we restore the streams that provide the necessary water that is going to make things grow in this country.³⁷

A Nationalist MP, J.N. le Roux, speaking in the same debate, specifically chastised the British government for not preventing soil erosion in the mountains.³⁸

While Smuts appeared to be happy to leave the issue of transferring the administration of the High Commission Territories in abeyance for the time being he was also aware that success on the issue would be popular with the white South African electorate.³⁹ On the other hand he was keen not to alienate the British, especially as he was looking for their support over the incorporation of Namibia. He raised the issue of soil erosion in the mountains of Lesotho in private with Baring on a couple of occasions,⁴⁰ but did not do so publicly (in contrast to his statement in 1933). This suggests that his concerns was probably to remove possible political advantage from the Nationalists rather than to pressurize London for transfer *per se*.

The potential political capital to be made by South Africa through its claims of neglect underscored all the discussions between Basutoland officials in Maseru, the High Commissioners office in Pretoria/Cape Town and the Dominions Office in London. Transfer was to the forefront of all British official's minds when issues such as soil erosion in Lesotho were being discussed. When Arden Clarke met with Dominions Office officials in 1945, the relationship between the mountain soil erosion issue and the question of transfer was discussed. The minutes of the meeting record that Arden Clarke:

37 Johnson, H.H., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 3rd Session, 9th Parliament, 1946-1947, Vol. 58, p. 8309.

38 LeRoux, J.N., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 3rd Session, 9th Parliament, 1946-1947, Vol. 58, p.8330.

39 Baring wrote a long memorandum to Addison, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, on 13 April 1946 dealing with the fact that Smuts was coming under pressure from the nationalists over the issue, PRO DO35/1172/Y/706/11.

40 PRO DO35/1180/Y950/5, Baring to Machtig, 25 February 1946.

wondered whether, even if Basutoland were transferred to the Union, the Union Government would in fact do any more than has been and is being done in Basutoland under the present administration.⁴¹

All were agreed that the best way to counter South African claims over the damage caused by soil erosion in the mountains was for the Basutoland authorities to do more to combat the perceived threat

During 1946 the Basutoland authorities began to formulate a policy designed to reduce soil erosion on the mountain rangelands. However, as the *Veld Trust News* article had acknowledged, their resources to do this were very limited. Early in the year Baring retraced the steps of Palmer and Van Rensburg's 1945 trek in order to comment on their article and made some initial policy recommendations. A keen amateur naturalist,⁴² he made extensive use of Staples and Hudson's 1938 *Ecological Survey* in his report on the mountain areas. In contrast with Palmer (and in line with Staples and Hudson) he reported that the worst examples of overgrazing were not on the high mountain tops but on north facing valley sides where *rooigras* species were being replaced by 'bitter karoo scrub'.

During this tour Baring held initial discussion with Matlere Lerotholi and Theko Makhaola, the chiefs of the two main mountain wards of Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek, but no firm policy was decided upon.⁴³ Early the following year P.A. Bowmaker, one of the Basutoland Department of Agriculture's two Principal Agricultural Officers, was sent on another trek to the mountain wards to devise a suitable policy.⁴⁴

As we will see in chapter 7 and 9, the two ward chiefs agreed to implement a policy to close all valley cattle post grazing areas below the 9,000 foot contour line and to order all livestock herds to be moved to the higher pastures. This policy was officially implemented in April 1947 and reported as a great success in subsequent Department of Agriculture *Annual Reports*. It was designed to remove all grazing pressure from the *rooigras* areas and to allow the grassy species to re-establish themselves over the 'bitter karoo shrub'. Initially it was felt that this would take only a few years but, in fact, the closure policy officially stayed in place for almost a decade.

⁴¹ PRO DO35/1180/Y950/3, Minutes of meeting between Arden Clarke and Lawrence at the Dominions Office on 13 September 1945.

⁴² His notebook on the trek is full of details on different plants and flowers. Unfortunately the notes are incoherent and say little about the general ecological conditions, Notebook 3, Evelyn Baring Papers, University of Durham.

⁴³ PRO DO35/1180/Y950/5, Baring to Machtig, 25 February 1946.

⁴⁴ I have been unable to trace Bowmaker's report on this trek in either the LNA or PRO, it is, however, referred to subsequent files such as LNA 2476/II.

The Basutoland authorities, the High Commissioner and the Commonwealth Relations Office⁴⁵ were all pleased with the closure policy and felt it would silence any South African criticism. Indeed it received a number of press reports that compared the policy favourably with what was taking place in South Africa. *The Friend*, for example, reported that:

In the highlands where the Orange rises no less than 1,400 square miles - an eighth of all Basutoland - have been totally closed to grazing till the Red Grass (*themedha*) carpets them again... The Basuto custom of tribal veld-sparing has been immensely extended by progressive chiefs on technical advice. I have seen mountain sides dangerously eroded and covered only by the bitter Karoo-bush after many years misuse growing golden red with red grass again after only two years of enforced rest from stocking. I have also flown across Cathkin Peak into Natal and seen exactly the same problems on the native lands on the Ladysmith side of the border with one depressing difference: there was practically no reclamation work in sight.⁴⁶

The Basutoland authorities must have been particularly heartened by a positive report in the *VeldTrust*⁴⁷ magazine:

With the support of progressive chiefs, who enforce the system in their own courts and receive the proceeds of the fines, Mr P.A. Bowmaker...is carrying through a programme designed to stabilise all the mountain slopes of Basutoland by 1956. More than 1,400 square miles - about an eighth of the territory - have been already removed from grazing, so that the rooigras may grow again and oust the bitter Karoo.⁴⁸

Nobody, not even the Veld Trust, commented on the fact that the closure policy involved moving all the livestock out of the valleys onto the watershed areas that Palmer had identified as having the worst soil erosion problems and being the greatest risk to the free flow of South African rivers.

45 The Dominions Office changed name, to the Commonwealth Relations Office, in July 1947.

46 *The Friend*, 27 March 1950.

47 Formerly the *Veld Trust News*.

48 Bond, J. 'The Basuto fight to save a mountain jewel', *VeldTrust*, April 1951, pp. 22-23, 30 & 32. Sections of the article were repeated in the August 1954 *VeldTrust* article 'Basutos Avert Disaster: Fight to save cradle of the Orange river', p. 25.

6.4. The National Party and renewed pressure

Despite the positive press reports the Commonwealth Relations Office did not feel complacent about the issue for long. Their fears were renewed with the victory of the Nationalists in the 1948 South African election and Malan's demand that the British address the issue of transfer. The Labour government could no longer simply avoid the problem and try to keep it off the political agenda. The victory of the Nationalists also hardened opposition to plans for transfer in both the High Commission Territories and Britain. Groups such as the Anti-Slavery Society, the Fabian Colonial Bureau and the Society of Friends actively lobbied the Commonwealth Relations Office to prevent any moves towards transfer.⁴⁹

In mid 1949 the High Commissioner's office began to warn the Commonwealth Relations Office that Malan was likely to formally request transfer in the very near future and soil erosion in the mountains of Lesotho would be one of the central issues. In August Baring reported a converstaion with Forsyth, an official in the Union Department of External Affairs:

Forsyth has told me that the Union Government definitely intend to demand the transfer of the High Commission Territories in the near future...[He] said that a particular point would be made of the condition of the catchment area of the Orange River.⁵⁰

In response to this possibility the Commonwealth Relations Office asked the High Commissioner office to compiled a briefing on various issues likely to arise in connection with the transfer issue. Much of the section on Lesotho was taken up by a discussion of soil erosion; the policy of closing areas of grazing was reported to be a success but the need for further action was stressed.⁵¹ In subsequent years three basic approaches to dealing with potential criticism were attempted: firstly to obtain independent support for the closure policy; secondly to introduce policies to reduce the total livestock populations; and thirdly to explore the possibility of technical solutions to prevent siltation.

49 See for example Submission from a Deputation on the High Commission Territories to the Commonwealth Relations Office, 14 November 1949, Patrick Duncan Papers, University of York, Basutoland Miscellany, DU 7.3.

50 PRO DO119/1442, Baring to Syers, 26 August 1949.

51 PRO DO 35/4330, A collection of notes on various aspects of the administration of the High Commission Territories likely to arise in connection with transfer, prepared by the High Commissioners Office, Pretoria, 7 December 1949,

6.4.1. Livestock culling

Stock limitation was seen as being a crucial element of the battle against negative South African publicity about the environmental condition of all three High Commission Territories. In October 1949 Baring informed the Resident Commissioners that:

I think it is particularly important for all three High Commission Territories to emphasise the measures we are taking to enforce in the future the limitation of stock. My impression from conversations with the Union authorities and from visiting Betterment areas in the Transkei is that i) they lay more emphasis on the limitation of stock and the improvement of pasture than they do on the protection of arable land and ii) they believe that without compulsory limitation no measures to save the soil are of any use.⁵²

During the 1949 Basutoland National Council the colonial authorities placed great pressure on the Basuto chiefs to implement livestock culling policies.⁵³ While members of the National Council rarely expressed any opposition to grazing control policies,⁵⁴ there was almost unanimous opposition to compulsory culling, even from chiefs such as Theko Makhaola who claimed to support the closure policy. Given that many members of the council were themselves large livestock owners this was hardly surprising. However, the fear of discussing any issue connected to the transfer question may well have acted as a check on opposition to anti-erosion policies.⁵⁵ A petition delivered to the British Prime Minister and signed by many influential chiefs in Lesotho, complained that the Resident Commissioner had threatened that a failure to check erosion would lead to increased pressure from South Africa for transfer.⁵⁶

After pressure from the Resident Commissioner the 1949 Council did agree to recommend the introduction of a scheme to reduce the goat population by 25 percent over a five year period. Goats were regarded by the British as 'public enemy number one'⁵⁷ and the administration made much of the National Council's acceptance of the proposal. The scheme was exceptionally liberal when compared with culling schemes in South Africa or Southern Rhodesia, and was essentially voluntary. The Basutoland administration had recognised for many years that it had little chance of imposing a compulsory culling scheme:

52 PRO DO119/1422, Baring to Forsyth-Thompson, 11 October 1949.

53 Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 45th Session*, 1949, p. 166-168.

54 The main complaint in this area was that white traders were not made to abide by the grazing regulations.

55 Edgar argues in the introduction to *Prophets with Honour* that the fear of incorporation into the Union was a check on militant protest by the opposition movement, Lekhotla la Bafo.

56 PRO DO35/4159, Petition of the Basotho tribe.

57 Howard, J 'Notes on a visit to Transkei, Ciskei and Basutoland, January 1950.' unpublished, Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS Afr. s.787. For the opposite view see Mathe, B.M. letters page of *Mochochonono*, 15 September 1945.

The unrest and ill feeling which such a course would cause would prejudice the success of all other progressive measures which the Government may intend to introduce during the next few years.⁵⁸

Any ideas for a compulsory plan were surely shelved in the aftermath of the 1950 Witzieshoek uprising just across the northern border of Lesotho. Police reports from the uprising described trails of blood leading into the Lesotho mountains,⁵⁹ and it is most likely that many Basotho heard first hand accounts of the culling policy and resistance to it.

Even the limited culling scheme agreed to by the National Council was, however, more than the Basutoland authorities could really manage and no attempt at implementation was ever made.⁶⁰

6.4.2. Pole Evans's Report

As well as the plans for a goat-culling programme the Basutoland authorities decided that they needed some independent support for their closure policy. In December 1949 they commissioned Iltyd Pole Evans to investigate the two main mountain districts of Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek. As we saw in chapter 4, Pole Evans was a central figure in African colonial ecology and was well connected with high level South African figures. Like Evelyn Baring he was a keen friend of Smuts and all three of them used to spend holidays at the Dongola Game Reserve run by Pole Evans.⁶¹ The Basutoland authorities approached Pole Evans expressly because they hoped he would support their policies and, Bowmaker, who was responsible for administering the closure plan wondered whether:

Dr Pole Evans might be informed confidentially that the object of his invitation is to provide the Basutoland Government with an 'outside' report which can be used to refute statements which appear in the press from time to time about the state of the cover in the Basutoland mountains, as compared perhaps with what is happening in the native reserves in the Union.⁶²

Pole Evans's reputation and connection with Baring may have made him an obvious choice but, if the Basutoland authorities were keen to impress the Nationalist government, he was not the best man for the job. During 1949 Pole Evans suffered

⁵⁸ LNA 2526, District Commissioner, Butha Buthe to Government Secretary, Maseru, 15 September 1947.

⁵⁹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 November 1950, quoted by Moroney, S. '1950 Witzieshoek rebellion', *Africa Perspective*, 3, 1976, pp.1-15. Also see Hirson, B. 'Rural revolts in South Africa'.

⁶⁰ It is discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

⁶¹ Douglas-Home, *Evelyn Baring: The Last Proconsul* and Carruthers, 'The Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary'.

⁶² LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker to King, 28 December 1949.

frequent personal criticisms in the South African parliament over his running of the Dongola Game Reserve. J.G. Strijdom, then Minister of Irrigation and Lands, wanted to break up Dongola (on the outskirts of his Waterberg constituency) and open it to new settler farmers but Pole Evans fought hard to resist.⁶³ Though Smuts spoke up in Pole Evans's defence, classing him 'with the very highest and most able public servants we have had in this country',⁶⁴ the Basutoland authorities had chosen a man with much reduced influence vis-a-vis the South African government.

Furthermore, despite their best efforts to fix the result, Pole Evans's report contained, amongst the general praise, a number of potentially damaging criticisms of the Basutoland authorities. Most importantly Pole Evans reported that the closure policy was not a solution to the problem in itself:

The question ... arises - Is the work now being done enough? Does it provide a permanent solution? The answer is 'No'. Something more than reclamation of the natural pasture by resting is required.⁶⁵

The Basutoland Department of Agriculture were concerned about these criticisms and, despite the fact Pole Evans complimentary comments were used in the 1950 *Annual Report*⁶⁶ it was not circulated to other members of the administration.⁶⁷ The Basutoland authorities seemed to be somewhat dissatisfied with the results of the report⁶⁸ and Bowmaker complained that:

My impression of Dr Pole Evans, which is backed up by his report, is that he is so much of a lover of nature and pure botanist that he does not really grasp the practical side or means of getting things put right.⁶⁹

To make things worse they also felt that Pole Evans's 'did not let us off lightly over his fee'.⁷⁰

6.4.3 . Damming the Senqu/Orange River

With increasing South African pressure over transfer, the failure of the goat reduction policy and only mixed support from Pole Evans, the British turned to more technical solutions to the problem of siltation caused by erosion in the mountains: the construction of water storage systems within Lesotho. For the British these plans had

63 Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 3rd Session, 10th Parliament, 1949, vol. 67, pp. 3371

64 Smuts, J., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 3rd Session, 10th Parliament, 1949, vol. 67, pp. 3765.

65 LNA 2476/II, I.B. Pole-Evans: Visit to Basutoland in February 1950.

66 Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1950, stated that Pole Evans 'expressed the opinion that the work in progress was satisfactory', (p.9).

67 LNA 2476/II, file notes from King and Forsyth-Thompson, c. May 1950.

68 Baring reported that Pole Evans was 'inclined to antagonise Agricultural Officers', PRO DO35/4010, Baring to Liesching, 20 July 1951.

69 LNA 2476/II, P.A. Bowmaker's comments on Pole-Evans report, June 1950.

70 LNA 2476/II, Forsyth-Thompson to Baring, 24 June 1950.

two major advantages; firstly they were a clear counter to the accusations that they were doing nothing to develop the resources of the country and secondly a series of dams would capture any siltation and result in a clearer flow of water into the Union.

The possibility of large scale water development schemes on the Orange river had been discussed for many years in South Africa. But a perennial problem was the large silt content of the river which would significantly reduce the life-span of any dam. The finger of blame for the silt content was pointed at the Basotho and the British administration, the obvious implication being that the Imperial government was holding back South African economic development. Some within the Basutoland administration began to discuss the possibility of large scale water development of their own as a way of countering these South African complaints. In April 1947, Gideon Pott, the District Commissioner of Teyateyaneng, wrote a long letter to the Government Secretary in Maseru detailing proposals for a large dam in Quthing district. While Pott outlined some economic advantages of the dam he essentially saw it as having a political role:

Politically I am of the opinion that it would do Basutoland a lot of good in its relations with the Union. It would show them we are willing to co-operate and assist them to combat erosion and to help them irrigate needy Union areas, and thus forestall them in the same way as we have done with anti-erosion work. There would be less talk about incorporation in the Union as we would no longer be a stumbling block to some of their more progressive and very necessary schemes.⁷¹

Pott's proposal received a warm welcome from other members of the administration but no action was taken until late 1949 when Jeffares and Green, a Johannesburg based civil engineering firm were contracted to write a preliminary report on the practicality of constructing a large dam. Their initial assessment, handed to the Resident Commissioner after a visit to the area in November 1949, included both good and bad news for the Basutoland administration: they believed that there was too much silt in the Senqu/Orange where it flowed through Quting for a dam to be sustainable but they also argued that most of this silt came from the lower Senqu/Orange valley below the divide between the basalt and sandstone based soils (see chapter 1). They argued that water development schemes would be possible in the upper reaches of the Senqu/Orange and its tributaries, especially the Malibamatso, but any developments on the lower reaches of the river should be delayed 'until such a time as the silt problem has found a solution'.⁷² Obviously the 'solution' to siltation was to be an extended anti-erosion campaign:

71 LNA 335/1, DC, Teyateyaneng to Government Secretary, Maseru, 14 April 1947.

72 LNA 335/1, Germond, R.C. 'Report on Preliminary Reconnaissance on the Orange River in Basutoland, 14th - 17th November 1949'.

All cultivation of steep slopes would have to be stopped and grazing would have to be strictly controlled and probably stopped altogether for a few years.⁷³

Given the positive reports about low levels of siltation from the northern mountains the Basutoland administration were keen to have Jeffares and Green write a full report on the proposals and the High Commissioner applied to the Commonwealth Relations Office for £2,500 from the CD&W Fund.⁷⁴ With the Union parliament frequently debating the possibility of water development schemes on the Orange within South Africa during February and March 1950, the Basutoland administration and the High Commissioner felt an even greater need for new ammunition. Their fears appeared to have been vindicated when Strijdom, the Minister for Irrigation, deflected demands for new projects by pointing towards Lesotho:

The water of the Orange River, coming from Basutoland, where there is a tremendous amount of soil erosion and from other places, contains so much silt that if one were to construct a catchment dam on the river, such a dam would eventually meet the same fate as the dams in the Fish River valley, and for practical purposes it would also silt up and we would find ourselves in a worse position than we are in today.⁷⁵

In May 1950 the High Commissioner pressurised the Commonwealth Relations Office into releasing funding for the survey. In a telegram to Patrick Gordon-Walker, the Secretary of State, he pointed out that the survey in itself would help counter South African criticisms even if the project was never constructed. He was particularly keen for the survey to take place at the same time the Directorate of Colonial Surveys were also involved in mapping the country:

The High Commissioner is particularly anxious that [the] survey should start without delay, both for intrinsic advantage and to anticipate criticism from [the] Union Government who, in supporting [the] case for transfer of [the] territories, are likely to allege that [the] catchment area of Orange river which is of major importance to the Union has deteriorated through neglect, and that we do not even possess accurate information about the area or its potential. [The] Colonial Survey Unit is currently engaged in photography of [the] Territory, preliminary to accurate mapping. If [a] hydrographic survey was also begun now we should be in a good position later this year to demonstrate that we are energetically accumulating data which will enable us to preserve and use [the] natural resources of Basutoland to common advantage. In short a scheme or schemes may result but politically we must have information.⁷⁶

The political necessity of the survey was also made explicit in the application for CD&W funds:

This survey is required to ... obtain the necessary data to anticipate criticism from the Union government, who in support of their case for the transfer of the High

73 LNA 335/1, Green, H.H. 'Notes on Basutoland, 5 December 1949'. The phrases 'strictly controlled' and 'stopped altogether' were underlined by somebody within the Basutoland administration (probably the Resident Commissioner) with a large 'yes' in the margin.

74 PRO DO35/4061, Application for CD&W Funds, 1 May 1950.

75 Strijdom, J.G., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 3rd Session, 10th Parliament, 1950, Vol. 70, p. 3362.

76 LNA 335/1, Baring to Baxter, 1 May 1950.

Commission Territories are likely to allege that the catchment area of the Orange River...has deteriorated through neglect.⁷⁷

In November 1950 CD&W released the funds and Jeffares and Green began a more comprehensive survey. The High Commissioner and the Commonwealth Relations Office were encouraged by the report, delivered to them in December 1950, and Baring advised that 'there is a very real possibility of the development of a big combined scheme of water storage'.⁷⁸ As in the preliminary assessment the report argued that there was little silt from the upper mountain valleys:

The igneous Drakensberg beds and solid cave sandstone of the Highlands produce only a fraction of the silt that the lowlands produce from the very erodable purple red and blue shale and mudstone, red standstone and grits.⁷⁹

Armed with this report the Commonwealth Relations Office felt much more comfortable about Gordon Walker's forthcoming meetings with Union officials during his tour of southern Africa in early 1951. In his briefing before the trip the political importance of the storage scheme as way of deflecting any criticism was made clear:

With storage in the mountains of Basutoland the flow [of the Senqu/Orange river] would become even, the conditions for irrigation in the Union would improve and the edge would be taken off the comments on erosion in the Basutoland mountains.⁸⁰

When Gordon Walker met with Strijdom in February 1951, as expected Strijdom 'complained of the extent of erosion in the Basutoland mountains and the quantity of silt in the waters of the Orange River'. In reply Gordon Walker mentioned the plans of the construction of a large dam on the Senqu/Orange.⁸¹ During the first half of 1951 Baring discussed the details of the plans, mentioned by Gordon Walker, with Strijdom and Union officials.

The Commonwealth Relations Office, however, were wary of releasing too many details about the scheme. By keeping plans vague they probably hoped that they could avoid difficult questions, especially as there was a major problem that needed to be overcome if the calculations of profitability were going to make any sense at all. The only way that the dam could possibly make any return on the investment was by selling electricity or water for irrigation direct to South Africa. Without a South African commitment to buy the electricity the necessary funds could not be approved by the

77 LNA 335/1 and PRO DO35/4061, Application for a Grant from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund of £2,500 for a survey of the Orange River in order to investigate its hydro-electric and irrigation possibilities, 1 May 1950.

78 PRO DO 35/4061, Baring to Baxter, 2 December 1950.

79 PRO DO 35/4061, Report from Jeffares and Green, 'Basutoland: Orange River Hydro-electric and Irrigation Project.' 1 December 1950.

80 PRO DO35/4061, Note for discussion with Secretary of State, 1-2 January 1951.

81 PRO DO 35/4061, Baring to Baxter, 19 February 1951.

Treasury. The High Commissioner's office, therefore, remained deliberately vague about details, but let it be generally known they were planning a major project.

The Commonwealth Relations Office must have felt satisfied with their approach when the plans for the scheme were raised in the Union Parliament in March 1951. J.A. Cull, the MP for Port Elizabeth North, mentioned the British survey whilst supporting a motion to establish a commission to investigate the watershed areas of the Senqu/Orange river. He went on to report that 'they are going to turn the upper portion of the Orange River into another Tennessee Valley'.⁸²

Over the next few months the issue was raised in the Union parliament on a number of occasions. In June 1951 Cull again mentioned the British survey in greatly exaggerated terms. Baring's assessment in May 1950 that the technical survey of the Senqu/Orange river and the Colonial Survey Unit's activities would be seen as part of the same process seems to have been accurate:

We..know that the British Government sent out quite a large number of experts to survey the Basutoland area, the sources of the Orange River. I understand that there were 70 experts and that they spent the best part of a year there. They surveyed all the potentialities and possibilities of the Orange River in respect of irrigation, cultivation of land, conserving of water, and the production of electricity by hydro-electric means... I would like to know from the Hon. Minister whether he or his Department has been approached to give advice or assistance, and if not, whether he or his department will take steps to find out what the plans of the British government are in regard to the scheme.⁸³

In his reply to Cull, Strijdom simply lied, saying until the British government saw 'fit to discuss the matter with us, it would not be right for us to discuss the matter'.⁸⁴ C.R. Swart, the Minister of Justice, had similarly denied any discussions with the British over the issue in response to a question by K. Ueckermann in April 1951.⁸⁵

In January of 1952 Bowker, Cull, Ueckermann, E.J.W. Henderson (Parktown) and G.F.H. Bekker (Craddock) all raised the issue of co-operation with Britain over the development of the Senqu/Orange river, while government ministers denied any

82 Cull, J.A., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 4th Session, 10th Parliament, 1951, p.2438, seconding a motion by Bowker, T.B. (p.2432).

83 Cull, J.A., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 4th Session, 10th Parliament, 1951, p.8606.

84 Stijdom, J.G., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 4th Session, 10th Parliament, 1951, p. 8629.

85 Ueckermann, K., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 4th Session, 10th Parliament, 1951, p. 5609.

discussion had taken place.⁸⁶ Yet at one point Strijdom indicated that perhaps he knew slightly more about the schemes than he was letting on:

If those dams in the upper reaches of the Orange river and various streams in Basutoland which he has in mind were to be constructed they would conserve only 750,000 morgen feet whereas the total average annual flow of the Orange River near Hopetown is 2,750,000 morgan feet.⁸⁷

Reports had also appeared in the press that negotiations were taking place and that a deal could be struck. The *Star*, for example, reported in December 1951 that Strijdom had hinted they might do a deal with Britain over storage dams in Lesotho. Negotiations about the scheme were difficult, however, and in many ways neither side had much to gain from the development schemes. The British could not call on the large amounts of capital needed for the project and, as mentioned above, needed the South African market for irrigation water and electricity to get any return on their investment.

There were also obvious reasons why the South Africans would want to avoid going into major joint development projects with the British colonial authorities, not least because it would be a *de facto* recognition of their sovereignty over the territory.⁸⁸ A private correspondent of Baring reported that Strydom had 'given orders that his Department should treat [the plans for a hydro-electric scheme] as a highly secret document until he was prepared to deal with it'.⁸⁹ By the middle of 1952 the scheme was more or less shelved.⁹⁰

Nevertheless the survey and proposals had essentially fulfilled their function of deflecting criticism of the Basutoland authorities. The Commonwealth Relations Office were confident about the political implications of the soil conservation work carried out in Lesotho and could blame the lack of progress on the Senqu/Orange river scheme on the Union:

In the past there was...some validity in the argument that development of the Territories resources was neglected. But this is no longer true today... In Basutoland we can claim to have arrested erosion and to have done conservation work that has been described as 'the best in Africa'. It is only the unwillingness

86 Ueckermann, (22 January 1952, p. 24); Henderson, (25 January 1952, p.208); Bowker, (29 January 1952, p.356); Cull, (29 January 1952, p. 362); Bekker, (1 February 1952, p.540) all in Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 5th Session, 10th Parliament, 1952.

87 Strijdom, J.G., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 5th Session, 10th Parliament, 1952, p.371.

88 PRO DO35/4011, High Commissioner, Visit to UK, Note for Discussion with Secretary of State, Januray 1950.

89 Roland D[illegible] to Baring, 1 October 1951, Semi-Official Correspondence, 1944-1949, Evelyn Baring Papers, University of Durham.

90 PRO DO 35/4061.

of the Union Government to co-operate that holds up progress with the Orange River Power Development Scheme.⁹¹

6.5. Changing preconceptions of African occupation of land

The Nationalist government's criticism of the Basutoland government reflected the belief that the mountains were only recently populated and that this was the root of the problem. Most reports stated that the mountains were not populated prior to the settling of Basotho people in the 1870s - the deliberate destruction of the San population by the early British and Cape colonial governments was totally ignored. A number of commentators, including both Pole Evans and Palmer, argued that the area was not actually suited to any human habitation. Many of the complaints coming from South Africa during the 1940s and early 1950s argued that soil erosion could not be prevented without massive, or even total, depopulation of the mountain area. This fitted in with more widespread calls for the removal of African population from watersheds frequently made in South Africa during the late 1940s and early 1950s. In May 1951

S.P. LeRoux, Minister for Agriculture, for example, told Parliament:

One would like to see the Native population removed from the mountainous areas, from the catchment areas of rivers, to more flat country⁹²

Yet during the mid-1950s these calls for the removal of the Basotho population from the mountain area declined and eventually disappeared. In order to understand why it is necessary to trace changing attitudes towards African occupation of land within the Union, and its relationship to an apartheid ideology, and how this influenced attitudes towards the three High Commission Territories.

The historiography of the genesis of apartheid has shifted significantly since the mid-1980s. The work of Deborah Posel, in particular, has shown that the Nationalists came to power in 1948 with no 'grand plan' for apartheid. Posel argues that there were essentially two distinct apartheid ideologies amongst Nationalists in the late 1940s and early 1950s; one she characterises as the 'total segregation' school and the other as the 'practical' school.⁹³

91 PRO DO35/ 4316, The Transfer Question; additional file note (anon.), 4 June 1953.

92 LeRoux, S.P. (Minister of Agriculture), Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 4th Session, 10th Parliament, 1952, p.7318. Similar statements in Parliament were also made by Abrahamson, Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 1st Session, 10th Parliament, 1948, p.1767, Mitchell, D.E., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 1st Session, 10th Parliament, 1948, p.2108 and Henwood, Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 2nd Session, 10th Parliament, 1949, p.6120.

93 Posel, D. *The Making of Apartheid 1948-61: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 49-60.

South African white commercial farmers had always looked to those small areas of the Union reserved for African occupation with envy, not just because of the land resources but, more importantly, because they saw within them a rich source of labour. Labour shortages in the commercial agricultural sector were endemic during the first half of this century, but became even worse during the Second World War with the flight of many farm workers to the towns and cities to take advantage of the new opportunities presented by the rapid growth of secondary industry. This perennial problem for white farmers underscored their attitude to most political and economic issues: though the ability and techniques used to gain labour varied greatly over time and between well capitalised large scale commercial farmers (the ‘mealie kings’) and poorer white farmers.⁹⁴ Generally larger farmers were able to fulfill their labour needs with state support and this meant that they were willing to accept the division of the African labour force into different economic sectors. This lay behind the support for policies to create a permanent urban labour force by the South African Agricultural Union’s (SAAU), the main vehicle for commercial farming interests. Nevertheless all farmers, large or small, were opposed to any land segregation policies that had a negative effect on them in practice. For example, farmers in areas near existing reserves vehemently opposed the extension to the reserves under the 1936 Land Act and, at a local level, often managed to delay or even prevent the purchase of scheduled land under the Act’s provisions.

Posel argues that the SAAU was one of the prime forces behind the ‘practical’ conception of apartheid in the late 1940s.⁹⁵ Their primary concern, and hence their conception of what apartheid meant, was finding a solution to their chronic labour shortage problems. Posel’s research concentrates on the allocation of labour between different sectors of the economy and hence her interest is in the SAAU’s attitude to influx control and not the organisations’ attitude towards the reserves. Nevertheless it is clear that even in 1948 many commercial farmers wanted to see not just a suspension of the scheduled area policy but the breaking up of the whole reserve system.

While the ‘total segregation’ conception of apartheid is often identified in popular histories as a uniquely Afrikaner ideology almost all professional historians accept that the earliest segregationists were English-speaking liberals.⁹⁶ These liberals were

94 Bradford, H. ‘Getting away With Murder: “Mealie Kings”, the State and Foreigners in the Eastern Transvaal, C.1918-1950’ in Bonner, P., Delius P. and Posel, D. (eds.) *Apartheid’s Genesis 1935-1962* (Braamfontein, 1993), pp. 96-125.

95 Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, p. 54.

96 Dubow, S. *Racial segregation and the origins of apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36* (Basingstoke, 1989).

concerned about the impact of African urbanisation and were anxious to find ways to keep African populations in the reserves. As we saw in chapter 2, by the early 1930s it was clear that conditions in the reserves were very poor and if their African population was to remain in these areas some sort of development policy was needed: the Native Affairs Department, therefore, began to implement Betterment policies designed to increase agricultural productivity.

The rapid rate of African urbanisation during the 1930s and more especially during the war years brought increased interest in the ‘native question’ amongst Afrikaner Nationalists. Accelerated rates of female migration, especially from Lesotho,⁹⁷ into Johannesburg and other Rand towns added to white fears of a permanently settled urban population politically able to challenge white supremacy: the increasingly vocal African opposition during the war years inevitably fuelled these fears. A number of Afrikaner Nationalists (often described as the ‘visionaries’), especially within the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA), began to advocate an ideology of ‘total segregation’ as a solution to these concerns. The ‘visionaries’ believed that in order to protect white supremacy there had to be the complete ‘separation of White and native into separate and self-sufficient socio-economic units’.⁹⁸ Given the heavy dependence of capital on African labour the ‘visionaries’ recognised there would need to be a significant economic sacrifice to enact this programme. For white workers too there was an obvious attraction to ‘total segregation’ as it would remove cheap African competition for jobs.

When the Nationalists came to power in 1948 there were, therefore, two distinct views about African occupation of land within the Apartheid fold: a ‘practical’ view that would happily alienate any African land where it suited white economic or political interests, and a ‘visionary’ view that looked to increase the size of the reserves and economic opportunities within them as a step towards ‘total segregation’. These contradictory and competing views of Apartheid both had their own constituencies within the National Party: the ‘practical’ view was generally espoused by both farming and large capitalist interests and ‘visionary’ view by workers and intellectuals.

Calls for the de-population of the Lesotho mountains seem to fit clearly within the ‘practical’ conception of Apartheid: the mountain population was causing siltation and problems for irrigated farming and should, therefore, be removed. In much of the

97 Bonner, “Desirable or Undesirable Sotho Women?”.

98 Eiselen, W.M. ‘The Meaning of Apartheid’, *Race Relations*, 15, 3, 1948, p. 80, quoted by Posel, *The Meaning of Apartheid*, p. 51.

literature on the rise of Apartheid the interests of white farmers are seen to be paramount. Dan O'Meara, in particular, sees agricultural capital as being the driving force, arguing that 'apartheid sought primarily to secure a stable labour supply for agriculture'.⁹⁹ While Posel lays more emphasis on conflicting conceptions of what apartheid meant to farmers, industrialists, workers or intellectuals she agrees that addressing the needs of white commercial agriculture was central to the design of apartheid.¹⁰⁰

Strijdom, who represented a farming constituency and was a long term advocate of irrigation farming,¹⁰¹ was the most vehement critic of British policy towards the environment in the three High Commission Territories. Baring records that during a meeting in March 1951 to discuss the proposals for the Senqu/Orange river dam Strijdom:

made it clear that his own belief is that in order to save the waters of the most important river in southern Africa it will one day be necessary to remove Natives not only from the mountains of Basutoland but also apparently from the lowlands. When pressed by me he admitted that much could be done to reduce soil erosion but he did not believe that it could be eliminated as long as there was a large Native population in Basutoland. I have often felt that this was the view of the Nationalist leaders.¹⁰²

There were, however, Nationalist MPs who were arguing for the opposite; ie. that Lesotho should support a greater population. Despite the 'practical'/'visionary' dichotomy outlined above one of these MPs was a representative of farming interests: J.N. le Roux the MP for Ladybrand and the Chairman of the Orange Free State Agricultural Union. In a speech in Parliament in 1946 Le Roux complained about British policy in Lesotho:

I also want to make an appeal to the Minister to get in touch with the Imperial Government in regard to the Protectorates. We have nothing to do with them today, but indirectly we have. I mention Basutoland here and I must say that the soil erosion in that Protectorate is a disgrace. It makes your heart sore when you see in Basutoland how the fine rich soil is being washed away and how it is ignored. Indirectly we shall pay for that, because the natives will be squeezed out, owing to not being able to make a living on the lands, and they will come to the Union in the near future, we shall again have to provide them with land and a place to settle. Therefore I would appeal to the Minister that as we have now become erosion conscious the Protectorates must fall into line and recover their land as well so that they can carry a greater population than is the case at present.¹⁰³

99 O'Meara, D. *Volkskapiyalisme: Class Capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, 1934-1948* (Cambridge, 1983), p.177.

100 Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, p.7.

101 His maiden speech in Parliament (29th July 1929) was about the need for a coordinated national irrigation scheme.

102 PRO DO35/4061, Baring to Baxter, 16 March 1951.

103 LeRoux, J.N., Union of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, 3rd Session, 9th

Nevertheless in the late 1940s and early 1950s the majority opinion within the National Party was that the mountain areas of Lesotho should be de-populated. This was certainly the assessment made by the Chief Secretary to the High Commissioners Office in February 1952 when he reported that the general ‘opinion in the Union holds that these mountains... should be evacuated’.¹⁰⁴

Over the next few years there was a major shift in attitude on the issue of African occupation of Lesotho, mirroring the development of a more concise conception of apartheid within the National Party. H.F. Verwoerd, the Party’s chief spokesman on ‘Native affairs’ and the leading policy maker, played a key role in the development of this strategy in the early years of apartheid. In 1948 Verwoerd was closely aligned with the SABRA ‘visionaries’ and through-out his career he continued to use their language and call for ‘total segregation’ as an ultimate ideal. He was, however, always careful to allay the fears of industrialists and farmers reliant upon African labour.¹⁰⁵

Verwoerd’s way around these contradictory ideologies was to state that they were being practical in the short term but were moving in the long-term situation where ‘total segregation’. The ideology was internally contradictory as the ‘practical’ policies would take the country along a different route from that leading to the purported ideal of ‘total segregation.’¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless Verwoerd’s ideology of apartheid was more than just ‘practical’ apartheid dressed up in ‘visionary’ language. Significantly for the debate here Verwoerd accepted the ‘visionary’ calls for the reserves to be developed economically (though he wanted to also use white capital) but he rejected calls for their territorial expansion.

The Tomlinson report¹⁰⁷ originally commissioned in 1950 but not finally published until 1956 was a key area of contest between Verwoerd and the ‘visionaries’.¹⁰⁸ Verwoerd announced that he accepted the report in principal though there were some details with which he disagreed. In practice few of the recommendation were ever enacted. Nevertheless the Tomlinson Report is relevant in respect to the issue because of what it said about the High Commission Territories.

Parliament, 1946, Vol. 56, p.8330.

104 PRO DO35/4014, Notes on visit by Turnbull to Basutoland, February 1952.

105 Lazar, J. “Verwoerd versus the “Visionaries”: The South African Bureau of Racial Affairs and Apartheid, 1948-1961” in Bonner, Delius and Posel, *Apartheid’s Genesis*, pp. 362-392, p.371.

106 Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, (chapter 3).

107 Tomlinson, F.R. *Summary of the Report of the Commission for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu areas within the Union of South Africa*, (Pretoria, 1955), p.181.

108 Lazar, ‘Verwoerd versus the “Visionaries”’.

This report envisaged that Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland would form three of the ‘cultural-historical cores’ of South Africa’s African population. The incorporation of the three High Commission Territories was seen as essential to the success of the policy of ‘total separation’. And by including their land areas in the calculations, the division of land between the African and European populations south of the Limpopo looked much more even, jumping from 13 percent to 47 percent.¹⁰⁹

Obviously if the ‘visionaries’ had had their way the population of Lesotho would have increased and, therefore, allegations of overcrowding in Lesotho would be incompatible. Verwoerd’s rejection of Tomlinson’s calls for the establishment of freehold tenure are also relevant in this respect. He stressed the importance of maintaining ‘traditional’ African communal land tenure - the very practice that was (and is still) so often blamed for causing poor farming techniques and overgrazing.

South Africa remained keen to get its hands on Lesotho in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but now in order to fully incorporate it into the ‘total’ apartheid system. When Strijdom visited London in 1956 he expressed very different views to those reported by Baring in 1951. Rather than calling for the removal of the African population from Lesotho he complained that the British policy of allowing white settlement in the three High Commission Territories did ‘not fit into the Union pattern’.¹¹⁰

While pressure for transfer of the High Commission Territories did not stop in 1954, complaints about soil erosion in official correspondence between London and Pretoria did suddenly disappear. The erosion and siltation issue is not mentioned once in lengthy correspondence between 1955 and 1960 over the feasibility of another reservoir scheme in the upper reaches of the Senqu/Orange river.¹¹¹ Similarly, press reports about proposed schemes on the South African stretches of the Orange river no longer pointed the finger of blame for the high silt content of the river at either the Basotho or the

109 Tomlinson *Summary of the Report of the Commission for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu areas*, p.183. This figure was based on a calculation including all of Swaziland, not just the ‘native areas’.

110 PRO DO35/4329, Note of conversation between Strijdom, Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, and Louw, Minister of Finance and External Affairs, and Sir Anthony Eden, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and the Earl of Home, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, at 10 Downing Street on 19th June 1956. The Natal Agricultural Union (NAU) continued to call for the ‘depopulation’ of watershed areas in the province into the 1960s, arguing that African agricultural practices were ruining some of the most fertile areas. These complaints were clearly linked to NAU opposition to plans to consolidate the ‘homelands’, see *Naunlu*, July 1967, quoted in Greenberg, S. *Race and State in Capitalist Development* (New York , 1980), p103.

111 DO35/7256, Regional water supplies in Basutoland: Ox-Bow Lake Scheme.

British.¹¹² With South African pressure off the need for anti-erosion policies in the mountains of Lesotho was no longer had of political importance and the Commonwealth Relation Office's interest in the issue quickly waned. The soil erosion specialists in the Basutoland administration obviously continued to take an interest, but their mission was no longer seen as politically vital

112 See, for example, cuttings from the *Diamond Field Advertiser*, 16 October 1957 to 18 May 1965, in KAB 3/KIM-4/1/183-039.

7. The politics of land and rural development in colonial Lesotho

7.1. Introduction

Land has been, and still is, an intensely political issue in Lesotho. The loss of the ‘occupied territories’ to the Free State was a near fatal economic and political blow to the Basotho state in the nineteenth century, and it is an issue that still has political resonance in Lesotho today.¹ During the Gun War (1880-82) land was a pre-eminent issue; Basotho opposition to disarmament was often couched in terms of losing their ability to defend their territory. The war was also spurred on by Gordon Spriggs’s proclamation that his Cape Government were going to divide up Quthing district in the south of Lesotho and sell it off as reparations for Cape expenditure in putting down the Moorosi Rebellion. As Sandra Burman has noted:

The Sotho naturally regarded the Quthing confiscation as further evidence that the Cape Government desired to gobble up Sotho land for white men’s farms.²

The political sensitivity of land meant that rural development projects, which usually alter the way in which land is used, were always potentially highly political affairs.

In this chapter I will explore the politics surrounding colonial rural development projects and rights to control land use in general and the closure policy proposed in 1947 in particular. One of the central arguments will be that the British colonial state was both unwilling and unable to radically reform land tenure arrangements, despite the fact that they believed the tenure system was a major cause of the country’s economic decline.³ The chapter will also suggest that the relationship between the colonial state and Basotho chiefs can not be adequately explained as either collaboration or resistance and needs to take into account more complex and dynamic political interactions. Underlying much of the chapter is a comparison with similar environment and development projects in the South African and Southern Rhodesian reserves.

1 Perry, J.A.G. ‘Land Power and the Lie’, *Man*, 16, 2, 1981, pp. 235-250; Perry, J.A.G. ‘Land and Politics in Lesotho’, *African Studies*, 42, 1, 1983, pp. 57-66; Parsons, N. and Palmer, R. ‘Introduction: Historical Background’ in Palmer and Parsons, *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, pp. 1-32, p.21.

2 Burman, S. *Chiefdom Politics and Alien Law: Basutoland Under Cape Rule 1871-1884* (New York, 1981), p. 135.

3 Chakela, *Review and bibliography*, p.8.

7.2. A ‘labour reserve’ with a difference

I started the previous chapter by criticising some literature on Lesotho for ignoring the country’s geopolitical reality; i.e. it is surrounded by South Africa. Rather perversely I start this chapter by suggesting that there is a danger that academics interested in the agrarian history of Lesotho may be blinded by South African historiography.

A flick through the bibliographies of most articles or monographs about Lesotho’s economic history will reveal many of the names familiar to South African historians: Legassick, Wolpe and Bundy followed by Keegan, Bradford and Beinart.⁴ This is hardly surprising given the continued pertinence of the ‘labour reserve’ hypothesis, most cogently argued by Murray.⁵ Clearly any understanding of Lesotho’s economy has to be based on its structural position within the wider southern African economy and, as Murray mentions and Maloka has demonstrated,⁶ British policy was largely, or even primarily, determined by the urge to produce cheap labour for South African mines and farms. This does not mean, however, that Lesotho was ‘just another reserve’. Some of the differences between Lesotho and the South African reserves are clearly evident in the area of rural development policy.

While the Basutoland administration was influenced by many of the same ideas about the African environment, and Africans in their environment, that underlay livestock management and pasture reclamation policies elsewhere in southern and eastern Africa (see chapters 3 and 4) the projects actually attempted in Lesotho were very different to those in South Africa or Southern Rhodesia. The two major factors which inspired widespread resistance to livestock development policies in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, namely fencing and forcible culling, were never attempted in Lesotho. Furthermore the major scheme in Lesotho, the massive grazing closure policy in Mokhotlong and Qacha’s Nek, was never closely administered by the colonial state, implementation being left up to the local chiefly authorities. The key to understanding these differences is in the very different nature of the state; the most crucial differences were in the field of public finances and in the political structure of the respective administrations.

4 See for example Franklin, *Land Law in Lesotho*.

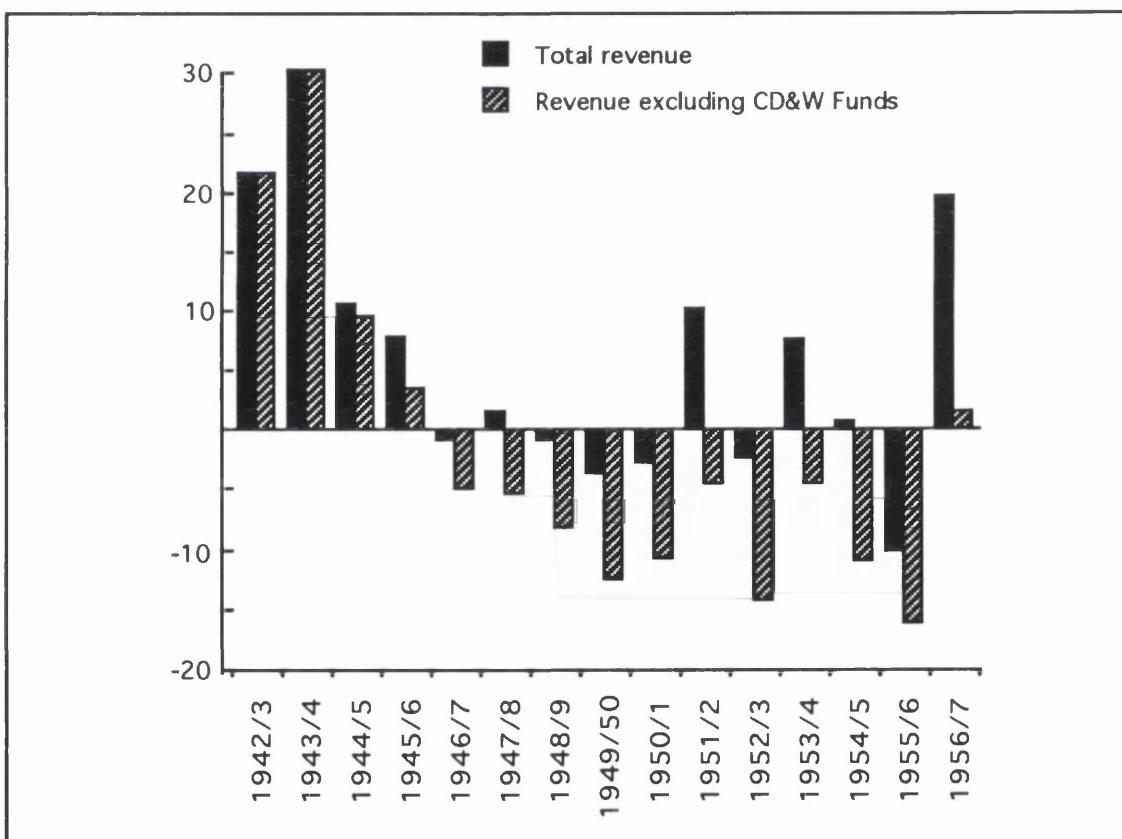
5 Murray, ‘From granary to labour reserve’.

6 Maloka, ‘Basotho and the Mines’.

7.2.1. Administration on a shoestring

The underlying rule of British administration of Lesotho was that expenditure should never exceed revenue. The government tended to produce an annual surplus that over the years built up to a fairly significant figure: in 1940 the Basutoland National Council, under the influence of Paramount Chief Seeiso, voted to grant £100,000 out of a £223,000 surplus to the British Government to help with ‘the War effort’.⁷ This figure was substantial compared with a total annual revenue in 1939/40 of only £421,035.⁸ During the late 1940s and early 1950s the Basutoland government ran a small annual budget deficit, though this more than covered by its healthy reserves (in March 1956 the accumulated balance stood at £523,415).⁹

Figure 7.1 Surplus or deficit of revenue as percent of expenditure (1942/3 - 1956/7).¹⁰



7 Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 35th Session*, 19 October 1940, quoted by Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, p.195.

8 DO25/15, Basutoland Blue Book, 1940.

9 United Kingdom, *Colonial Annual Report: Basutoland 1956* (London, 1957).

10 Calculated from United Kingdom, *Colonial Annual Reports*.

This financial consideration meant that the Basutoland authorities were extremely constrained in their ability to intervene directly in the development of the colonial economy. This situation was alleviated, to an extent, after 1929 with the advent of the Colonial Development Fund and later loans and grants available under the 1939 and 1945 Colonial Development and Welfare Acts.¹¹ Although in 1969 Sandra Wallman placed a particular emphasis on the shortcomings of the Colonial Development and Welfare (CD&W) Scheme for the failures of the Taung Reclamation Scheme and the 'Farmech' Mechanisation Scheme,¹² the significance of CD&W has yet to be explored in the more recent literature on the history of rural development in Lesotho. Kate Showers mentions that funding for the massive lowland anti-erosion works came from the Colonial Development Fund but does not consider the implications of this form of funding for the way in which the project was managed.¹³

Given their peculiar administrative position any development scheme from the three High Commission Territories had to be pushed extremely hard to gain wider attention in Whitehall. Wallman noted that in order to attract funding:

A scheme must be drawn up in such a way that it will catch the eye of an extensive hierarchy of office-bound administrators and technicians. One is tempted, therefore, to exaggerate its importance and its likely effect - even [to] put up an unnecessarily large scheme so that London will consider it worthy of outside funds.¹⁴

In the immediate post-War era the new Labour administration attempted to introduce state-led development of large-scale capital projects with the aim of increasing African productive capacity.¹⁵ The system allocating CD&W funds meant that small countries such as the three High Commission Territories were only likely to get funding for one or two large-scale schemes. In Swaziland CD&W funding went mainly to road building and forestry, in the Bechuanaland Protectorate it went to the cattle industry and in Lesotho to the anti-erosion scheme begun in the lowlands in the late 1930s.¹⁶

¹¹ Swaziland received some funding in the form of grants-in-aid in the two years prior to the establishment of the Colonial Development Fund and received the most generous funding out of the three Territories during the 1930s. Lesotho and the Bechuanaland Protectorate did not receive any funds from the Colonial Development Fund until after 1934, Spence, 'British Policy Towards the High Commission Territories', p. 233.

¹² Wallman, *Take Out Hunger*, p. 165-170.

¹³ Showers, 'Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho'.

¹⁴ Wallman, *Take Out Hunger*, p.168.

¹⁵ Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*, p.296-297.

¹⁶ Baring, 'Economic Development under the High Commission'. See also Samatar, A.I. and Oldfield, S. 'Class and Effective State Institutions: the Botswana Meat Commission', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33, 4, 1995, pp. 651-668. Baring commented that 'the British Treasury always give a grant in aid with absolute... maximum of control and minimum of money', Transcript of recording of a discussion between Lord Howick [Evelyn Baring] and Dame Margery Perham

The anti-erosion scheme was attributed huge significance by both the High Commissioner's office and the Secretariat in Maseru. Some people within the administration feared that the anti-erosion scheme was actually being over emphasised¹⁷ and in 1946 the Basutoland administration almost over-played its hand in trying to secure renewed funds. Nevertheless it was this scheme that received the bulk of external funding: for the 1946/7 financial year the anti-erosion scheme was allocated £32,000¹⁸ out of a total of £36,165 expenditure on all CD&W schemes in the country.¹⁹ Between 1947 and 1957 CD&W Funds contributed on average just under seven percent of the total national revenue (see Figure 7.2). These funds take on a greater significance when considered in the light of the need to always balance the annual budget (see Figure 7.1).

With CD&W funds being allocated to the lowland anti-erosion project and with very few other sources of possible revenue any scheme designed to prevent degradation of the mountain pastures had to be extremely cheap. This necessity of having a cheap scheme goes a long way towards explaining the differences between pasture regeneration projects in Lesotho and similar projects in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.

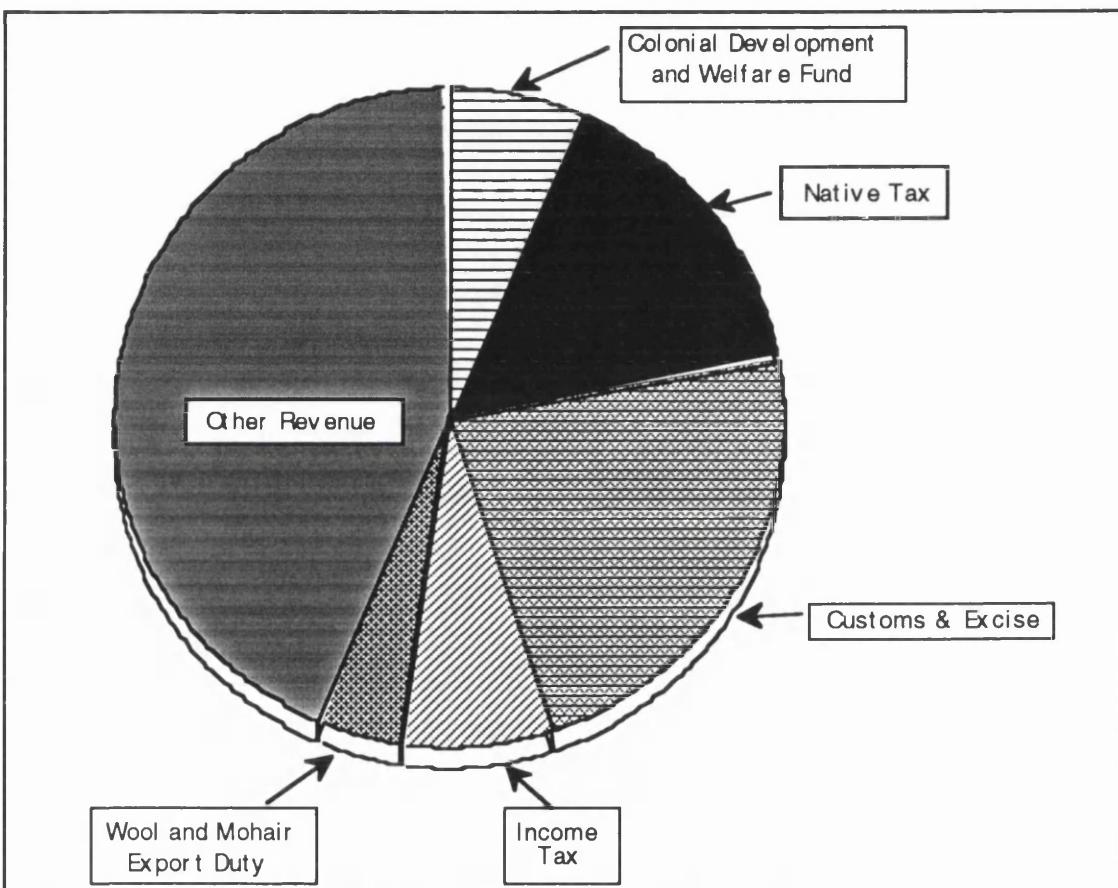
It is not easy to directly compare the levels of expenditure in the South African reserves with expenditure in the High Commission Territories. Though many figures were banded about, most of these were unreliable.²⁰ In 1954 the High Commissioner's Office in Pretoria attempted to calculate figures to compare expenditure in South Africa and the Territories. They did not get very far in the exercise and eventually gave-up, concluding 'whatever analysis was produced could not alter the basic fact that the Union do spend much more per head on Africans than we do'.²¹ This assessment would appear to be born out by the figures that are available. According to Verwoerd the Union government spent £5,000,000 on 'reclamation work' during the period 1945-53 (this included things such as the construction of contour banks, grass strips, fencing,

which took place in Oxford on 19 November 1969, Rhodes House, MSSAfr.s. 1574, p. 57.

- 17 In February 1952 the Chief Secretary to the High Commissioners Office noted that the Basutoland Department of Agriculture as not 'adverse to taking departmental advantage of the importance of its task', PRO DO35/4014, Notes on the visit of the Chief Secretary to the High Commissioners Office to Basutoland, February 1952.
- 18 PRO DO35/1187/Y1136/23, Application for Colonial Development and Welfare Funds, Telegram from Dominion Office to High Commissioner, 25 October 1946. The total grant was for £282,000 over a ten year period.
- 19 United Kingdom, *Colonial Annual Report: Basutoland 1947* (London, 1947), p.19.
- 20 Robert MacIntosh, pers.cors. 18 July 1997.
- 21 PRO DO35/4538, Liesching to Le Rougetel, 10 August 1954.

irrigation and sinking boreholes).²² The Basutoland administration's expenditure on 'conservation work' (mainly spent on building contour banks, dams and grass strips) amounted to just £404,000 between 1946 and 1954.²³ Even in *per capita* terms the expenditure by the Union government was at least double that of the Basutoland administration.²⁴

Figure 7.2 Sources of revenue for the Basutoland administration between 1946/7 to 1956/7.



This different level of expenditure goes a long way to explaining the difference in implementation of conservation/development policies between the South African

²² Robert MacIntosh, pers.cors. 18 July 1997, quoting Verwoerd, *Debates of the House of Assembly*, p. 3514-3515, September 1953.

²³ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1954, p. 20.

²⁴ The 1956 population census reported a *de facto* population of 641,674 in Lesotho compared to an official 1954 population of 3,307,234 in the 'Bantu Areas' of South Africa; Union of South Africa, Native Affairs Department, *Report of the Department of Native Affairs for the Years 1954-54*, (UG 53/1956), pp. 9-10.

reserves and Lesotho. A full explanation, however, also needs to take into account its very different administrative and political structure.

7.2.2. Chiefly authority and colonial rule in Lesotho.

During the late 19th century the settler states of southern Africa attempted to confine and diminish the powers exercised by African chiefs over their followers. In the Transkei, for example, an administration was established based around district magistrates and village headmen which undermined the power of middle-and-upper ranking chiefs.²⁵ During the short-lived Cape administration of Lesotho there were similar policies to reduce the independent power of African leaders, but for at least seventy years after the Gun War the British followed a policy of maintaining the existing powers of the chiefs: in the words of one Basutoland official ‘the administration is concerned in upholding the existing hierarchy’.²⁶

This did not mean, however, that the Basutoland colonial authorities did not intervene in the country’s administrative system. The core pre-colonial institution linking chiefs with commoners, the *pitso*, was transformed into a simply ceremonial institution and in 1903 a new National Council, where the chiefs and their closest advisors could discuss the domestic affairs of the territory, was established in its place. This and other changes tended to dilute pre-existing checks on the power of chiefs by commoners.²⁷

The Basutoland administration also intervened in conflicts between different leading chiefs. They were keen to have a simple unitary chiefly structure under the leadership of the most powerful Koena clan (to which Moshoeshoe had belonged), as they felt it would be easier to work with than numerous semi-autonomous clans as had existed in the pre-colonial era.²⁸

Nevertheless L.B.B.J. Machobane has argued that the Basutoland administration basically followed a policy of non-interference prior to the late 1920s. He quotes from, and agrees with, a statement made by the Pim Commission in 1935:

The Protectorate policy followed with reference to ... [Lesotho] has little in common with indirect rule. It has been a policy of non-interference, of proffering

25 Beinart and Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa*, p. 79.

26 LNA S3/22/2/1, Clifford to Sturrock, 8 October quoted by Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*.

27 Maloka, “All Chiefs are Shepherds”; Gill, S. J. *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija, 1993); Weisfelder, *The Basotho Monarchy*.

28 Hamnett, I. *Chieftainship and Legitimacy: An Anthropological Study of Executive Law in Lesotho*, (London, 1975), p.35. See Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho* for a detailed discussion of the political and constitutional manoeuvrings in this period.

alliance, of leaving two parallel Governments to work in a state of detachment unknown in tropical Africa.²⁹

Machobane argues that the key to understanding this non-interference was the administrative inertia caused primarily by the confusion over the exact constitutional position of the territory. It was not until the colonial government came under increasing pressure during the 1920s from two commoners' political organisations (Lekhotla la Bafo and the Basutoland Progressive Association) that they began to consider introducing reforms to the system of administration.

Some authors, such as Tishidiso Maloka, Judy Kimble and Gabriele Winai-Strom have downplayed the 'parallel' nature of the late 19th and early 20th century administration and labelled the territory as being administered by a system of 'indirect rule'.³⁰

Whatever the exact nature of the early colonial state it is clear that the main thrust of British policy from the mid-1920s through to the mid-1940s was the establishment of an administration akin to the other African 'indirect rule' colonies, with Uganda providing a particularly important model.³¹ This shift from locally determined 'laissez faire' indirect rule to a more formalised Imperial notion of indirect rule was similar to the process many British African colonies underwent in the early decades of the twentieth century.³² The main difference in Lesotho was that this shift did not occur until the late 1930s to early 1940s.³³

The process of reforming the system was long and complex, and the chiefs were able to resist the introduction of reforms they felt would challenge their authority. Under

29 Pim, *Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland*, p.49, quoted by Machobane, *The Political Dilemma of Chieftaincy*. Hugh Ashton attributed a very similar phrase to Margery Perham though he does not reference the quote: Ashton, E. H. 'Political Organisation of the Southern Sotho', *Bantu Studies*, 12, 1938, pp.287 - 320, p. 290.

30 Maloka, "All Chiefs are Shepherds"; Kimble, 'Clinging to the Chiefs' and Winai-Strom, G. *Migration and Development, Dependence on South Africa: a study of Lesotho* (Uppsala, 1978).

31 J.C Sturrock, the first Resident Commissioner to try to introduce fundamental reforms in the territory's administration, had previously been posted to Uganda, where he had overseen the codification of customary law as the Uganda Native Administration and Court Regulations, Machobane, *Government and Change*, p. 178.

32 Berry, S. 'Hegemony on a shoestring'. To make a distinction between an earlier 'laissez faire' system of indirect rule and the reformed system of administration I have capitalised the term indirect rule in the remainder of this chapter when referring to the post-1938 period to indicate its affinity to the wider model of administration.

33 The desire for reform, however, existed much earlier, at least amongst some Basutoland civil servants. Sturrock tried to introduce reforms in the late 1920s but his plans were scuppered by effective opposition from members of the Basutoland National Council, largely orchestrated by the leading light of Lekhotla la Bafo, Josiel Lefela (see Machobane, *Government and Change*, p. 177-182). Whilst Lekhotla la Bafo were severe critics of chiefly abuse of power they were strong supporters of the institution of chieftainship and resisted British reforms which they felt would weaken the institution, see Edgar *Prophets with Honour*.

Proclamation 2B of 1884 the High Commissioner was empowered ‘to make such laws as may appear to be necessary for the peace, order and good government’ of the territory.³⁴ In reality the Basutoland administration rarely used these legislative powers to determine domestic policies. Though the Basutoland National Council was established merely as a consultative body the British administration tended not to legislate unless the Basutoland National Council agreed.

In 1929, when Sturrock first proposed reforms to the system of administration and the judicial function of chiefs, he simply dropped his plans when it became clear the Basutoland National Council would resist the policy.³⁵ When the National Council did eventually agree to reforms, in 1938 and 1944, the quid pro quo was essentially that the major chiefs would maintain their authority, and be paid handsome salaries from state coffers, at the expense of the more junior chiefs and headmen.³⁶

The Basutoland administration’s hopes of running the territory’s administration via a streamlined and efficient system of Indirect Rule proved to be short-lived, however. Internal squabbles amongst the major chiefs, and dissatisfaction on the part of more junior chiefs, resulted in a spate of widely publicised murders³⁷ and the changing imperial mood led the colonial authorities to re-consider the role of the chiefs in the administration. As early as 1949 the Chief Secretary to the High Commissioner reported that:

I am far from happy about the picture which Basutoland presents today. It is very easy to criticise but we are now reaping the harvest of a long period during which we have bolstered up over much what is at best an obsolete feudalism and at worst a tyrannical dictatorship. I know that the administration officers in Basutoland argue that the tribal system there is extremely democratic; everyone has a say in tribal gatherings. But I do not put much faith in such protestations ... The ‘Chiefery’ has proved itself pretty rotten at the core and no longer worthy of blind support.³⁸

34 Section 4 of Proclamation 2B of 1884.

35 The basic argument used against the reforms in the National Council was that the Resident Commissioner did not have the power to introduce legislation under 1884 Proclamation, as the Proclamation dated from the era of direct Cape administration. This was not actually the case but Sturrock did not feel confident enough in his grasp of the territory’s constitutional history to argue against the point, see Machobane, *Government and Change*, p. 177-182.

36 Machobane, *Government and Change*, p. 221.

37 Jones, G.I. *Basutoland Medicine Murder: a report on the recent outbreak of ‘liretlo’ murders in Basutoland* (Cmd. 8209, London, 1951); Eldredge, E.A. ‘Medicine murder and power: the consolidation of colonial control in British Basutoland in the 1940s’, (unpublished paper presented to The South African Historical Society, 16th Biennial Conference, University of Pretoria, 6 July 1997); Murray, C. and Sanders, P. have work in progress on the Bereng and Gabashane case.

38 PRO DO119/1376, Ritual Murders and Witchcraft: Basutoland Memorandum on The Native Administration of Basutoland with particular reference to Ritual Murder, by W.A.W. Clarke (Chief Secretary, High Commissioners Office), 25 January 1949.

The colonial authorities also began to come under increasing pressure from within Lesotho to institute a process of de-colonisation and establish a democratic political system. During the first half of the 1950s the National Council, still dominated by the chiefly elite but with a growing commoner representation, made increasingly vocal demands that it be given legislative powers. After 1952 these demands were given increased militancy by the establishment of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) and eventually led to the establishment of a Legislative Council in 1960.

7.3. Rural development projects before the Indirect Rule reforms

As we saw in chapters 3 and 4 fears about land degradation and its impact on Lesotho's struggling agricultural economy increased rapidly during the early 1930s. These fears were not, however, turned into policy until after the middle of the decade. This was largely because of the perceived inability to intervene in the rural economy until the system of administration had been reformed and external funding was made available. Whatever the desires of the colonial officials to intervene they were essentially hamstrung until they could move some way towards overcoming these two constraints.

In the wake of Russell Thornton's 1931 report on grazing in the mountains, F.A. Verney, the Principal Veterinary Officer, made a number of suggestions for livestock development policies and other environmental protection measures. He placed particular blame for the situation on the system of administration:

The greatest weakness at the moment is the calibre of our Chiefs. It is to be regretted that so few of our Chiefs take any real interest in the 'general agricultural' welfare of the people.³⁹

His report was not well received by Sturrock who had been forced to abandon his own attempt at reforming the system of chiefly rule in 1929. Beside Verney's comment that he agreed with Thornton's recommendation that people be stopped ploughing up grazing land and that he had 'advocated this sometime ago', Sturrock wrote:

39 LNA 212, Verney to Foord, 28 September 1931. Verney also complained that: 'most of our important chiefs today are far too sedentary; few ride a horse or go amongst their people and see what is really taking place, and the majority of them do all their travelling in a luxurious motor car and I am perfectly certain, at their stage of evolution, the Almighty never intended this'. Beside this Sturrock commented 'I fear that this is also a characteristic of many European administrators'. Intriguingly a similar complaint about chiefs driving around in cars had been made by Keable 'Mote, the Provincial Secretary of the Orange Free State Branch of the ICU (the 'Lion of the Free State') only a few months previously (though obviously without the racist social Darwinism): 'The chiefs tour around in big motor cars and have no association with the peasants'. 'Mote, K. 'The awakening of Basutoland', *Ikwezi le Afrika*, 18 April 1931, in Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, p.168.

We have all advocated it, but how to establish control. We have never really annexed this country and the relations between us and the Native Government are hopelessly undefined.⁴⁰

A letter from Verney suggested that the Paramount Chief should be ‘ordered to institute the old method of the ploughing board, which in our experience does not exist today’: beside the suggestion Sturrock simply wrote ‘By whom!’.⁴¹

In subsequent correspondence with the Sir H.J. Stanley, the High Commissioner, Sturrock made it clear why he believed the Basutoland administration could do little in the way of rural development:

I would ... stress the fact, so often stressed before, that all improvements of present agricultural practices, in as far as it is based upon accepted European principles, does in fact tend to undermine the traditional system of land tenure and on that account is apt to meet with suspicion and opposition from the Paramount Chief and his Chiefs.

He went on to say that any change in land tenure would represent a ‘social revolution’ and that the introduction of individual land tenure ‘could only be effected after a change in the relative position of Chiefs and people’.⁴²

Sturrock also pointed out that the administration’s efforts to improve the productivity of the livestock sector benefited only the wealthiest members of the population who owned large herds of sheep and goats. Whilst Lekhotla la Bafo complained vigorously about the dipping campaign, opposition within the National Council tended to be muted.⁴³ Owners of larger flocks may have been more willing to put up with the loss of some livestock in exchange for better returns on wool or mohair, especially if they were benefiting from the highly subsidised sale of high quality rams. The chiefs were not, however, willing to contemplate any moves to reduce the livestock population; in 1925 the Council had discussed a recommendation from Verney to reduce the livestock population, but every speaker was opposed to the plan and nothing came of it.

The National Council were much more supportive of a plan to introduce a national soil conservation scheme. When this was discussed in the 1932 session many chiefs expressed support for the idea. Some went so far as to suggest that commoners should provide free labour, presumably under the system of matsema labour.⁴⁴ Chiefly abuse

40 LNA 212, margin note [by Sturrock] on Verney to Foord, 28 September 1931.

41 LNA 212, Verney and Wacher to Foord, 23 November 1931 and margin note [by Sturrock].

42 LNA 212, Sturrock to Stanley, 4 December 1931.

43 In the 1927 two prominent chiefs, Makhaola and Sekonyana, both requested that more dip tanks be built in the mountain areas, Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 22nd Session, 1927*, pp.21-22.

44 Pim, *Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland*, p. 139.

of *matsema* labour was, however, the issue over which Lekhotla la Bafo was most consistently vocal⁴⁵ and the colonial authorities appeared to be more sensitive of the political ramifications of expanding the use of *matsema* labour for public works than some of the chiefs.⁴⁶ Without the necessary funds, or a clear locus for intervention, the colonial authorities were unable to take forward the national anti-erosion project.

Nevertheless the colonial authorities kept the idea in mind and when the Pim Commission arrived in the territory it was one of the things that the Department of Agriculture particularly stressed in their submission.⁴⁷ Though the publication of the Pim Commission report is often seen as a pivotal point in the history of Lesotho its real significance was simply that it gave what Machobane calls ‘moral support’⁴⁸ to pre-existing concerns amongst the Basutoland administration and led directly to the opening of Whitehall coffers. The section of the report on soil erosion was based largely on the submission from Thornton⁴⁹ and the Commission was convinced of the necessity and feasibility of a national soil conservation plan after visiting the scheme initiated by Thornton in Herschel.⁵⁰ Thornton’s detailed estimates for a similar programme were included as a annex to the report and these formed the basis of the funding subsequently granted from the Colonial Development Fund.

45 Edgar *Prophets with Honour* p.10.

46 Rugege argues that the colonial state used *matsema* labour to ‘extract surplus labour from the peasants for all kinds of public works such as building court houses, roads, bridges etc.’ Rugege, S. ‘Chieftainship and society in Lesotho’, p.24. He does not cite any evidence to support this contention and I believe it may be somewhat of an exaggeration. Sheddick (to whom Rugege refers later in the thesis when discussing *matsema* labour, p. 338) states that *matsema* labour was used in the construction of ‘native courts’, pulling up burr-weed from pastures and the construction of dams, Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, p.151. The abuse of *matsema* labour by chiefs was a major complaint from Lekhotla la Bafo and they would have raised an out-cry if the colonial authorities made heavy demands on this form of labour. In 1943 they did complain to the Paramount Chief about *matsema* labour being used to plant trees in dongas on behalf of the government, Rabase Sekike to Chieftainess ‘Mantsebo Seeiso, 30 May 1943, MA 1/33. 1937-1946 in Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, p.137-140, but on the whole the complaints tended to be directed against the senior chiefs. Furthermore concerns about fulfilling the labour demands of South African mines and farms would have discouraged the Basutoland authorities from extracting large amounts of labour within the territory.

47 PRO DO 119/1051, Commission of Inquiry: Financial and Economic Mission to Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, Answer to Questionnaire sent by Sir Alan Pim in preparation for Commission, 31 August 1934.

48 Machobane, *Government and Change*, p.187.

49 PRO DO 119/1051, Commission of Inquiry: Financial and Economic Mission to Basutoland, Dept. of Agriculture, Answer to Questionnaire sent by Sir Alan Pim in preparation for Commission, 31 August 1934.

50 Pim, *Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland*, pp. 137-140.

When the Colonial Development Fund agreed to grant £160,233 over a ten-year period to institute the national soil conservation project⁵¹ the Basutoland administration was able to overcome the first of the two stumbling blocks outlined above. The prior acceptance of the principal of a soil conservation programme by the National Council might have suggested to the Basutoland administration that they could count on the support of the major chiefs and overcome the second major stumbling block. Nevertheless they remained extremely wary of the possible reaction to the policy amongst the Basotho population.

One good reason to be wary was the potential opposition from Lekhotla la Bafo to any external development funding. As Edgar notes in the introduction to *Prophets with Honour*:

Lekhotla la Bafo opposed any assistance - whether for soldiers' pensions or anti-erosion schemes - over which the Basotho had no control. It reasoned that no matter how positive a contribution development assistance might make, it was a subtle way of distracting the Basotho and paving the way for European settlement.⁵²

Despite the fact that they tended to dismiss Lekhotla la Bafo as unhinged trouble-makers the Basutoland authorities were wary about their opposition to any policy. Not only was the organisation able to claim widespread popular support in many areas of the country they were also, on occasions, able to muster support in the National Council. The Basutoland administration had already experienced the ability of Josiel Lefela to rally support within the National Council, despite his antagonism to some of the most important chiefs. Machobane argues that it was largely the influence of Lefela that led the 1929 National Council to reject Sturrock's reform programme.⁵³

According to Kate Showers and Gwendolyn Malahleha, Paramount Chief Griffith was opposed to the idea of the national anti-erosion scheme and only agreed to it at the last minute:

Discussion about implementing this programme took place between the British administration and the Paramount Chief Griffith in private meetings and with the chiefs and representatives of the National Council. Chief Griffith refused to consider any kind of soil conservation programme until he was quite old and weak. He finally agreed to the national soil conservation programme in a series of bargaining sessions in which concessions were made to him about nominating his successor in exchange for agreement to certain British administrative activities.⁵⁴

Showers and Malahleha cite an unnamed oral source, a historian and teacher in Quthing district, as evidence for this secret bargaining session. Though Showers and Malahleha

51 Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1936, p.1.

52 Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, p.15.

53 Machobane, *Government and Change*, p. 177-182.

54 Showers and Malahleha, 'Oral Evidence in Historical Environmental Impact Assessment', p. 287.

make no reference to it there is a published source that appears to support their analysis: a letter from Rabase Sekike of Lekhotla la Bafo to Paramount Chief 'Mantsebo'. The letter starts by complaining about the anti-erosion campaign and later states that 'in secret your father-in-law [Griffith] signed documents yielding [the rights of Basotho] to Europeans'.⁵⁵ There is, however, some evidence to suggest that Showers and Malahleha's informant and Rabase Sekike may have been mistaken. Firstly the Basutoland authorities did not make concessions to Griffith over the nomination of his successor. Indeed, as Machobane shows, they consistently refused formally to accept the nomination of his son Bereng over his other son Seeiso and, in fact, engineered the accession of Seeiso on Griffith's death.⁵⁶ Furthermore the official record of the discussion between Griffith and the Basutoland authorities over the succession question contained nothing about amending the administrative arrangements or about soil conservation. Essentially these discussion took place in the late 1920s, before the soil conservation scheme was mooted, and when discussion between the chiefs and colonial state was dominated by Sturrock's' draft Regulations.

Given the potential for opposition in the National Council the Basutoland authorities did not re-introduce the policy in 1935 and took the 1932 vote of support as their locus for action.⁵⁷ Acceptance of the anti-erosion scheme did not, however, mean that the Basutoland authorities had overcome the constitutional difficulties concerning their rights to intervene in land tenure arrangements. In order for the project to go ahead the Basutoland authorities had to accept as a 'first principal' that contour banks would cut through and across fields.⁵⁸ In 1937 there was no legislation under either the 'customary' Laws of Lerotoli or from a High Commissioner's Proclamation which gave them the right to intervene in land use in this manner.⁵⁹

55 Rabase Sekike to 'Matsaba Seeiso Griffith, 2 February 1941, MA 1/33, 1937-1946, in Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, p. 140-141.

56 See Machobane, *Government and Change*, p.188-196.

57 Showers and Malahleha make no reference to these discussions in the National Council, which they simply dismissed as a 'talking shop' full of 'yes men', Showers and Malahleha 'Oral Evidence in Historical Environmental Impact Assessment', p. 284.

58 The colonial authorities may have been willing to construct contour banks across fields but they stopped short of rearranging the pattern of field allocations so that fields were bounded by the banks, arguing that 'the adjustment of fields is regarded as a matter to be settled between the people and the Chiefs'; LNA 1486, Thornton, R.W., Outcome of Investigations, March 1938.

59 It was not until 1941 that an Order was passed by the Paramount Chief (Order No. 1/26, Office of the Paramount Chief, Matsieng, 26 March 1941) which stated that: 'It shall be lawful to lay down anti-erosion works, such as contour terrace banks and contour grass strips anywhere in Basutoland where these measures are considered necessary, irrespective of field boundaries'. See below for further details on this Order.

The Basutoland authorities would also have been well aware that acceptance of the scheme by the National Council did not mean that individual chiefs would actually support its implementation in their wards or villages. Their concerns appeared to have been well founded: Showers and Malahleha's oral informants in Quthing and Maseru districts reported that the local chiefs never arrested or fined anybody who removed or adapted the contour banks constructed across their fields.⁶⁰

This concern about the willingness of chiefs at a local level to administer the construction and maintenance of contour banks may explain why the Basutoland authorities used mechanical power rather than labour power to build the contour banks.⁶¹ In his original plans for the scheme Thornton envisaged that contour banks would be built by teams of paid labourers.⁶² Indeed this is how the Herschel contour banks had been constructed. Showers and Malahleha report that the contour banks in the Mobu valley, which were probably the first to be constructed under the scheme, were built by hand but by 1938 manual labour had been largely replaced by mechanical labour.⁶³ By relying on professional construction teams the anti-erosion scheme was able to free itself from having to rely upon teams of labourers organised by local chiefs and headmen. Showers and Malahleha cite the fact that contour banks were driven across the landscape with no reference to the local population as an example of the absolute authority of the British,⁶⁴ but ironically it was the *lack* of control over the chiefly administration that probably led to the decision to use mechanical power.

- 60 Showers and Malahleha, 'Oral Evidence in Historical Environmental Impact Assessment'. Though until 1941 there were no regulations pertaining to the maintenance of contour banks and it is not clear under what legislation people could have been fined before that date. There is one archival report prior to 1941 of someone being 'strongly dealt with' (by Chief Bereng on behalf of his father at Matsieng) for ploughing up and down the contours, LNA 1486, Thornton, R.W., Outcome of Investigations.
- 61 PRO DO 119/1096 includes a set of photographs of contour banks being constructed by tractors in 1946. Also see South African National Film Archive, FA1912 - 3 'The Story of Matsele', filmed by Lewis, L. for the National Veld Trust, which includes footage of contour banks being constructed in c. 1947.
- 62 Thornton's original estimates were based on gangs of 100 men, paid a rate of 9d per day, Pim, *Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland*, Annex XIX, Estimate of Sum Required for Soil Erosion Work, p. 221
- 63 Showers and Malahleha, 'Oral Evidence in Historical Environmental Impact Assessment', p. 290, footnote 60. Showers and Malahleha report that the contour banks in this valley were built sometime in mid-1937. Jacks and Whyte (*The Rape of the Earth*) include a picture (taken on 9 June 1937) of contour banks near to Matsieng which they report were built in December 1935. If this is correct the banks at Matsieng were built before the CD&W funding was available and may explain why they were built by hand.
- 64 Showers and Malahleha, 'Oral Evidence in Historical Environmental Impact Assessment', p. 295.

Another possible explanation may be British concerns about removing workers from the migrant labour system. It is likely, however, that labour would have been forthcoming within Lesotho at wage levels that would not have provided competition with either the mines or Free State farms. In Herschel District labourers were paid six pence a day, plus a ration of mealie meal valued at three pence. These rates were significantly lower than those for miners on the Rand⁶⁵ and the Pim Commission noted that ‘the gangs employed consist ... mainly of labourers who are unfit or unwilling to work on the mines’.⁶⁶

The Basutoland Department of Agriculture saw the anti-erosion works begun in 1937 as very much a first stage in a more comprehensive anti-erosion programme. The degradation of mountain pastures was being examined in an ecological survey, also funded from the Colonial Development Fund⁶⁷ and it was anticipated a programme would be begun there on the basis of the survey’s recommendations. There were also a number of changes in the system of agriculture in the lowlands which Thornton and others in the Department of Agriculture saw as being crucial if the anti-erosion works were going to be a success. In an internal report Thornton likened these changes to a spiked wheel ‘which stab into or through Native agricultural practice’, but argued that accelerated soil erosion would continue ‘until the whole wheel with all its points revolves freely’.⁶⁸

Thornton recognised that it was beyond the abilities of the Department of Agriculture to constantly ensure that the contour banks were in good condition and that the funds available for maintenance under the Colonial Development grant were inadequate for the task. He therefore urged the Resident Commissioner to introduce regulations making people liable for the maintenance of contour banks driven through their fields. He was aware, however, of the political sensitivity of what he was proposing and suggested they should ‘avoid the use of Proclamations [from the High Commissioner]

⁶⁵ According to the African Mineworkers Union Statement Submitted to the Witswatersrand Gold Mines Native Wage Commission, in the late 1930s mineworkers on the Rand were earning wages of about 2s3d per shift and those employed in secondary industry significantly more; Appendix II in Allen, V.C. *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa* (Volume 1, Keighley, 1992).

⁶⁶ Pim, *Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland*, p.138.

⁶⁷ £3,070 was granted in 1936 for an Ecological Survey of the Mountains, Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1936, p. 1. The survey was carried out from 1 October 1936 to 22 January 1937 and published as Staples and Hudson, *An Ecological Survey of the Mountain Area of Basutoland*. The survey’s findings and recommendations are discussed in chapter 4.

⁶⁸ LNA 1486, Thornton, R.W., Outcome of Investigations, March 1938.

through-out this work ... if our object can be attained by other means, such as an order from the Paramount Chief'.⁶⁹

7.4. Rural development projects after the Indirect Rule reforms

At the very time Thornton wrote this report the Resident Commissioner was attempting to push through the long discussed series of reforms to bring the country in line with other Indirect Rule territories. These were eventually promulgated in December 1938 as Proclamations 61 and 62 of 1938, often referred to as the Native Administration Proclamations.⁷⁰ Under Sections 8 and 15 of Proclamation 61 the Paramount Chief was empowered to issue Orders and Rules, within clearly defined areas, providing for the 'peace, good order and welfare of his people'.⁷¹ Many of the areas in which the Paramount Chief could issue Orders related to agricultural development or conservation policies including the right to issue Orders to 'regulate grazing' and 'prevent soil erosion'.⁷²

With the passage of Proclamation 61 the Basutoland administration could press the Paramount Chief to introduce new regulations concerning protection and maintenance of anti-erosion works. They were considerably delayed, however, by the death of Griffith in 1939, the debate over the succession of Bereng or Seeiso, the death of Seeiso just months after he was confirmed Paramount Chief, and the subsequent wrangling between Bereng and Seeiso's widow 'Mantsebo. Within months⁷³ of her accession to the Regency, however, 'Mantsebo signed an Order concerning the construction of contour banks through fields and pasture areas, ploughing on the contour, the protection

69 LNA 1486, Thornton, R.W., Outcome of Investigations, March 1938.

70 See Machobane, *Government and Change*, p. 185-186 for details.

71 Proclamation 61/1938 (Chieftainship Powers Proclamation) in Basutoland, *Laws of Basutoland*, pp. 156-62. The exact distinction between Rules (issued under section 15) and Orders (issued under section 8) is a little unclear. The Basutoland authorities were themselves confused about the distinction, see Machobane, *Government and Change*, pp. 207-209. Several previous Laws of Lerotholi were revised as Rules. These appeared in the revised (1946) version of the Laws of Lerotholi as part II. Orders issued under Section 8 were supposed to relate to essentially administrative decisions and were included in the revised Laws of Lerotholi as part III. Rules issued under section 15 had to have the prior approval of the High Commissioner, while this was not necessary for Orders issued under section 8.

72 Section 8, Proclamation 61/1938. Sheddick, *Land Tenure in Basutoland*, (p.30) lists the subjects relating to land tenure. Eric Limbach and Anita Franklin both mistakenly assumes that the 1938 Proclamation refers to actual Orders rather than the right to make Orders; Limbach, 'Current Status of Range Management' and Franklin, *Land Law in Lesotho*.

73 The Order was actually issued before her appointment was confirmed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs on 10 May 1941.

of contour banks, meadow strips and inlets, dams, grass burning trees planted in dongas and damage to fencing.⁷⁴

With this Order the Department of Agriculture at last had a clear locus from which to intervene in the rural economy of Lesotho. In the words of one junior Basutoland official:

The principle of conservation - that government must have the right to drive terraces through private lands, take areas out of cultivation, to plant plantations - is now accepted.⁷⁵

Furthermore in the atmosphere of post-war reconstruction the Basutoland administration were hopeful of gaining access to more funds under the revitalised CD&W Fund. In the belief that they were now able to overcome the two major constraints on their activities the Department of Agriculture set about intervening in a much more fundamental way in rural land-use patterns. They were soon to discover, however, that their high hopes were misguided.

7.4.1. Agricultural Improvement Areas

In 1945 the Department of Agriculture unveiled a plan to declare Agricultural Improvement Areas in parts of the country deemed to be suffering from particularly acute environmental problems. Under the scheme chiefs and headmen in these areas were temporarily to abdicate their rights to allocate land to the Department of Agriculture. The Department was then to categorise the area as agricultural land, grazing land or tree plantations on the basis of its agro-ecological potential. All pre-existing divisions of agricultural land were to be cancelled and each family allocated a single field in proportion to its size.⁷⁶ The scheme was closely modelled on the Southern Rhodesian 'centralisation' and South African Betterment policies though it did not include as strong an emphasis on the regrouping of residential sites.⁷⁷

When proposals for the Agricultural Improvement Areas were put before the Basutoland National Council they received a very unfavourable reaction. In the aftermath of the administrative and judicial reforms of 1938 and 1944 the Chiefs were in no mood to give up their major remaining source of power: the allocation of land.

74 Order No. 1/26, Office of the Paramount Chief, Matsieng, 26 March 1941, reproduced in Thornton, R.W. 'Anti-erosion measures and reclamation of eroded land', *Proceedings of the South African Society of Civil Engineers*, XL, 1942, pp. 79-104, p. 96.

75 Duncan to Robertson, 20 October 1944, Patrick Duncan Archives, University of York, DUS 81/10, emphasis in original.

76 Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, p. 129.

77 See Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War*, pp. 71-75 on centralisation and Yawitch, J. *Betterment: the myth of homeland agriculture*, (Johannesburg, 1981) on Betterment.

During a ‘stormy session’ the proposals were rejected.⁷⁸ Despite this set-back the Department of Agriculture included many elements of the scheme in a proposal for further CD&W funding⁷⁹ and attempted to re-introduce the schemes to the National Council the following year.

This time the Basutoland administration incorporated the Agricultural Development Areas into proposals for the construction of a new mountain road, arguing that it would open up new areas to agricultural expansion and the Department of Agriculture therefore needed new powers over land allocation in a twenty-mile strip on either side of the road.⁸⁰ Most members of the Basutoland National Council were very much in favour of the road and had been lobbying for its construction for some time. They were, not surprisingly, extremely annoyed to discover the proposal was now tied to a scheme they had rejected the previous year. Chief Leloko Leretholi, one of the more outspoken senior chiefs,⁸¹ clearly outlined the reason for their opposition to the Agricultural Improvement Areas:

The declaration of Agricultural Improvement Areas means that the Government, that is through the Agricultural Department, should control the grazing and control the lands of the people which they never had the right to do before.

He went on to say that they would rather do without the road than agree to policies that would ‘persecute the whole Nation’.⁸²

Opposition to the scheme was not confined to the National Council. In a series of editorials the influential bi-lingual *Mochochonono* newspaper, strongly associated with the Basutoland Progressive Association, spelt out its opposition to the Agricultural Improvement Areas, especially the suggestion that the schemes might include regulations for the compulsory culling of livestock.⁸³ Furthermore they felt that any scheme should be implemented through elected District Councils and not via the Department of Agriculture and the chiefs alone.

78 Lefela, M. ‘Taxes up in Basutoland’, *Inkulueko*, 18 February 1946, in Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*.

79 PRO DO35/1187/Y1136/23, Application for Free Grant under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, 20 March 1946.

80 PRO DO35/1187/Y1136/23, Application for Free Grant under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, 20 March 1946.

81 Over the next few years he raised a number of important constitutional issues in the National Council, including the question of whether Lesotho was a Crown Colony or a Protectorate, see Machobane, *Government and Change*, p. 248-249.

82 Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 42nd Session*, October 1946, p. 48.

83 Editorial, 18 August 1945, and letter from B.N. Mathe, 15 September 1945, *Mochochonono*. Arden-Clarke later pointed to fears about culling as the primary cause of Basotho opposition, PRO DO 35/1187/Y1136/23, Minutes of discussion with Arden-Clarke, 29 June 1946.

In the National Council the Acting Resident Commissioner made the position of the British Government position clear: unless the National Council agreed to the Agricultural Improvement Area funds for the road would not be forthcoming.⁸⁴ Despite this threat the National Council again rejected the plans for a national scheme by a vote of 44 to 4.⁸⁵

Given this opposition the Department of Agriculture decided to by-pass the National Council and try to get the backing of individual chiefs for projects in their wards. The policy was announced in an unusually downbeat manner in their 1946 *Annual Report* with a note that they regretted that the 'question of stock limitation... will not at present be considered by the Basotho'.⁸⁶ Only one Agricultural Improvement Area was ever declared,⁸⁷ in the Maphutsang valley in Mohales Hoek District after the area was visited by a party of senior chiefs.⁸⁸ Fields were to be allocated on the basis of family size and a further quarter-acre plot in a large block suitable for vegetable gardening was given to each family.⁸⁹ A second stage of the plan was to include the implementation of rotational grazing, 'the disposal of stock surplus to the estimated carrying capacity of the grassland' and compulsory villagisation.⁹⁰

At first the Department of Agriculture reported that the scheme was proceeding satisfactorily and were pleased to show Dr W.C. Lowdermilk, the recently retired head of the United States Soil Conservation Service, around the project.⁹¹ The following year, however, they admitted, in an unusually candid statement, that things had not gone according to plan:

One of the difficulties which has to be overcome in this scheme is the equitable distribution of arable land. Shortly after the scheme was commenced, land was redistributed on a family size basis, but this is such a fluctuating figure that within a few years what was equitable to start with has become wholly inequitable. As land issue is one of the few remaining props to authority which the chiefs and sub-chiefs have it is considered to be politically unwise, apart from it being almost impracticable, that the issue of lands should become yet another function of Government, as would be required in any extension of the Maphutseng scheme. Therefore, land issue is to be allowed to revert to the chiefdom.⁹²

⁸⁴ Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 42nd Session*, October 1946, p. 55.

⁸⁵ Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 42nd Session*, October 1946, p. 57.

⁸⁶ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1946, p.4.

⁸⁷ Though they were discussed in other areas, including in Mokhotlong.

⁸⁸ Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 42nd Session*, October 1946, p. 8-9.

⁸⁹ See Nobe and Seckler, *An economic and policy analysis of soil-water problems*.

⁹⁰ Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, p. 130.

⁹¹ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1949, p. 11.

⁹² Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1950, p. 11.

After the failure of the only Agricultural Improvement Area ever declared the policy was dropped.

Despite this set-back the Department of Agriculture were still keen to establish at least one area based agricultural development project. In 1952 they obtained CD&W funding for a Pilot Project in the Tebetebeng river valley. Apart from the inevitable construction of contour banks the major intervention associated with the Pilot Project was the introduction of co-operative ownership of tractors. Given the failures of the Agricultural Improvement Areas, however, the Department of Agriculture were extremely wary of tampering in pre-existing land tenure arrangements.⁹³

The basic idea behind the scheme was that farmers in one area would co-operate and all have their fields ploughed at the same time by a communally owned tractor. Despite relatively generous external funding and high hopes amongst Basutoland officials, again the scheme did not go according to plan. Inevitably the land tenure system was one of the primary targets for blame: if one farmer in the centre of a block refused to take part it became extremely difficult to administer the ploughing.⁹⁴ Unable either to reform or work with the agricultural land tenure system the Department of Agriculture changed its emphasis and from the mid 1950s decided to ‘concentrate on improving the methods and output of progressive individuals and not to undertake “mass” schemes’.⁹⁵

7.5. Access to mountain grazing areas, boundary disputes and grazing closures

Given the opposition to the Agricultural Improvement Areas in the 1945 and 1946 National Council the Department of Agriculture resorted to enacting development policy directly through the Paramount Chief and other ward chiefs. Furthermore, financial constraints were still very much to the fore; as CD&W funding had been funnelled into a continuation of the physical anti-erosion works begun in 1936 the Department of Agriculture had to look to alternative sources of revenue for other development projects. The Department of Agriculture therefore had to rely upon senior chiefs to agree to issue instructions for any new schemes.⁹⁶

⁹³ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1954, p. 19.

⁹⁴ Wallman, *Take Out Hunger*, p. 116.

⁹⁵ Wallman, *Take Out Hunger*, p. 117.

⁹⁶ Howard, J. ‘Notes on a visit to Transkei, Ciskei and Basutoland, January 1950’, unpublished report, Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS Afr.s.787.

Fortunately for the Basutoland Department of Agriculture it appeared that the Paramount Chief and her closest advisers were willing to go along with their plans, especially in the politically sensitive sphere of grazing control on the mountain pastures. They soon discovered, however, that relying on Orders from the Paramount and Principal Chiefs could be a fraught process and that they could also issue orders that did not suit the Department's programme. To make matters worse it was unclear exactly who had the right to issue orders concerning the use of mountain grazing areas.

7.5.1. The 1946 Order

In November 1946 'Mantsebo made an Order that all livestock, with the exception of riding horses and donkeys, should be sent to the cattle post areas during the summer months and that smallstock should remain there year round.⁹⁷ This Order appeared to come as a complete surprise to the Basutoland Department of Agriculture, and in fact a copy of it did not appear on their files until March 1947.

In the meantime Chief Bofihla, the Paramount Chief's representative in Likhoele ward,⁹⁸ had issued instructions to all headmen in the ward telling them that, in line with the new Order, they must:

inform all your people to send their livestock to the cattle posts further up beyond Moholobela's and right up to Oetsi's, which pastorate is solely the Paramount Chief's plateaux.⁹⁹

When these instructions were brought to the attention of the Mafeteng District Commissioner he wrote to the Government Secretary expressing his concerns that they would lead not just to overgrazing in the cattle-post area but also to 'political disturbance'.¹⁰⁰

The ward boundaries in this area were extremely complex and there were a number of chiefs who came under the Paramount Chief's Matsieng ward but whose own areas were in the Mafeteng District. G.I. Jones noted:

The boundaries of certain wards and hence of the Districts to which they belong, are not defined or even accurately known in certain areas of recent settlement - for example in south central Basutoland in the area of the Maletsunyane and

⁹⁷ Order 37/1946, Paramount Chief, Matsieng, 20 November 1946, translated copy on LNA 2476.

⁹⁸ Chief Bofihla was a half brother of the late Paramount Chief Seeiso and became one of 'Mantsebo's official advisers in February 1949. They later fell out (March 1952) after Bofihla asked 'Mantsebo what contributing she was making to a fund to provide higher education for chiefs' sons and daughters, PRO DO119/1382, Arrowsmith to Wray, 26 November 1952.

⁹⁹ LNA 2476, Bofihla G[riffith] Lerotholi to Chiefs and headman in Likhoele ward, 9 December 1946.

¹⁰⁰ LNA 2476, DC Mafeteng to Government Secretary, Maseru, 3 January 1947.

Sinquyane rivers where there exists a mosaic of villages and village groups said to belong to three or more different wards, in three different Districts.¹⁰¹

In the mid 1940s the dispute seemed to centre around the village of Headman Oetsi who apparently had the option of remaining under the Paramount Chiefs ward of Likhoele (in Mafeteng District) or of switching allegiance to Chief Bereng's Phamong ward (in Mohale's Hoek district).¹⁰² In 1942 the dispute had erupted into violence, though I have not been able to trace reports of exactly what occurred.¹⁰³ This boundary dispute was obviously given added tension by the dispute over succession between 'Mantsebo and Bereng. When discussing boundary disputes Sheddick noted that these tended to have a very different character depending on the relationship between the ward chiefs (whom he termed Governors):

It may happen that the neighbouring Governors are not friendly, and in such cases the ill-defined and inadequately demarcated boundaries are exploited to their limit; they suddenly "expand", on the one side to justify the seizure of the cattle of the rivals supporters and on the other to permit the attempted invasion and seizure of part of the other's area.¹⁰⁴

It would appear that 'Mantsebo was using her powers to issue Orders concerning grazing control as a way of expanding the area under her jurisdiction; and she was doing it in such a way that her claims would seem to be justified by colonial government policies.

When this Order came to light the Maseru Secretariat quickly wrote to the Paramount Chief asking her to suspend the instructions, pointing out that in the opinion of the Director of Agriculture, W.G. Leake, the instructions would lead to the devastation of the mountain pastures.¹⁰⁵ 'Mantsebo, however, skilfully deflected their request by saying she was just trying to issue orders in line with the Department of Agriculture's calls for rotational grazing:

what the Agricultural Department says is in opposition to their usual advice that grazings should be rotated.

She protested that her instructions were simply to allow the lowland grazing areas in Mafeteng to be rested and to recover. Furthermore she did not see how the instructions could cause any political problems as the second paragraph of the letter 'orders these people... to live in peace'.¹⁰⁶

101 Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, p. 75.

102 LNA 2476, DC Mafeteng to Government Secretary, Maseru, 3 January 1947.

103 Sheddick, *Land Tenure in Basutoland*, p. 176.

104 Sheddick, *Land Tenure in Basutoland*, p. 155.

105 LNA 2476, Kennan to 'Mantsebo, 16 January 1947.

106 LNA 2476, Mantsebo to Forsyth-Thompson, 20 January 1947.

It was clear to the Basutoland authorities that ‘Mantsebo was using their supposedly politically-neutral agricultural policies to ‘further her own ends’.¹⁰⁷ When the nationwide Order that people should move their livestock to the cattle-posts came to the notice of the Department of Agriculture they decided that it, and the instruction in Likhoele ward resulting from it, should be overturned. Quite how this was to be done, however, was not clear. The Paramount Chief had been granted the powers under a High Commissioner’s Proclamation (Proclamation 61, section 8) and it could, therefore, only be overturned if it was found to be *ultra vires* in Court, not just because the Department of Agriculture did not like it.

Nevertheless when Kenneth Moeletsi, a representative from Mafeteng district, raised the issue of Order 37/1946 in the 1947 National Council the Resident Commissioner reported that his understanding was that the Paramount Chief had cancelled the Order. When Josiel Lefela attempted to join in the criticism of the Order the Resident Commissioner, in his role as president of the Council, simply quashed the debate and moved onto the next item on the agenda.¹⁰⁸

Despite these statements from the Resident Commissioner it appears that Order 37/1946 remained on the statute books, though it was certainly rarely enforced. Sheddick, who undertook fieldwork in the late 1940s, makes no mention of the Order and describes a system of transhumance between lowlands and mountains, though he does also note that increasing population pressure had led some livestock owners to leave their livestock in the mountains year round, moving them to cattle posts in the lower valleys during the winter months.¹⁰⁹ There are numerous other reports of smallstock in the lowlands during this period; for example, in January 1954 N.C. Pollock observed a mixed herd of 700 head of livestock moving from a village in the lowlands of Berea District to a mountain cattle post near the Buthe-Butha/Mokhotlong border.¹¹⁰ The Basutoland administration did however attempt to settle the boundary dispute and the boundaries in the area were officially delimitated in February 1948.¹¹¹ Conflict over

¹⁰⁷ LNA 2476, file note [probably by Leakie] dated 1 February 1947. The note also accused her of confusing rotational grazing with closing areas of grazing. This was extremely ironic as that was exactly what the Department of Agriculture and others in the administration would itself do latter that year with the massive grazing closures in Mokhotlong and Qacha’s Nek.

¹⁰⁸ Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 43rd Session*, 1947, p. 562-3.

¹⁰⁹ Sheddick, *Land Tenure in Basutoland*, p. 105-106.

¹¹⁰ Pollock, N.C. ‘The Economic and Social Geography of Basutoland’ (unpublished B.Litt, Oxford, 1956), p. 127.

¹¹¹ The settlement is referred to in LNA 2476/II[I], Driver to ‘Mantsebo, 10 November 1951 but I have been unable to locate any correspondence on the delimitation in either LNA or the PRO.

access to pastures in the area, however, appeared to continue at least into the early 1950s.

Curiously Order 37/1946 did appear to be enforced, to some extent, in Qacha's Nek district, though it may well be that this was a result of confusion between the 1946 Order and the 1947 instructions to totally close large areas to all grazing. During the 1950s complaints about the Order were raised in the National Council by representatives from Qacha's Nek. A motion was initially introduced in the 1952 National Council¹¹² and was then raised again in 1954 when Thabo Tsepa, a representative of the Qacha's Nek District Council, complained that the 1946 Order causing great hardship during the winter months. He pointed out that in the previous winter nine herd-boys had died as a result of the cold. Another Councillor from Qacha's Nek, Mahlabe Mokhachane, reported that one person had lost a flock of 500 sheep and goats in the snow and that people therefore disobeyed the Order.¹¹³ The Council passed a resolution that the Order be amended to exempt ewes in lamb and other smallstock if the Ward Chief granted 'special permission':¹¹⁴ an option that might have decreased the mortality rate of livestock but not of the herd-boys looking after the remaining herds. The following year the ward chief, Theko Makhaola, raised the issue during a session of the Standing Committee of the National Council but the resulting discussion was inconclusive.¹¹⁵

These discussions in the National Council and Standing Committee were noted by the Department of Agriculture, but they did not appear to do anything about the Order. The District Commissioner of Qacha's Nek wrote to the Government Secretary in Maseru in early 1952 complaining that Order 37/1946 was causing problems as it had led to an increase in the number of smallstock in the District, especially from Mokhotlong

¹¹² Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 48th Session*, 1952, motion 78, pp. 517-522.

¹¹³ Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 50th Session*, 1954, p. 399. 86 mm of precipitation were recorded at the Sehlabathibe Rainfall Station (in one of the major mountain grazing areas in Qacha's Nek) during July 1954, Government of Lesotho, Hydrological Survey Department, *Meteorological data to December 1970*. Precipitation during the month of July is unusual and almost always falls as snow.

¹¹⁴ During these discussions there was no mention of the fact that the closure policy meant that all livestock should have been in the high cattle-posts year round. The obvious inference to make is that, as in Mokhotlong District, the closure policy was never enforced in a systematic manner (see chapter 9). The most likely explanation is that the Ward Chief (Theko Makhaola) enforced elements of both policies. The pattern may have been something like this: all livestock (except probably those belonging to the important chiefs) were ordered out of the village grazing areas, and possibly the lower altitude cattle-post areas, during summer, but cattle and equines were allowed to return to the valleys (village grazing and winter cattle-posts) in the winter.

¹¹⁵ LNA 2476 V, Grazing Areas in the Mountains, Extracts from Minutes of the Standing Committee, 28-30 June 1955.

ward¹¹⁶ though the fact that the policy appeared not to have been applied elsewhere leads to the conclusion that this was due to factors other than the 1946 Order. There was no follow-up correspondence or file notes from the Department of Agriculture at this date or in response to the motions in the National Council. The assumption has to be that they were content just to see the Order quietly forgotten. It is not clear what happened to the Order after 1955 as the Department of Agriculture files on grazing policies in the mountain petered out soon afterwards.

7.5.2. The 1947 instructions

At the time of the initial worries about 'Matsebo's 1946 Order the Department of Agriculture was involved in discussions with Chiefs Matlere and Theko, who headed the two biggest wards in the mountain areas, Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek. When Evelyn Baring, the High Commissioner, first discussed the possibility of some sort of grazing policy on the mountain pastures in early 1946 he reported that Chiefs Matlere and Theko:

appeared to be afraid to touch cattle post areas and probably fear the accusation that they are being used as tools by the government to deprive the Basuto nation of its ancient rights to free and untrammelled communal grazing above the cultivation line.¹¹⁷

A year later, however, Matlere and Theko had both changed their minds. At a meeting with Leakey at Umkomozana in March 1947 they agreed to institute the Department of Agriculture's plans and close large areas of their wards to all grazing.¹¹⁸ Quite why they changed their minds is unclear, though for Matlere there were some obvious political advantages (which are discussed in chapter 9).

The Department of Agriculture argued that this new closure policy was simply an extension of 'customary' leboella regulations¹¹⁹ and they saw it as a successful modernisation of 'customary' practices. The leboella regulations were a well established method of conserving scarce resources from over use and were most commonly associated with the closure of pastures close to villages during the summer to ensure sufficient fodder for the lean winter months. Areas of grazing, or other scarce

¹¹⁶ LNA 2476/II[I], DC Qacha's Nek to Government Secretary, Maseru, 3 March 1952.

¹¹⁷ PRO DO35/1180/Y950/5, Baring to Machtig, 25 February 1946.

¹¹⁸ Unfortunately the minutes of this meeting were on a file (1570/1) I was unable to locate in the LNA. The meeting was, however, frequently referred to in correspondence on files in the LNA 2476 series. Thought is not quite clear from the archival record, the location Umkomozana probably refers to the Natal side of the Sani Pass where the Mkhomozana valley runs up to the pass. Presumably Leakey either flew or travelled through the Union via Underberg and Matlere and Theko trekked over from Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek.

¹¹⁹ Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs*, p. 78.

natural resources, were declared closed to everyone for an agreed period and anyone found trespassing on the area would be fined.¹²⁰ Leboella was supposedly declared by the local chief and headman with the consensus of the resource users,¹²¹ though in reality chiefs tended to declare leboella when it best suited their needs.

Despite the Department of Agriculture's assertions that the closure policy was just a development of these 'customary' practices the closures differed from leboella in a number of crucial respects. Firstly under the closure policy grazing land was closed year round not just seasonally. Secondly livestock owners held semi-private rights to small areas of the cattle-post grazing area (i.e. the cattle posts themselves) unlike in the leboella areas near villages. Thirdly, there were no pre-existing mechanisms for achieving consensus among all resource users at the ward level and there was never even a pretence at consultation between the ward chief and resource-users. Indeed it was unclear exactly who made up the category of potential resource users in the case of mountain grazing areas. This was to become a matter of considerable debate.

7.5.3. The 1949 Order

The debate was sparked off by a new Order from the Paramount Chief, promulgated on 15th August 1949. In this new Order 'Mantsebo instructed all Principal Chiefs: to inform all the people in your ward who have cattle posts in my mountain area and on my plateau land to remove their cattle posts... You should see to it that this order of mine is carried out and that no animals from your wards will come into my mountain area country.'¹²²

Again this Order was not brought to the attention of the Department of Agriculture until some months after it was sent out from Matsieng, and again it was a District Commissioner, this time from Teyateyaneng, who brought it to their attention because of his fears about possible repercussions.¹²³ Gideon Pott reported that the Order would cause 'problems' and that his local informants told him 'grazing has always been communal in the Malutis and a man can have his cattle where he liked'.¹²⁴ This contradicted the understanding of 'customary' law used by the Department of

120 Swallow, Brokken, Motsamai, Sopeng, and Storey, *Livestock Development and Range Utilisation*, p. 8-9.

121 Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs*, p. 78.

122 LNA 2476/II, Order from Paramount Chief, Matsieng (the original Order was not given a reference number).

123 Teyateyaneng was the district immediately to the north of Maseru district and livestock owners from the three Teyateyaneng wards probably made use of the extensive cattle-post country in 'Mantsebo's Matsieng ward. The biggest ward in Teyateyaneng was 'Mamathe's, under 'Mantsebo's influential rival Chief Gabashane. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the Order was sent out just days after Gabashane and Bereng were hanged for their part in a 'medicine' murder.

124 LNA 2476/II, DC Teyateyeng to Government Secretary, 15 November 1949.

Agriculture to enact the closure policies. The debate basically came down to a disagreement about whether principal chiefs had the right to refuse access to cattle post areas in their ward to livestock owners from other wards.

7.5.4. Different understandings of ‘customary’ law

As we have seen Staples and Hudson’s *Ecological Survey* reported that the first agro-pastoralists to settle in the mountain areas of Lesotho were a group of ‘Zulus of the Matooane tribe’ in the early nineteenth century. They had left the area during ‘the wars of Chaka’s time’ and from then until the 1880s the area was ‘occupied solely by the Bushman and the game on which they preyed’.¹²⁵ It was only with the arrival of the Batloka¹²⁶ that domestic livestock were re-introduced into the area. Increasing population in the lowlands, especially with the influx of people from the Free State in the aftermath of the South African 1913 Natives Land Act, had resulted in the internal migration of people to the mountain valleys and the rapid increase in the livestock populations of the mountain pastures. This history of occupation was accepted as a matter of course by the Basutoland administration and they believed that it largely accounted for both the recent environmental degradation of the area and the ‘open access’ land-tenure arrangements.

D.W. How, the Government Secretary, wrote the section of Staples and Hudson’s *Ecological Survey* dealing with land tenure in the mountain areas. He stated that all mountain grazing areas came directly under the control of the Paramount Chief and that these areas were officially open to every Mosotho livestock owner. The Paramount Chief’s control of the area was, however, delegated to ward chiefs who sometimes prevented the access of livestock from other wards. This action was considered to be illegal, though How admitted it was fairly commonplace.¹²⁷

Three anthropologists who carried out fieldwork during the colonial era disagreed with this understanding and argued that Principal Chiefs did indeed have the right to exclude people from other wards. Hugh Ashton, who wrote an ethnography based on fieldwork carried out in the mid-1930s, noted that livestock owners could establish a cattle-post in the area controlled by their immediate chief or a neighbouring chief as long as they were both under the same Principal Chief. This suggested that Principal Chiefs only had to allocate grazing land to residents of their ward and could deny access to anyone from

¹²⁵ Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 19. This section of the report was based on information from R.C. Germond.

¹²⁶ See chapter 9.

¹²⁷ Note by How, D.W. (Government Secretary) in Staples and Hudson, *Ecological Survey*, p. 20.

a neighbouring Principal Chief's ward.¹²⁸ Sandra Wallman, who carried out her fieldwork in the early 1960s, also mentions that chiefs in the lowlands had specific cattle-post areas reserved for local residents and that if livestock owners from other areas wanted to graze there they had to come to some sort of temporary agreement.¹²⁹

Vernon Sheddick, who carried out fieldwork on land tenure arrangements in the late 1940s, at the invitation of the High Commissioner and funded by the Colonial Social Science Research Council, also stated that a Principal Chief (whom he called Provincial Governors) only had a duty to allocate grazing land to his/her own 'subjects':

Grazing in cattle-post country is partially a personal right in so far as a man may be assigned a particular area within which he may build his own huts, byres and stockpens and partially a public right in that grazing itself cannot be denied to any stock whose owner is a subject of the Provincial Governor. A stock owner seeking semi-personal grazing rights first approaches his immediate Sub-Area Chief, informing him of his requirements. When he has satisfied his chief that he is a lawful resident under his jurisdiction, he, the stockowner, is directed to the Provincial Governor. It is the subjects of any one Provincial Governor who have prior claim to the grazing within the control of their chief. Their claim does not prevent the Governor considering application from persons, subject to other chiefs, who have failed to obtain grazing within their own province.¹³⁰

The Basutoland authorities were unhappy with Sheddick's report in general and with this passage in particular. Comments on the text of the original report batted backwards and forwards between the Secretariat in Maseru the High Commissioner's Office in Pretoria/Cape Town and the Dominion/Commonwealth Relations Office in London. By this process they managed to block the publication of the report until 1954, when Sheddick threatened to have it published commercially. The report that was eventually published as part of the Colonial Research Studies series included a number of changes from the original draft and a foreword from the Commonwealth Relations Office pointing out which parts of the report the Basutoland administration did not accept.¹³¹

Attached to the section cited above, Sheddick was persuaded to include a footnote stating that:

The Basutoland Government maintain that all cattle-post country is common to all Basuto and not only the fellow subjects of the same provincial governor.

Given the 1946 and 1949 Paramount Chief's Orders, the next sentence of the footnote is particularly noteworthy:

128 Ashton, *The Basuto*, p.152.

129 Wallman, *Take out Hunger*, p. 103-4.

130 Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, pp. 158-159.

131 Sheddick's comments on the grazing closure policy, and the reaction of the authorities to them, are discussed in chapter 9.

They also point out that the Paramount Chief has said very firmly that any arrangement whereby the cattle of one chief may be prevented from grazing where the cattle of another chief are permitted to graze is strictly forbidden.¹³²

One of the severest Basutoland critics of Sheddick's statements about access to cattle post grazing was Patrick Duncan. From May 1947 to October 1949 Duncan had been a Assistant DC in Teyateyaneng and in mid 1951 to 1952 was the Judicial Commissioner.¹³³ His position as Judicial Commissioner gave him significant scope to comment on Sheddick's draft report¹³⁴ and he later (after he had left the Basutoland service) wrote a scathing review of the book, describing it as 'idiosyncratic and pretentious' and 'full of serious inaccuracies'.¹³⁵ The most serious inaccuracy, according to Duncan, was Sheddick's statement that the mountain grazing was divided between separate chiefdoms. This, said Duncan, was totally opposed to the view of both the Government and Paramount Chief and was contrary to 'customary' law:

The Government view is based on Sotho law, which firmly lays down that the cattle of any member of the Sotho people may graze anywhere which is open to public grazing. There have, it is true, been cases where chiefs have arrogated to themselves the right to exclude cattle from other chiefs. But wherever they have been discovered it has been put an end to... [I]t is surely incorrect to lay down in the text of a handbook on land law that a practice, condemned as illegal by the highest administrative authorities in the land, is the rule.¹³⁶

In his own handbook on the 'customary' law of Lesotho Duncan reiterated that 'grazing-area of the country is communal, no adult having the right to graze privately where others are not allowed'. He went on to quote the words of a representative of the Paramount Chief:

When they were on the plateau they found a grazing practice of the herds of the people on the plateau, a practice unknown here in Basutoland; a practice resembling only that of the Boers on the farms of the Orange Free State; a practice whereby the animals of one are not allowed to graze on the farm of another. I reprimand the deed, and I do not wish to see or hear again that there are some herds which are prevented from grazing where other herds are allowed to graze.¹³⁷

While Sheddick's understanding of 'customary' law may have seemed to act in the interests of the most powerful chiefs not all of them agreed with the analysis. In the 1944 National Council Chief Bereng spoke out against plans announced by Leakie for

132 Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, p. 158, footnote 3.

133 At the time of the Order he was at the London School of Economics on a two term study leave, Driver, *Patrick Duncan*.

134 Comments on Sheddicks Report, in DU 7.12, Patrick Duncan Archives, University of York.

135 Duncan, P. 'Review of Land Tenure in Basutoland by Vernon Sheddick', *Man*, January 1957, pp. 11-12.

136 Duncan, 'Review', p.12

137 Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs*, p. 74. Duncan did not reference this quote nor say from which Paramount Chief the orders emanated. My suspicion is that it is from the early colonial period.

grazing control policies on the mountain pastures. Chief Bereng argued that the ‘chief does not give cattle posts to people’ and that, unlike on the village grazing areas, every (male) Mosotho had a right to graze his animals wherever he liked:

If 70 of us like a certain place we shall go and peg out cattle posts there and we shall never agree if one of us suggests we should graze a certain part and rest another.¹³⁸

It should be noted that livestock owners from Bereng’s and ‘Mantsebo’s wards had clashed over access to grazing lands on the borders of the ward in 1942. It is possible Chief Bereng foresaw the political use ‘Mantsebo could make of supposedly politically neutral grazing policies.

Other Chiefs and the Department of Agriculture agreed with Sheddick’s understanding of the ‘customary’ law: indeed that understanding provided the basis of the 1947 closure instructions. In a memo written after Gideon Pott had voiced his concerns J.G.M. King reported that their assessment was based on what Leakie, his predecessor, had been told by Chiefs Matlere and Theko at the meeting in March 1947. The Chiefs had:

stated categorically that all cattle posts in their wards fell under [their] direct control and that if a ward chief does not want people from other wards to use his cattle posts he has the liberty to remove them.¹³⁹

King pointed out that this was essential for effective grazing control:

If grazing control in the cattle post areas is to be effective it is of fundamental importance that the whole of the cattlepost area should fall under one or other of the ward chiefs. This allows of [sic] the redistribution of posts within wards, and where necessary the complete removal of posts.¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, if Principal Chiefs had exclusive administrative rights over the cattle post areas in their wards it would help stimulate their interest in grazing control, and by making access more difficult it worked ‘towards creating a squeeze which will make stock limitation much more acceptable when the time for it comes’. King asked the Government Secretary to point out to ‘the critic [Pott] that these considerations far outweigh the possibility of damage of a relatively minor nature that is likely to occur in the wards of chiefs who control comparatively small areas of cattle post’.¹⁴¹

King admitted that ‘some chiefs consider that the Paramount Chief has acted in an arbitrary manner’ and conceded that it might be a good idea to debate the question of access to mountain cattle posts in the National Council. He went on to argue, however, that ‘when it is discussed the result must be a foregone conclusion’.¹⁴² In the end the

¹³⁸ Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 39th Session*, 1944, p. 255.

¹³⁹ LNA 2476/II, memorandum from King to Government Secretary, n.d. [c. Dec. 1949].

¹⁴⁰ LNA 2476/II, memorandum from King to Government Secretary, n.d. [c. Dec. 1949].

¹⁴¹ LNA 2476/II, memorandum from King to Government Secretary, n.d. [c. Dec. 1949].

¹⁴² LNA 2476/II, memorandum from King to Government Secretary, n.d. [c. Dec. 1949].

Order was not discussed in the Council and, as the reaction to Sheddick's report indicates, the Secretariat went against the wishes of the Department of Agriculture and followed the line that mountain cattle-post areas were open to all, regardless of which Principal Chief controlled the area.

According to this interpretation the cattle-post areas came directly under the jurisdiction of the Paramount Chief (holding the land in trust for 'the nation'). Administration of the areas was, however, devolved to the ward Chiefs who were to act, in effect, as caretakers.¹⁴³ This meant that there were advantages for 'Mantsebo' in both analyses of the 'customary' law: under Sheddick's interpretation she could exclude any livestock owner from outside the three wards she ran directly (Matsieng, Likoele and Mokhotlong) which in total accounted for a large percentage of the mountain grazing area, while under Duncan's interpretation she could intervene in the way other Chiefs ran the cattle-post grazing within their wards.

7.5.5. The 1950 Order

This is exactly what she did in a new Order dated 3 August 1950.¹⁴⁴ This new Order instructed all ward chiefs that they must set aside 'pasture improvement areas' (i.e. areas closed for grazing) within the areas under their jurisdiction. It is unclear to what extent this Order was made under the Department of Agriculture's instructions but unlike the 1946 order they were very much in favour of it. The fact that a meeting was arranged some time after the Order was passed for King to explain to 'Mantsebo, her advisors and other chiefs and headman from Matsieng ward 'the technical reasons for putting unsuitable areas back to grass and also to inform them of the political necessity for such measures' suggests where the impetus probably came from.¹⁴⁵

District Commissioners in various parts of the country took the new Order as a signal to pressurise local ward chiefs to close areas of cattle-post grazing. The degree to which this occurred was largely determined by the keenness of the particular District Commissioner and the ward Chief. In Mohales Hoek Stanford Driver was particularly concerned about the grazing areas around the headwaters of the Qabane river. He 'suggested' that 'Mamohato Bereng Lerotholi close the area on a one-year-on, one-year-off rotation and that she appoint caretakers to ensure the regulations were enacted:

¹⁴³ Oral informants in Mokhotlong reported this was their understanding of what the position had been, informants 7,8 and 15 (Table 9.1).

¹⁴⁴ Order 41/1950, referred to in Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs*, p. 78.

¹⁴⁵ LNA 2476/II[I], Forsyth-Thompson to 'Mantsebo', 23 September 1950.

The caretakers must be good and reliable men because your action in closing a considerable mountain area will not be popular and cattle post owners will no doubt deliberately poach in the closed area. You must not, however, shirk the responsibility of closing each area in turn for I can assure you that the area at the Qabane headwaters is very badly denuded and something drastic must be done without delay.¹⁴⁶

Driver's other instructions indicated that there was still a degree of confusion over the exact rights of Ward Chiefs to restrict access to people from other wards. He claimed that the damage had been 'caused chiefly by stock ... from Qacha's Nek district' and that the Chief of Phamong should order these stock owners to remove their cattle posts as soon as possible.¹⁴⁷

The 1950 Order from the Paramount Chief once again fed into the boundary dispute between Mohale's Hoek and Mafeteng districts which seems to have continued despite the February 1948 ruling. In October 1951 Driver and 'Mamohato Bereng decided that a large area to the east of Qhoobeng river should be closed to all grazing, but it was discovered that there were many livestock belonging to residents of Matelile ward in Mafeteng district grazing in the area. By November 1951 these animals had not been removed so Driver sent a telegram to 'Mantsebo asking her to intervene and instruct the chief of Matelile, Joel Moholabela, to has his followers remove their stock.¹⁴⁸ To Driver's annoyance this only resulted in an increase in the number of livestock from Matelile ward grazing in the area.¹⁴⁹ It is not clear what happened to the plans to close this area after this date as there is no further correspondence on the relevant file.

Driver's actions in this particular mountain grazing zone suggest that District Commissioners were, like Ward Chiefs, well aware of the potential political uses of grazing regulations. It seems more than likely that Driver was keen to implement this general closure in order to prevent the possibility of further conflicts over grazing land.

7.5.6. The 1955 Order

The confusion over whether or not Principal Chiefs had a right to deny access to livestock owners from other wards was clarified by a further Order from the Paramount Chief. As in 1950, and in contrast to the 1946 and 1949 instructions, this Order had the full backing of the Basutoland administration and essentially settled the dispute by giving the Department of Agriculture much greater rights to determine the grazing pattern in the mountain cattle-post areas. The Order stated that the cattle-post grazing

¹⁴⁶ LNA 2476 II[I], Driver to Chief of Phamong, 2 November 1951.

¹⁴⁷ LNA 2476 II[I], Driver to Chief of Phamong, 2 November 1951.

¹⁴⁸ LNA 2476 II[I], Driver to 'Mantsebo, 10 November 1951.

¹⁴⁹ LNA 2476 II[I], Driver to Government Secretary, 19 December 1951.

areas would be the responsibility of the Principal Chief of each ward but that this was a function that was delegated to them by the Paramount Chief, at whose ‘disposal’ the whole cattle-post area remained. The Principal Chief did not have the right to refuse permission to anyone who requested grazing in the ward unless this would ‘result in the carrying capacity of the ward being exceeded’. The grazing areas would be divided into sections, defined by natural boundaries and not greater than 12 square miles, and the Department of Agriculture would set a specific carrying capacity for each individual section. A written record of this had to be kept by each Principal Chief and each livestock owner had to apply for written permission to graze in the section on a yearly basis.¹⁵⁰

The plan to divide the whole mountain grazing area into sections and then determine the carrying capacity was never carried out. Bowmaker had attempted to do this while on trek in Mokhotlong in 1952 but had found the maps available too inaccurate and aerial photographs too confusing without the correct equipment and had abandoned the attempt.¹⁵¹ In 1955 the Department of Agriculture recognised that the work involved in assessing the carrying capacity would be ‘heavy’ but argued that the new 1:50,000 map series then being prepared would make the job possible.¹⁵² In the 1956 *Annual Report* it was reported that ‘fair progress’ had been made in assessing the carrying capacity¹⁵³ but archival evidence again casts doubt on this claim as the survey appeared not to have even been started by June 1956. In Mokhotlong, Matlere was reported to be keen to carry out the Order but the Agricultural Department were ‘anxious that no unilateral action should be taken...until the carrying capacity of the Territory as a whole be determined’.¹⁵⁴ Neither the survey, nor the Order, were mentioned in any subsequent annual report and I have found no reference to either of them in post-1956 archival material.¹⁵⁵

The 1955 Order essentially marked the end of a ten year period in which concerns over the deterioration of mountain pastures had been central to the Basutoland administration. Bowmaker, the Department of Agriculture official most closely involved with the mountain grazing ‘problem’, had been promoted to the position of

¹⁵⁰ Order 1/1955 issued by ‘Mantsebo on 18 November 1955, reproduced as Appendix IV of Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1955, p. 65-66. See p. 9 of the *Annual Report* for a discussion of the Order.

¹⁵¹ See chapter 9.

¹⁵² Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1955, p. 9.

¹⁵³ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1956, p.10.

¹⁵⁴ PRO DO35/4361, Basutoland: Paramount Chief Regent, Extract from Tergos, no.6, June 1956.

¹⁵⁵ Stephen Lawry states that the stock limitation elements of the 1955 grazing regulations were ‘in no instance applied’; Lawry, ‘Private Herds and Common Lands’, p. 110.

Director when King was transferred to Uganda in 1954 and presumably had less time to devote to the issue. He died in 1957 while still in the post. With pressure from South Africa off, and a run of years with good rainfall, the 1955 Order was quietly forgotten as concerns over the mountain grazing waned.¹⁵⁶

7.6. Semi-private and public rights to grazing

The debate within the Basutoland administration over the interpretation of ‘customary’ law of access to mountain pastures curiously ignored an important factor raised by Sheddick in his report on *Land Tenure*: namely the contrast between public rights to grazing and (semi)private rights to cattle-posts. As the communal nature of grazing land was consistently cited as the primary cause of overgrazing this lacuna in the debate is highly significant.

Since the early 1930s the problem of overgrazing on Lesotho’s mountain pastures has tended to be blamed on a ‘primitive’ communal land tenure system. Because access to grazing land was communal, the argument went, it did not make sense for an individual to reduce his livestock holdings to within the carrying capacity as this did not affect the actions of other livestock owners using the same area of rangeland.¹⁵⁷ In his initial report in 1931 Thornton suggested that the key problem in the mountain areas was that communal tenure stifled all individual effort, and that the objective of the Basutoland authorities should be the development of individual land-tenure arrangements. While different policies came and went this basic belief persisted: in 1958 the Department of Agriculture *Annual Report* described the land tenure system as ‘antiquated, out of date and ... the basic cause of all drawbacks in the proper usage of land in Basutoland’.¹⁵⁸

As I have indicated above, however, there was always a tension between this stated objective of moving towards a system of individual tenure and the political and administrative needs of a colonial state based on Indirect Rule. The Basutoland authorities could never determine a policy that would reform land tenure arrangements without destroying the power of the chiefs and, with the exception of the Agricultural Improvement Areas scheme, they tended to steer clear of the issue. Given this tension

¹⁵⁶ Elements of the Order were later included in the 1959 revision of the Laws of Lerotoli (Part III, Orders made under section 8(i) of Proclamation 61/1938). Significantly the sections of Order 1/1955 relating to the ultimate authority of the Paramount Chief were dropped from the 1959 Laws of Lerotoli where section 5(i) states that ‘Control of grazing in the cattlepost areas shall be the responsibility of the Principal or Ward Chief in whose ward the grazing is found’ (p. 45-46).

¹⁵⁷ In recent literature on African rangelands this idea is often associated with Hardin, G. ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’, *Science*, 162, 1968, pp. 1243-8.

¹⁵⁸ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1958, p.14.

it is perhaps surprising that there was never an attempt to question the exact tenure arrangements on the mountain pastures to determine if they really were communal. As Sheddick pointed out, access to grazing might be communal but access to cattle-posts themselves was (semi)private.

In order to graze livestock on the mountain pastures it was, and still is, necessary to have access to a cattle-post. Even though cattle-posts were usually no more than rough stone huts they provided vital shelter for herd-boys: even in summer months temperatures can plummet to below freezing at night. Livestock clustered near the huts or were kraaled in stone enclosures at night as protection from the elements, predators and thieves.¹⁵⁹ Livestock were released early in the morning and foraged over the surrounding hillsides, with smallstock tending to graze on the slopes above a cattle post and largestock on the lower valley slopes. Livestock returned to the kraal with minimal herding each night. In 1937 Staples and Hudson reported that this practise had only begun a few years previously because of a sharp increase in stock theft, but, as herd-boys would still have needed shelter, livestock would have had to remain fairly close to a cattle-post even if they were not kraaled at night. The pattern of grazing on the mountain pastures was therefore largely determined by the location of cattle-posts. As these were scattered at intervals along the valleys, often on an exposed spur to afford a good view of the areas to be grazed, each cattle-post had its own more or less discreet grazing area.¹⁶⁰ Individual cattle post owners had, in effect, a *de facto* private grazing area surrounding their cattle post. Even where these overlapped, neighbouring cattle-post owners tended to be relatives or close friends¹⁶¹ and were, therefore, probably able to come to mutually acceptable grazing strategies.

159 Ashton (*The Basuto*, p. 137) whose fieldwork was mainly carried out in the late 1930s reported that cattle-posts only occasionally had stone stock-pens while Sheddick (*Land Tenure*, p.106) who carried out fieldwork in the late 1940s suggested that every cattle-post had at least one walled stock-pen. Dobb ('The Organization of Range Use in Lesotho') reported that smallstock were kraaled each night but that largestock were allowed to graze where they chose and only checked every few days.

160 Dobb ('The Organization of Range Use in Lesotho') working in the mid-1980s, reported that livestock from different cattle posts often used overlapping areas but the significantly lower density of cattle posts in the 1940s and 50s would have made this more unusual (see Table 7.1):

Table 7.1 Numbers of cattleposts in five cattlepost areas 1936-1988

Valley	1936	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1988
Langalabalele	2	2	3	4	7	7	14
Jareteng	2	3	5	6	14	12	20
Merareng	0	1	3	4	4	4	12
Sanqebethu	1	1	1	1	2	3	6
Khohlo Li Ntja	0	0	0	2	3	8	9

From Quinlan, 'The Livestock Economy in the Mountain Zone', p. 70

161 Quinlan, 'The Livestock Economy in the Mountain Zone of Lesotho'.

It was widely accepted that according to ‘customary’ law every livestock owner had to get permission from the Ward Chief before constructing a cattle post. When Baring originally spoke to Chief Matlere he was specifically told that the Ward Chief could stop the construction of cattle posts but he had no right to determine how people who had been granted cattle posts grazed the area (as I showed above, Matlere later changed his story and reported that the ward chief could also declare *leboella* at the cattle posts).¹⁶² This version of ‘customary’ law was supported by Duncan who stated that ‘it has always been necessary for a person wishing to establish a cattle-post to obtain first the permission of the chief of the mountain area’.¹⁶³ Allen Dobb reported that in the mid-1980s it was still the case that people had first to seek permission from the Ward Chief but that this was not always done. If the surrounding cattle-post owners did not want someone new moving into the area they would report him to the Ward Chief, but if they did not mind the new arrival they would say nothing.¹⁶⁴

The tenure of a cattle post was essentially the same as the tenure of a village site. Once it had been allocated, the owner had a right to occupy the site and the chief was not allowed to reallocate it or order its removal unless it had been abandoned by the owner. Cattle posts were also freely inheritable.¹⁶⁵

All this meant that despite the frequent statements to the contrary the mountain cattle-post area did not represent an open-access zone. Although an individual livestock owner could not legally prevent another livestock owner from grazing within the sphere of his cattle post, the reality of the grazing regime in the mountains must have made this a rare occurrence. The whole theory underlying the Department of Agriculture’s understanding of overgrazing in the mountains therefore looks more than a little shaky. If livestock owners had more or less exclusive use of the pasture area surrounding their cattle post the Department’s goal of individual tenure had, in practice if not in theory, already been achieved.

Interestingly the Department of Agriculture obliquely stated that this was the case in its 1944 *Annual Report* by making a comparison between the mountain and village grazing areas:

With the exception of the high mountain cattle post areas, where individually owned flocks and herds graze the area surrounding the cattle post, the grazing

162 DO35/1180/Y950/5, Baring to Machtig, 25th February 1946.

163 Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs*, p. 84.

164 Dobb, ‘The Organization of Range Use in Lesotho’, p. 193.

165 Duncan, *Sotho Law and Customs*, p. 85.

attached to villages is communal and under the control of the local Chief or Headman.¹⁶⁶

A statement by Leakie, written in an internal memorandum around the same time, arguing that each individual cattle-post owner would have to be responsible for grazing control in the area around his cattle post, suggests that he might have been the source of the observation in the *Annual Report*.¹⁶⁷ Whatever the source of the idea, however, it was not repeated in subsequent *Annual Reports* or Departmental correspondence and certainly never informed policy.

Indeed the grazing closure policy, and other recommendations, showed a total disregard for the reality of the grazing regime in the mountains. When the Department of Agriculture talked of closing areas to grazing or enforcing large-scale rotations, it never discussed the cost to the average Mosotho livestock owner. Though cattle posts tended to be no more than simple stone huts, their construction involved a significant input of labour and capital. If the area in which a cattle post was sited was subsequently closed to grazing, the livestock owner may have been able to negotiate the use of a friend's or relative's cattle post in an area still open for grazing¹⁶⁸ or negotiated a *mafisa* (loaning out) arrangement but would have lost all the returns on the investment in the original cattle post. If no relative or friend was able to help, or if he was unwilling to enter a *mafisa* arrangement, a livestock owner would have had to find a new location for a cattle post, negotiate permission with the Ward Chief and construct a new hut and kraal. Because the tenure arrangements on the mountain pastures had been labelled as communal, however, there seemed to have been an assumption amongst the Basutoland authorities that it was easy for livestock owners to simply move their herds to a new area. In the words of A.D. Forsyth-Thompson, the Resident Commissioner:

the removal of ... stock in itself would not present any great problem (other of course than the disinclination of the people concerned to move).¹⁶⁹

While the Basutoland authorities may have constantly blamed overgrazing on 'primitive' land tenure, it was also in their interests to emphasise the communal nature of land ownership in reference to their development projects. By ignoring the individual tenure aspects of land ownership they were better able to justify large-scale land-use reorganisations. A similar tendency has been noted by Mary Tiffin in her

166 Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1944, p. 3.

167 LNA 2076, Agriculture: Plans for post-war development, Memorandum by Leakie, n.d. [c.1944], p.9.

168 Quinlan ('The Livestock Economy in the Mountain Zone') reports that at the time of his fieldwork, in the late 1980s, this was a common occurrence.

169 PRO DO35/1180/Y950/3, Forsyth-Thompson to Baring, 13 June 1946.

work on Machakos district in Kenya. Here the individual nature of Akamba rights to land was clearer than in Lesotho but nevertheless:

Most administrators and agriculturalists preferred to believe that African land was managed by tribal authorities and that individuals held only use rights. This conveniently implied that a right to use another piece of land could be substituted if the government for any reason wanted to dispossess the user.¹⁷⁰

The Akamba on the other hand stressed the individual nature of their land holdings and were keen to have their tenure arrangements recognised by the Kenyan colonial state.

Even where colonial development projects did result in individual tenure arrangements these were often in the form of leasehold rather than freehold arrangements. The Swaziland Land Settlement Scheme allocated plots of land to settlers under a system of leasehold using 'Certificates of Occupancy'. Peasant farmers who did not abide by conditions of occupation imposed by the colonial government could be evicted from the plots. Thornton commented on the issue:

I have come to the conclusion that there is no surer way of ruining the land than where freehold is applied in the case of people who have not developed sufficiently to permit of their realizing that the land is not theirs to ruin for rapid temporary gain, but is only theirs to live from economically, and has to be maintained and even built up for prosperity. I would strongly recommend that in the case of the land in Swaziland leasehold tenure be applied.¹⁷¹

Unlike the Akamba, Basotho tended to avoid any reference to aspects of the tenure system that emphasised the rights of the individual. For the chiefs the reason was obvious, but for commoners the stress on communal ownership was also politically advantageous. The linking of rights to land with membership of the Basotho nation was seen as a vital element in the battle against land alienation and transfer. Lekhotla la Bafo often complained about the presence of European traders on the grounds that they had no right to secure tenure of residential plots as they were not members of the nation.¹⁷²

170 Tiffin, M. 'Land and Capital: Blind Spots in the Study of the 'Resource-Poor' Farmer' in Leach and Mearns, *The Lie of the Land*, pp. 168-185, p. 171.

171 Swaziland National Archives 486F, Report on Native Land Settlement Scheme, 22 March 1949, quoted in Simelane, H.S. 'Landlessness and the Imperial Response in Swaziland, 1938-1950', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17, 4, 1991, pp. 717-741, p. 730-1.

172 See for example Presidential Address, Maseru ,13 October 1929, LNA S3/22/2/4 in Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, p. 103-111. Berry ('Hegemony on a Shoestring') notes similar motivations across sub-Saharan Africa: in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, for example, the communal nature of land tenure was used as an argument against plans by the colonial state to declare all 'vacant' land as Crown property.

7.7. Land alienation and opposition to fencing

Fears about the possibility of land alienation also largely explain the more or less universal opposition to fencing that existed in colonial Lesotho, especially if the fencing was erected by the colonial state. The Basutoland authorities recognised that any large-scale fencing plan would be extremely expensive, especially taking into account the country's broken topography, and would only lead to vocal opposition. Fencing was not, therefore, ever carried out to the same extent as it was in either the reserve areas of South Africa or Southern Rhodesia.

The anti-erosion scheme initiated by Thornton in Herschel district, South Africa, had included substantial investments in fencing to protect areas suffering from severe erosion. The Pim Commission recommended that this part of the scheme should not be attempted in Lesotho, noting that:

Fencing is...regarded with intense suspicion and ... an attempt should be made to give the necessary protection to the slopes on the lines of ancient custom instead of adopting measures which would antagonise both the Chiefs and the people.¹⁷³

Where fencing was erected, for example around the experimental plots discussed in chapter 8, great pains were taken to ensure that the local ward chief agreed to the plan.

Despite the extremely cautious attitude of the Basutoland authorities the few projects that did include fencing were met with resistance from Basotho. During the Second World Ward the Department of Agriculture was particularly keen to increase output of food crops, in line with general imperial policy. As they believed low yields were primarily the result of low soil fertility they placed a particular emphasis on the manuring of arable fields. The removal of manure to use as fuel was identified as a major issue and it was decided that they should encourage the planting of trees as a way of increasing the availability of fuelwood.¹⁷⁴ This scheme was criticised by Lekhotla la Bafo both because tree planting was done under the matsema labour system and because the tree plantations were fenced.¹⁷⁵ The difficulties the Basutoland authorities encountered with this limited fencing scheme, and its expense, discouraged them from using any fencing in the grazing closure policies attempted in the decade following the Second World War.¹⁷⁶

173 Pim, *Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland*, p.139.

174 Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1942, p.2.

175 Rabase Sekike to Chieftainess 'Matsaba Seeiso, 2 February 1941 and 30 May 1943, MA 1/33, in Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, p.137-139 and 140-142.

176 See Lambert, R.T. 'Notes on a trip to Basutoland and South Africa, February - March 1945', unpublished report, Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS Afr.s.397(9).

The lack of emphasis on fencing is in stark contrast to grazing schemes in the South African and Southern Rhodesia reserves. In Zimutu reserve, Southern Rhodesia, a grazing scheme begun the same year as the Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek closures involved the fencing of 1,460 hectares into four paddocks.¹⁷⁷ In South Africa the Director of Native Agriculture saw fencing as the key to the development of 'modern agriculture'.¹⁷⁸ Fencing became a potent symbol in the conflicts between Africans and the settler state in decade between the mid-1940s and mid-1950s, and the cutting of fencing became one of the major acts of resistance to the state's rehabilitation policies.¹⁷⁹

7.8. Livestock culling

The second crucial area in which the Basutoland authorities felt unable to intervene was in the forcible culling of livestock populations. This does not mean, however, that the Department of Agriculture did not see a smaller national livestock population as an important objective.

As we saw above the Director of Veterinary Services in the Department introduced the idea of culling to the 1925 National Council, but it was flatly rejected and the scheme was dropped. Six years later, when Thornton first reported on Lesotho's mountain pastures, he also recommended that the livestock population be reduced, saying that there were twice too many head of smallstock in the country. Thornton recommended that a start be made by placing a tax on 'surplus sheep'. He did not fully define the concept but it seemed to imply the number of sheep an individual person held above the country's carrying capacity divided by the adult male population.¹⁸⁰

While the Department of Agriculture were discussing how to implement Thornton's recommendations the livestock population in Lesotho altered, in the words of one official, in a 'most unexpected manner'.¹⁸¹ The succession of droughts in the early 1930s and a slump in world wool and mohair prices meant that Thornton's goal of halving the smallstock population was achieved without any government intervention whatsoever (see Figure 4.5).¹⁸² This was greeted with mixed feelings by the

¹⁷⁷ Robinson, D.A. *Pasture Improvement in Zimutu Reserve* (Bulletin No. 1578, Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Sailsbury, 1951).

¹⁷⁸ Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development', p.80.

¹⁷⁹ Mager, 'The People Get Fenced'.

¹⁸⁰ LNA 212, Thornton, R.W., Report on Pastoral and Agricultural Conditions in Basutoland, n.d. [c. July 1931].

¹⁸¹ LNA 212, Principal Veterinary Officer to Government Secretary, 8 February 1933.

¹⁸² Mohair prices dropped from about 20p per lb in 1929 to between 2 and 3p per lb in 1932, Uys, *The*

Basutoland administration. On the one hand they felt that all that was now needed for pasture improvement was ‘plenteous rains’,¹⁸³ but on the other that the decrease in livestock meant that there were ‘not sufficient oxen for ploughing purposes’.¹⁸⁴ It was decided that for the time being no further moves should be made to reduce the livestock population. This decision was, however, to be short-lived and it was not long before new calls for a reduced livestock population began to be heard.

Despite the fact that the sheep population remained at a level roughly half that deplored by Thornton in 1931 and the goat and cattle populations rose only very slowly from comparably low levels there were persistent calls for a reduction in the total livestock population from the late 1930s onwards. The fact that the livestock population had fallen so dramatically in the first half of the 1930s meant, however, that the Department of Agriculture often got itself into a state of confusion over the issue of overgrazing. They were sure that livestock culling was the correct policy, but by their own calculations it hardly seemed necessary.

The *Mochochonono* newspaper exploited this confusion in a June 1947 article in which it reported a recent conversation between a deputation of ‘Basuto farmers’ (presumably members of the Progressive Association) and Forsyth-Thompson. According to *Mochochonono* Forsyth-Thompson had told them that the country was not overstocked and that it had more than sufficient pastures for the present animals.¹⁸⁵ *Mochochonono* argued (I would suggest correctly) that this meant that the Department of Agriculture’s attitude towards livestock culling was ‘based more on theory than upon experience and practice’.¹⁸⁶

The Basutoland administration responded in a lengthy letter, signed by T.B. Kennan the Government Secretary, which the newspaper printed in full. He agreed that the country’s livestock population was well within the accepted carrying capacity but that this figure represented the position ‘once the grazing has been rehabilitated’. Kennan went on to argue that large areas of the country were heavily degraded because stock were concentrated in certain areas and that they needed to be properly redistributed. The recently instituted closure policies would ensure that this redistribution occurred

Lesotho Mohair Industry.

183 LNA 212, Principal Veterinary Officer to Government Secretary, 8 February 1933.

184 LNA 212, file note by Sturrock, n.d. [c. March 1933].

185 Leakie made a similar statement in the Basutoland National Council in 1944, *Proceedings of the 39th Session*, 1944, p. 255.

186 Editorial, ‘Limitation of Stock’, *Mochochonono*, 14 June 1947.

but it had to be carried out ‘conscientiously’ and with ‘great urgency’. He finished with a barely veiled threat:

If limitation, redistribution and grazing management are carefully observed, it is hoped that the reduction in stock may be unnecessary.¹⁸⁷

This threat, and others of it kind, were apparently taken relatively seriously by members of the National Council who often spoke in favour of grazing control in the same breath as speaking against compulsory culling. Even Josiel Lefela spoke up in favour of grazing control policies¹⁸⁸ while a Councillor from Qacha’s Nek best summed up the general opinion of the Council:

I agree firmly that control of grazing ... is the only solution, not that the country is overstocked.¹⁸⁹

Despite the fact that the livestock population seemed to be below the government calculations of the country’s carrying capacity a whole series of policies were enacted from the mid 1930s through to the late 1940s, designed to keep the livestock population low. These were mostly concerned with placing restrictions on imports, encouraging exports and castrating ‘bastard’ rams and ‘scrub’ bulls. The various Proclamations promulgated by the High Commissioner resulted in numerous complaints in the National Council, many of whose members believed that the livestock population was too low, and should increase.¹⁹⁰ Another constant complaint in the National Council was that white traders were allowed to circumvent the rules¹⁹¹ and that Free State farmers waited near the border crossings and brought up any livestock prevented from entering Lesotho at extremely low prices.¹⁹²

While these *ad hoc* control policies seemed to fulfil the Basutoland authorities desire to do something about the overall livestock population, the advent of a Nationalist government in South Africa encouraged them to consider more direct reduction policies. As we saw in chapter 6, a letter from Baring to Forsyth-Thompson makes it clear where the motivation for a more interventionist policy emanated from:

I think it is particularly important for all three High Commission Territories to emphasise the measures we are taking to enforce in the future the limitation of stock. My impression from conversations with the Union authorities and from

187 Letter from Kennan, T.B. *Mochochonono*, 5 July 1947. Copy of original in LNA 2526, Kennan to the Editor of Mochochonono, 26 June 1947.

188 Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 44th Session*, 1948, p. 221.

189 Councillor Theko Bereng, Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 44th Session*, 1948, p. 173.

190 See for example discussion in Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 45th Session*, 1949, p. 153-166.

191 See for example discussion in Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 47th Session*, 1951, p.484-491.

192 See for example a statement by Councillor K. Moelesi, Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 43rd Session*, 1947, p.562.

visiting Betterment Areas in the Transkei is that (i) they lay more emphasis on the limitation of stock and the improvement of pasture than they do on the protection of arable land and (ii) they believe that without compulsory limitation no measure to save the soil are of any use¹⁹³

Just months after the election victory of the National Party in South Africa the Basutoland authorities raised the issue of reducing the goat population to the National Council. The desire to mount a particular attack on goats had existed for many years. Thornton had regarded goats as ‘uneconomical’ and ‘destructive’,¹⁹⁴ and his distaste for the animal was shared by his successors. While they believed that an attack on the goat population would not be as unpopular as moves to reduce the sheep or cattle population the Basutoland authorities were nevertheless concerned that the National Council might reject the plans.

The debate in 1948 was inconclusive, with a number of speakers picking-up on the contradiction pointed out by the *Mochochonono* newspaper the previous year. One speaker referred to a speech made by Leakie at the Umkomozane meeting in March 1947 in which he ‘stated that the number of livestock... is lower as compared with former times’.¹⁹⁵ P.A.O. Bowmaker, who stood in as Acting Director of Agriculture between Leakie’s departure in April 1948 and King’s arrival in October, attempted to re-interpret his former boss’s comments in a way that suited their present task:

When Mr Leakie... said that the country was not overstocked that was not exactly what he meant. He intended to say that if the grazing in Basutoland was as it should be it could carry all the stock which was in the territory at that time, providing that the stock were properly distributed and not clustered in the neighbourhood of the villages and in certain grazing areas.¹⁹⁶

Although many members spoke out against any plans to reduce the goat population they did agree to elect a committee to look into the issue. While the Basutoland authorities claimed that the committee was representative of a cross section of the country’s goat owners, in reality it was dominated by close advisors to the Paramount Chief. The Angora Goat Committee, chaired by King, met in April 1949 and agreed to recommend a plan to reduce the total goat population by 25 percent over 5 years.¹⁹⁷ Much was made of the plan by the Department of Agriculture but it was extremely short on details. Quite how the mechanism was to work was totally unclear. All that

¹⁹³ PRO DO119/1442, Baring to Forsyth-Thompson, 11 October 1949.

¹⁹⁴ LNA 2076, Thornton’s comments on Memorandum on post-war development prepared by Leakie, n.d.

¹⁹⁵ Samuel Matate, Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 44th Session*, 1948, p.175.

¹⁹⁶ P.A.O. Bowmaker, Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 44th Session*, 1948, p.176.

¹⁹⁷ Basutoland National Council, *Proceedings of the 45th Session*, 1949, p.167.

was agreed was that goats would be purchased and exported by the Department of Agriculture and that Ward Chiefs would organise ‘the presentation for goats for purchase’. As a *quid pro quo* the Department of Agriculture would buy good quality angora goat rams which would be sold at reduced prices to Basotho flock owners.¹⁹⁸

The second part of the scheme was the only part of it to be implemented. In 1950 and 1951 almost 200 hundred rams were imported, using funds from the Wool and Mohair Fund and re-sold at reduced prices.¹⁹⁹ Presumably the rams tended to be brought by the better off angora goat owners running large commercial herds. As the early 1950s were a time of generally good mohair prices (see Figure 9.2), these livestock owners were probably entirely satisfied by the intervention.

The actual plans for reducing the goat population were somewhat hazy. They seemed to involve a system whereby livestock owners would be forced to sell their goats to the Department of Agriculture at the current market price in Durban where the Department would then re-sell the goats. It was not clear how the people forced to sell, or the number they would have sell, was going to be determined. The original plans had suggested this would be the responsibility of ward chiefs but the Department of Agriculture later claimed that the plans were held up by delays in appointing Development Officers who were to undertake the work. Until there was one Development Officer per district it was deemed ‘not desirable on political grounds’ to commence the plan.²⁰⁰

Despite a half-hearted attempt to revive the plan at a meeting between Forsyth-Thompson, Bowmaker and the Paramount Chief’s advisers in March 1953, the plan was never translated into action. At that meeting the Paramount Chief’s advisers objected to the plan to pay the current market price in Durban as they said traders in Lesotho were paying higher prices. They were, however, willing to support, a scheme whereby the Department of Agriculture would pay the current local market price for goats whose meat would then be distributed to ‘lepers, lunatics and prisoners’. Bowmaker pointed out that there was no way the Department could subsidise such a scheme, and he suggested instead a tax on all Boer goats to encourage people to sell.²⁰¹ This plan was not greeted with enthusiasm by the advisers and, as with Thornton’s original proposal in 1931 for taxing ‘surplus sheep’, the policy was never implemented. Through-out the

198 Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1949, p.79.

199 LNA 2537/III, King to Government Secretary, 13 May 1952.

200 LNA 2537/III, King to Government Secretary, 13 May 1952.

201 LNA 2537/III, Extracts of a meeting between the Resident Commissioner and the Paramount Chief’s advisers, 18 March 1953.

colonial period all that the Basutoland authorities could do to reduce the livestock population was to try to control imports and encourage exports; they were never able either to intervene directly and cull livestock or to introduce grazing fees or livestock taxes.

7.9. Conclusion

One of the reasons the Basutoland authorities were keen to try to revive the goat reduction campaign in the early 1950s was that ‘Mantsebo had spoke out in favour of the idea. Early on in ‘Mantsebo’s reign the British authorities decided that they should try to interest her in agricultural development issues. This was largely because they wanted her support in getting the National Council to accept their plans for Agricultural Improvement Areas but also because they hoped it would divert her attention from political battles with her chiefly rivals. Evelyn Baring’s approach to Basutoland in general and ‘Mantsebo in particular was to ‘try to divert attention from political to agricultural issues’.²⁰² Through-out her reign they continued to pursue this policy and she frequently went along with their programme.

Under the reforms of the late 1930s and early 1940s the powers of the Paramount Chief had become increasingly circumscribed, and functions that the Paramount Chief had previously controlled individually were increasingly usurped by either the National Council or the colonial state. Agricultural development policies were one of the few arenas in which the Paramount Chief could find a space in which to negotiate power. Marc Epprecht has noted that “‘Mantsebo and other female chiefs were ... known for employing innovative means to increase the powers and prestige of their office’. He, however, underestimates just how ‘innovative’ ‘Mantsebo could be when he argues that she:

won grudging respect from the British by her willingness to enforce the often highly unpopular erosion control laws on her lands, an extension of her authority she eagerly embrace in the name of ‘progress’.²⁰³

The evidence cited above suggests she was even more innovative in the way she chose to enforce, or not to enforce, erosion control and other development policies. In the next chapter I will show how she used the Department of Agriculture’s plans for experimental grazing control plots to her own material advantage and in chapter 9 I

²⁰² PRO DO35/4007, Baring to Machting, 24 June 1947. See also PRO DO35/4010, Baring to Gordon Walker, 22 October 1950.

²⁰³ Epprecht, M. ‘Women’s “Conservatism” and the Politics of Gender in Late Colonial Lesotho’, *Journal of African History*, 36, 1995, pp. 25-56, p. 42. This assessment is based on personal correspondence between Epprecht and Gordon Hector, Deputy Resident Commissioner and Government Secretary, 1956-1965, who may not have been fully aware of ‘Mantsebo’s manoeuvrings over grazing control orders earlier in the 1950s.

discuss how her support for grazing control in the ward of Mokhotlong significantly bolstered her political position and that of her closest adviser and lover, Chief Matlere Lerotholi.

In his review of literature on rural resistance in sub-Saharan Africa in 1990, Allen Isaacman comments:

Even when the colonial administration used strong hereditary chiefs, these historic authorities had little room to negotiate. As a result, their ability to command mass loyalty and to govern by consensus declined. Chiefs had to make a judicious calculation of when to enforce colonial policies and when to speak out in opposition to the state. Each had an obvious cost. However much they may have wished to straddle [these two options], most chiefs usually opted to be loyalists.²⁰⁴

The political ingenuity of ‘Mantsebo, Matlere and other senior chiefs concerning development policies suggests a slightly different perspective. Another option pursued with great skill by some senior chiefs in Lesotho was to speak out in favour of the colonial policies but then either to manipulate the implementation to their own political ends or not to implement them at all, all the while saying that the implementation is progressing satisfactorily.

Basutoland and High Commission officials regularly pointed to the senior chiefs as being the key to the successful implementation of soil conservation and other development policies. Evelyn Baring was especially keen to emphasise the central role played by the chiefly authorities in the remote mountain areas:

It is they and they alone who will be able to enforce rotational grazing and stock limitation in the steep valleys of the roadless mountain country which makes up the catchment of the Orange...Basutoland’s survival as a political unit separate from the Union depends on the success of soil conservation. This, in turn, depends on the co-operation of the chiefs and the maintenance of their authority.²⁰⁵

This emphasis on the role of chiefs in the development process meant that, while the general trend from the 1910s through to the 1960s was for the political position of the chiefs to come under increasing pressure, from both a more interventionist colonial state and political organisations commanding mass support, a few of the most powerful chiefs were able to find significant ‘room to negotiate’ in the arena of development, especially in the period between the mid-1940s and mid-1950s.

204 Isaacman, ‘Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa’, p.41.

205 PRO DO35/4025, Notes by Sir E. Baring on the Political and Economic Position of the HC Territories. [c.1950]. This was sentiment expressed often and forcibly by Baring, also see, for example, PRO DO35/4010, Baring to Gordon Walker, 22 October 1950 and Baring to Liesching, 20 July 1951.

While I have tended to contrast the developmental policies in Lesotho with those in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia some recent research has suggested that even in the settler states there were, on occasions, significant opportunities for chiefs to negotiate a more complex route between the two poles of resistance or loyalty than Isaacman's simple dichotomy suggests. Jocelyn Alexander's detailed examination of agrarian policy and rural politics in two districts of Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe from the 1940s through to the 1990s reveals just such an approach amongst local chiefs, especially when 'officials were thin on the ground, as they often were'.²⁰⁶ The following statement by Alexander could serve equally well for Lesotho:

Government officials' reliance on chiefs to maintain order and implement policies allowed chiefs a flexible space in which to negotiate for concessions and to undermine or mitigate the impact of policies. The state's success in implementing policies, and in co-opting rural leaders has been exaggerated: policies did not have the effects they were intended or which were claimed for them.²⁰⁷

Nevertheless there are some key contrasts between the reserve areas of settler states and the Indirect Rule colony of Lesotho. The first obvious contrast was in the opportunities available to senior chiefs to scupper policies before they were even implemented. The Basutoland administration's desire to get National Council support for all their policies meant that it was unlikely that a development policy, such as forcible culling, would be introduced if it were not in the interest of the senior chiefs.²⁰⁸ In the South African reserves many chiefs were also opposed to forcible culling, but their powers to influence policy were much weaker. In some cases chiefs in South Africa were at the forefront of resistance to forced culling when it was in the process of being implemented,²⁰⁹ but in Lesotho this resistance took place at a quasi-legislative level and the policies were therefore often never even enacted.

Secondly South African development projects often took place on Trust Lands where state technocrats could institute land tenure policies that fitted their ideas about the productivity of land under different tenure regimes. It was only after the mid-1950s, with the debate over the Tomlinson Commission, that South African government attitudes to communal tenure began to shift and attempts were made to bolster or reactivate chiefly control over land allocation. In Lesotho both the colonial state and the chiefs were aware that the cornerstone of chiefly authority was their power to allocate

206 Alexander, 'The State, Agrarian Policy and Rural Politics', p. 34.

207 Alexander, 'The State, Agrarian Policy and Rural Politics', p.3-4. On the point about policies not being implemented see also Phimister, I 'Rethinking the Reserves: Southern Rhodesia's Land Husbandry Act Reviewed', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 2, 1993, pp. 223-239.

208 Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, p. 4-5.

209 Mager, 'The People get Fenced'; Delius, 'Sebatakgomo: Migrant Organisations, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt'.

land and they avoided any projects that appeared to undermine the communal nature of land ownership.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, however, even the ‘communal’ nature of Lesotho’s land tenure system has to be understood in an essentially political framework; a framework that was open to conflicts over definitions and conflicts over rights. Anita Franklin, citing the work of Martin Chanock,²¹⁰ has argued that, as elsewhere in southern Africa, the Basutoland administration’s codification of ‘customary’ law led to ‘the artificial “freezing” of what had previously been a dynamic system’.²¹¹ As we have seen above, however, interventions by the colonial administration did not simply serve to freeze the system of land tenure into a shape that favoured the state’s interests, but were rather just one factor in the political battles over land. In this context it is important to recognise not only that the majority of development policies attempted by the colonial state failed, but that both their success and failure had important political implications. The political implications of the Mokhotlong closure policy are examined in chapter 9, but first we will turn to the experimental plots in Maseru district.

210 Chanock, M.L. ‘Making Customary Law: Men, Women and Courts in Colonial Northern Rhodesia.’ in Hay, M. and Wright, M. (ed.) *African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives*, Boston University Papers on Africa, Vol. 7, 1982; Chanock, M.L. *Law, Custom and Social Order: the Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia*, (Cambridge, 1985).

211 Franklin, *Land Law*, p. 47

8. The pilot grazing schemes in the mountain areas of Maseru district

One of the results of the visit by Russell Thornton to Lesotho in 1931, outlined in chapter 4, was the establishment of two experimental grazing schemes in the mountain area of Maseru district, near the village of Semongkong. This experimental programme was one of the two major highland grazing projects attempted during the colonial era (the other being the massive closure policy in Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek). The history of this experimental programme was fairly carefully documented in the Department of Agriculture files from the 1940s; there are certainly more details on them than on the closure policy. The area in which the schemes were attempted was visited fairly regularly by Basutoland officials, probably not least because of its proximity to the stunning Maletsunyane Falls. This chapter outlines the schemes' history in some detail as they provide a good case study highlighting many common features of colonial development policies in Lesotho.

8.1. An experiment in fencing, stock removal and deferred grazing

In February 1932 the Resident Commissioner, J.C. Sturrock, and an officer from the Department of Agriculture met with two representatives of the Paramount Chief (Chief Joel and Chief Tebesi) to discuss the state of Lesotho's rangelands and policies for rehabilitation. Tebesi suggested that the best way of dealing with bitter karoo bush was to burn it, reporting that in the following season grasses would return. Sturrock concurred with his analysis but added that grasses would only return if the areas were allowed to rest in order to give grasses time to re-seed.¹ Sturrock suggested the idea of putting up fencing around areas of bitter karoo bush in order to see if the grasses grew back when all grazing was stopped. He was a great pains to stress that the fences would only be put up around areas where the grazing potential was already severely reduced and that 'we are not depriving any man of his pastures'.²

As in other issues connected to land use, Sturrock feared that the Paramount Chief might reject the proposals. When the possibility of establishing a Pasture Research

¹ This is a good example of the non-expert administrator taking on the language and ideas of rangeland specialists and repeating them with the voice of authority. It is especially striking here as Sturrock seemed very shaky on details during his early questions to Chiefs Tebesi and Joel.

² LNA 212, Notes of an interview with representatives of the Paramount Chief, 24 February 1932. A report on the enclosures by L. F. Wacher, in Staples and Hudson's *Ecological Survey*, gives the date of the meeting as 24 January 1932.

Station was first raised in 1931 he reported these concerns, along with the question of finance, to the High Commissioner:

The Paramount Chief would almost certainly be opposed to the Grant of any land for the purpose of instituting a Pasture or Reclamation Station, assuming that the necessary funds for the purpose could eventually be found.³

He must have been relieved, therefore, when the two chiefs accepted the idea and said they would recommend it to Paramount Chief Griffith.⁴ Griffith's response is not recorded on the relevant file but as there was no further discussion it can probably be safely assumed to have been positive. Given subsequent events it is possible that Griffith was offered the chance of grazing his livestock inside any fenced areas at some future date; this was certainly on offer to 'Mantsebo' in the 1940s and Griffith's close involvement was seen as vital to the projects workability.⁵ In February 1933 it was reported that two sites, one at Thaba Putsoa and another at Thaba Tsoeu, were due to be fenced the following month.⁶

Unfortunately details of how these areas were managed during the rest of the 1930s are not readily available as the subsequent file was not traceable in the Lesotho National Archives. From what can be gleamed from Department of Agricultural *Annual Reports* it appears that the enclosures at Thaba Putsoa and Thaba Tsoeu were to be closed to all grazing, whilst an area of about 1,000 acres just to the west of the Thaba Tsoeu enclosure was to be subjected to a 'deferred grazing' regime. Unlike most "deferred grazing" schemes practised in southern Africa at this time the Thaba Tsoeu scheme involved not just leaving two thirds of the area ungrazed each year but also the exclusion of all livestock in the winter months, on the grounds that in these months livestock returned to village pastures. It is unclear exactly how the rotation was administered; at some point a local headman, Sekoolo Sethnoamajoe,⁷ was appointed as caretaker but subsequent events suggest he did little to enforce regulations.⁸ In fact it is highly unlikely that the Thaba Tsoeu 'deferred grazing scheme' was actually implemented in any systematic way during the 1930s.

In 1936 the Department of Agriculture's *Annual Report* recorded that after just two years (i.e. before the three year cycle was completed) there were 'remarkable' signs of pasture improvement, despite the fact that the stocking rate was 'far too heavy'.⁹ This

³ LNA 212, Sturrock to Tweedie, 21 March 1931.

⁴ LNA 212, Notes of an interview with representatives of the Paramount Chief, 24 February 1932.

⁵ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1939, p. 2.

⁶ LNA 212, Agricultural Officer to Government Secretary, n.d. [c. February 1933].

⁷ At various times his first name was also spelt Seholo or Sekoalo and his surname Sethnamajoe.

⁸ He was later sacked from this position, see below for fuller discussion.

⁹ According to the Annual Report (p.1) there were 1,200 head of cattle and horses in the area. The Report did not mention smallstock, so it is not clear if they were excluded from the scheme or not

report of success needs to be treated as extremely dubious. The following two *Annual Reports* make no mention of the scheme and the 1939 *Report* states that:

The full progress desired in connection with this difficult and far-reaching project was not achieved due to several causes, the chief of which were the protracted illness and subsequent death of the Paramount Chief, and the Director of Agriculture's absence of leave for a period of seven months.¹⁰

Despite these set-backs the *Annual Report* continued in up-beat terms:

The delay has not been unfruitful, as the examination of experimental results, etc. has led to a close re-examination of the original proposals, which will result in a further simplification of the general plan dealing with pasture control throughout the territory.¹¹

An internal report on the experimental plots, written by L.H. Collett in 1950 suggested that there were more widespread problems with the scheme. He noted that in the period from April 1935 onwards there were many 'accidental (?) fires' [punctuation in original] and that the fences around the two enclosures were frequently cut. In 1938 Staples and Hudson reported that the enclosure at Thaba Tsoeu was 'maliciously burnt' in September 1934 and the one at the Thaba Putsoa in July 1935.¹²

It is pretty clear that the 'deferred grazing' scheme was never implemented.

Significantly the 'deferred grazing' scheme was not even mentioned in Staples and Hudson's *Ecological Survey*, despite the fact they carried out their field work in 1936, the year the scheme was supposedly so successful. In 1950 Collett mentioned that in the early 1940s it was decided to institute a new 'proper grazing trial in place of the work which had been *contemplated*' [my emphasis].¹³

8.2. A second attempt

This new grazing trial first began to be mooted after a June 1941 visit to the enclosures at Thaba Tsoeu and Thaba Putsoa by Collett and one of the Paramount Chief's representatives, Chief Maama Letchesa. Officially these two enclosures were simply closed to all livestock to see what happened to bitter karoo bush, though as Collett's 1950 report indicated they were both frequently burnt and grazed. Nevertheless in 1941 Collett reported that both enclosures looked in good condition and that:

The chief was very impressed with the marvellous recovery in this enclosure and expressed the wish that this fence be left standing and that the enclosure be used by the Paramount Chief's cattle for future grazing experiments.

recorded. A figure of over one livestock unit per acre is far in excess of the figures most livestock experts recommended at this time.

¹⁰ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1939, p.2.

¹¹ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1939, p.2.

¹² Staples and Hudson, *An Ecological Survey of the Mountain Area*, p. 31-32.

¹³ LNA 2476/II, Note on Grazing Experiments at Thaba Putsoa and Thaba Tsoeu, sent to Government Secretary, 12 August 1950.

To make this possible it was suggested that the enclosure at Thaba Tsoeu be extended to include a nearby stream so that livestock would have access to water.¹⁴

Collett and Letchesa also discovered, however, that the Thaba Tsoeu fence was broken at one point and cattle were grazing within the enclosure. Sekoolo Sethnoamajoe, the caretaker appointed to oversee the enclosure was berated by Letchesa and the keys to the enclosure gate were taken away from him.¹⁵ At some point in 1941 (most probably then) Sekoolo was sacked as caretaker.¹⁶ The Department of Agriculture officials involved all seemed to agree that the ‘untrustworthy and useless’ Sekoolo was ‘responsible for most of the damage’.¹⁷

The Agricultural Officer based at Mafeteng, who visited the enclosures fairly regularly, reported that Sekoolo had threatened, in January 1941, that the next ‘winter would not pass without the whole enclosure being burnt’.¹⁸ In September the enclosure was indeed ‘entirely burnt out’¹⁹ and in the following summer and autumn there were reports of the fencing being broken down and livestock grazing in the enclosure.²⁰

In April 1943 Leakie reported that:

The wire fence is continually being damaged and broken and large herds of cattle graze in the area, so that the enclosure is worthless for experimental purposes.²¹

He suggested that the best course of action was to remove the fence entirely and to concentrate on the Thaba Putsoa site, which was not suffering to the same extent. The Paramount Chief, however, asked the Agriculture Department not to remove the fence and suggested that she could send livestock to graze the area on an experimental basis as suggested by her representative, Chief Letchesa when he visited the enclosure with Collett in June 1941. As footnote 20 indicates there is some evidence that her cattle were already grazing within the Thaba Tsoeu enclosure in any case. Later that year she changed her mind²² and in June 1943 the fence was pulled down.²³ Her reasons for

¹⁴ LNA 1012/II, Collett, L.H., Report on Grazing Experiments, 15 June 1941.

¹⁵ LNA 1012/II, Collett, L.H., Report on Grazing Experiments, 15 June 1941 and Agricultural Officer, Mafeteng to Wacher, 19 October 1941.

¹⁶ LNA 1012/II, Leakie to Government Secretary, 7 April 1942.

¹⁷ LNA 1012/II, Leakie to Government Secretary, 7 April 1942.

¹⁸ LNA 1012/II, Agricultural Officer, Mafeteng to Wacher, 19 October 1941.

¹⁹ LNA 1012/II, Wacher to Thornton, 1 September 1941.

²⁰ LNA 1012/II, Collett to Leakie, 17 March 1942 and Leakie to Government Secretary, 7 April 1942. Collett reported that 30 of the 62 cattle found in the enclosure belonged to ‘Mantsebo of Qeme’. Leakie noted in the margin of the letter that this was the Paramount Chief, but the Government Secretary suggested that it could refer to cattle from the Mantsebo area of the Qeme valley. The issue was not pursued.

²¹ LNA 1012/II, Leakie to Government Secretary, 10 April 1943.

²² LNA 1012/II, ‘Mantsebo to Arden Clarke, 12 June 1943.

²³ LNA 2476/II, Collett, L.H., Report on Grazing Experiments, 12 August 1950.

changing her opinion were not recorded but it is probable that she was offered the chance of grazing her livestock both in the enclosure at Thaba Putsoa and on a new rotational grazing scheme to be tried on the site of the previous ‘deferred grazing’ experiment next to what had been the Thaba Tsoeu enclosure.

During the winter of 1944 R.K. Tennant, an officer in the Agriculture Department, visited Thaba Tsoeu with an unnamed representative of the Paramount Chief to beacon off three different camps, of more or less equal size (totalling 1,150 acres), that would form the basis of the rotational grazing scheme. Tennant reported that the Paramount Chief’s representative and Headman Sekoolo stated that:

If the area was beacons they thought it would be more respected than if it was fenced. If this proves correct it should prove easy to control the grazing.²⁴

The area was to be stocked at a rate of one livestock unit to 10 acres and each year only two of the three camps were to be grazed. The two plots being grazed would be utilised on a one month rotation. The whole area was to be closed to grazing during the winter months of May to September.²⁵ After numerous delays the requisite number of Mantsebo’s cattle were sent to Thaba Tsoeu and installed on the rotational grazing scheme on 17th January 1945. Sekoolo was appointed, on the advice of ‘Mantsebo, as caretaker.²⁶ Nobody in the Department of Agriculture seemed to realise they had appointed the person blamed for destroying the previous experiment as overseer of the new one, possible because Tennant spelt his name as Seholo, while Collett spelt it as Sekoolo. Furthermore they were happily passing on his advice that a ‘beacons will be better respected than ... fences’ to other members of the Basutoland administration.²⁷

This assessment proved to be somewhat wide of the mark. When the Agricultural Officer from Mafeteng visited the scheme a couple of months later he reported ‘hundreds of sheep and goats are already running at random within the selected area’ and, realising who they had appointed as caretaker, blamed Sekoolo:

The whole demonstration is doomed to failure, unless the Paramount Chief can appoint someone who will take more interest in the work and prevent trespass by outside stock.²⁸

To make matters worse ‘Mantsebo sent Arden Clarke a note informing him that the grazing scheme ‘had been eaten bare’ and she was moving her livestock elsewhere.²⁹ The first year of the rotational grazing was not a great success.

²⁴ LNA 1012/II, Tennant to Leakie, 16 September 1944.

²⁵ LNA 2476/II, Collett, L.H., Report on Grazing Experiments, 12 August 1950.

²⁶ LNA 1012/II, Form [signed by Leakie] appointing Seholo Sethuamajoe as caretaker with effect 16 January 1945 with a salary of £2 per month.

²⁷ LNA 1012/II, Leakie to Government Secretary, 4 October 1944.

²⁸ LNA 1012/II, Leakie to Government Secretary, 15 March 1945.

²⁹ LNA 1012/II, ‘Mantsebo to Arden Clarke, 23 March 1945.

Over the next winter the Department of Agriculture tried to put the problems right. Sekoolo was sacked (for the second time) and a new caretaker, Headman Lesala Mahomo, was appointed. Nevertheless by September 1945, when 'Mantsebo's cattle were due to return, two of the three sections were found to be completely denuded.³⁰ It was considered inadvisable for her livestock to be sent to the scheme, especially as the new caretaker, who lived some distance away in Semongkong, was not overseeing the grazing area. In exasperation Leakie commented:

One would have thought that the Paramount Chief had only to declare certain areas 'spare veld' for the local Headman to see that her orders were carried out. This is not apparently the case.³¹

After discussing the whole issue with advisers of the Paramount Chief, the Agricultural Department decided to appoint a second sub-caretaker, who lived nearer Thaba Tsoeu. The two caretakers were told to impound any livestock found in the beaconed area and hand them over to the Paramount Chiefs adviser, Chief Leloko Lerotholi, who would impose a heavy fine. It was reported that after just a few weeks of this new regime the grazing was improving and that 'Mantsebo's herds should be sent up to the project area.³² The rotational grazing scheme now appeared to run more smoothly and the

Annual Report for the year ending 30th September 1946 gave a very upbeat assessment:

The Paramount Chief has set aside an area of 1,150 acres at Thaba Tsoeu on which the good effects of controlled rotational grazing may be demonstrated. When the demonstration was commenced two and a half years ago, the area was densely covered with Chrysocoma and the grazing so poor that it was almost impossible to maintain adequately the correct number of animals on the available grass. The results of the control are most satisfactory for after only three seasons the Chrysocoma is dying out and grass rapidly taking its place. As the area is not fenced the demonstration is capable of large scale and immediate application.³³

During the 1946/7 summer months there were no reports of livestock, other than those belonging to the Paramount Chief, in the demonstration area and towards the end of the grazing season Forsyth-Thompson wrote to 'Mantsebo congratulating her on the state of her 'own personal grazing area' and for setting such a good example in grazing control.³⁴ Given the good results it was decided that the stocking rate should be increased from 1 lu per 10 acres to 1 lu per 8 acres.³⁵ The Department of Agriculture

³⁰ LNA 1012/II, Report from Senior Agricultural Officer, Mafeteng forwarded by Leakie to Government Secretary, 27 September 1945.

³¹ LNA 1012/II, Leakie to Government Secretary, 27 September 1945.

³² LNA 1012/II, Leakie to Government Secretary, 4 January 1946.

³³ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1946, p. 16.

³⁴ LNA 1012/II, Forsyth-Thompson to 'Mantsebo, 22 March 1947.

³⁵ LNA 2476/II, Collett, L.H., Report on Grazing Experiments, 12 August 1950.

Annual Reports for 1947 to 1950 all reported the Thaba Tsoeu experiment to be a great success.³⁶

Correspondence between ‘Mantsebo and the Department of Agriculture, however, reveals that problems with the demonstration continued and, though reports of trespassing declined, the area was never grazed on the rotational plan as originally intended. In the spring of 1947 the area was in poor condition and livestock were not installed until mid-summer.³⁷ The following scheduled grazing season the problem was the opposite, the pasture had grown rank. Local herdboys apparently suggested the best thing was to burn the pasture, but the Department of Agriculture resisted this idea and instead suggested that the stocking rate could be further increased to 1 lu per 5 or 6 acres.³⁸

After 1950 Department of Agriculture interest in the rotational grazing scheme seemed to wane. Collett summarised the results of the experiment in an internal report in August 1950, concluding that with a stocking rate of about 1 lu per 8 acres, pasture lands should show signs of improvement. It was noted that the area at Thaba Tsoeu which had been fenced between March 1933 and April 1943 was, in 1950, showing evidence that ‘bitter karoo was starting to flourish again’.³⁹

The enclosed area at Thaba Putsoa, which appeared not to suffer from fence cutting during the 1940s, was grazed in a more controlled fashion. The area had been divided into two by an internal fence and each half was utilised by cattle belonging to ‘Mantsebo at a different stocking rate in order to determine the impact of grazing. As at Thaba Tsoeu the aim was to graze the area from as ‘early as possible in spring’ through to May the following year. The results reported by Collett are summarised in Table 8.1.⁴⁰

³⁶ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1947, p. 16; 1948, p.16-17; 1949, p.10-11; 1950, p. 10.

³⁷ LNA 2476, Correspondence between ‘Mantsebo and Leakie; Leakie and Government Secretary; and Government Secretary and ‘Mantsebo; December 1946 - March 1947.

³⁸ LNA 2476, File notes, n.d. [c. January 1948].

³⁹ LNA 2476/II, Collett, L.H., Report on Grazing Experiments, 12 August 1950.

⁴⁰ LNA 2476/II, Collett, L.H., Report on Grazing Experiments, 12 August 1950.

Table 8.1 Results of grazing experiment at Thaba Putsoa enclosure, 1944-1948.

year	dates grazed	general comments	comments on different paddocks	
			1 lu per acre	1 lu per 4 acres
1944-1945	5/1/45 to 30/5/45	rains very late; stock in good condition at end of season	cover good	cover good
1945-1946	12/1/46 to 31/4/46	rains very late again	enclosure grazed down, even Festuca grazed	selectively grazed, uneven cover
1946-1947	21/11/46 to 2/4/47	none	too many livestock	too few livestock
1947-1948	12/11/47 to ?/12/47	obvious results would be same as 1946/7, decided to remove livestock and rest pasture	too many livestock	too few livestock

It is not clear why the enclosure at Thaba Putsoa suffered less from fence cutting and burning than the enclosure at Thaba Tsoeu. During the 1930s both enclosures suffered from trespassing, but after the fence was removed at Thaba Tsoeu there were no reports of similar incidents at Thaba Putsoa. One possible reason may be that Thaba Tsoeu is nearer to the large village of Semongkong and areas of permanent (year round) habitation than Thaba Putsoa. It is not totally clear from the archival record that Thaba Tsoeu fell within a cattle-post area. The presence of a village headman nearby suggests, rather, that it was a village grazing area and therefore used in winter or spring. The late winter burning of the area was in keeping with pre-existing Sesotho pasture management practices for village grazing areas: burning the pasture encourages early spring growth, vital for strengthening cattle before their heavy ploughing duties that start with the first rains.

In addition to the gaping holes in the archival record, this experimental programme exemplify many issues and themes frequently encountered in analyses of colonial development projects in Lesotho. These are outlined below.

8.3. Discussion

8.3.1 . What happened next?

As with so many other schemes in colonial Lesotho these two grazing experiments were not followed up in subsequent plans. The last *Annual Report* to mention the rotation grazing scheme at Thaba Tsoeu was the one for 1950, when it was reported that the scheme was continuing and grazing conditions had improved to the extent that the stocking rate would be increased in the following year.⁴¹ A report written in 1960 by R.O. Barnes, the influential Kenyan government soil conservation officer, made an obscure reference to ‘much information’ being obtained from ‘experiments in fencing’ in Maseru and Mafeteng districts, but no details were reported.⁴² I have been unable to trace any other references to the Thaba Tsoeu rotational grazing experiment in any other literature on livestock and grazing issues in Lesotho.

Results from the Thaba Putsoa experiment, wound up in 1947, were used again by P.A. Bowmaker, the Agricultural Department official most active in the mountain grazing sphere. In 1950 he used them to refute a claim by I.B. Pole-Evans that the correct stocking rate for the mountain pastures of Lesotho should be 1 lu per 25 acres⁴³ and then in 1953 as the basis for assessing an appropriate stocking rate for the areas of Mokhotlong when they were due for re-opening after the ending of the closure policy.⁴⁴ However, as we will see in the next chapter, these assessments of stocking rates in Mokhotlong were never carried through into policy.⁴⁵

The results of the Thaba Putsoa experiment were not considered conclusive for long; in 1959 a new experiment was set-up in the Ox-Bow area of Butha-Buthe district ‘to establish an indication of the stock carrying capacity of the area’.⁴⁶ D.R. Phororo reports that a stocking rate of 1 lu per 8 hectares (1 lu per 19.8 acres) was calculated as

⁴¹ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1950, p. 10.

⁴² Barnes, R.O. ‘Grazing Control: a memorandum prepared for the Guidance of District Councils for application Basutoland.’ unpublished report in the Papers of R.O. Barnes, MSS Brit. Emp.t.1(2), Rhodes House, Oxford. I am not sure what the experiment in Mafeteng refers to: possibly it may have been another project or more likely simply confusion as the two Maseru district schemes were close to the boundary with Mafeteng and visited fairly regularly by the Mafeteng District Agricultural Officer.

⁴³ LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker’s comments on Pole-Evans report, n.d. [c. May 1950].

⁴⁴ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1953, p. 16. See also LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker, P.A.O., A report on a visit to Mokhotlong from 6th-28th March 1952, for details of the problems he faced in trying to produce this detailed break-down of stocking rates for individual valleys.

⁴⁵ Barnes, ‘Grazing Control: a memorandum prepared for the Guidance of District Councils’.

being the correct rate for the Ox-bow region.⁴⁶ This figure suggests a much lower stocking rate than that calculated at Thaba Putsoa, but it is not clear if the rate was calculated for grazing in just the summer months, as at Thaba Putsoa, or for the entire year. At around about the same time a degraded area of Qacha's Nek was fenced in 'to allow observation of effects of protection':⁴⁷ the same aim as the original Thaba Tsoeu and Thaba Putsoa enclosure experiment started over two and a half decades previously.

The archival record does not give many clues about the fate of the enclosure at Thaba Putsoa or if any attempt to continue the rotational grazing scheme at Thaba Tsoeu was ever made. In 1951 'Mantsebo did write to Forsyth-Thompson, the Resident Commissioner, asking for the whole Thaba Tsoeu plateau to be declared an 'improvement area' and closed to grazing (presumably with the exception of her livestock).⁴⁸ The fact that this request was never followed up strongly suggests that the Agricultural Department had given up on the rotational grazing experiment.

As chapter 9 will demonstrate the massive closure policies supposedly implemented in Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek Districts between 1947-1956 were similarly promptly forgotten. The closure policy is only mentioned briefly in a handful of studies of the livestock sector in Lesotho after 1956, quoting either the Department of Agriculture *Annual Reports* or Patrick Duncan's 1960 textbook *Sotho Law and Custom*.⁴⁹ In his bibliography of literature on soil and water resources in Lesotho, Q.K. Chakela commented that the Department of Agriculture *Annual Reports*:

do not give one any clear idea of what any scheme is about except that it makes 'good progress', it is 'a success', showed 'improved progress', and one has no idea what any of these words are supposed to imply because suddenly the scheme disappears from the reports without any comment.⁵⁰

This general comment is an exact description of the reporting of the two demonstration plots at Thaba Tsoeu and Thaba Putsoa.

8.3.2. Rhetoric and reality

A cursory reading of the published reports on the grazing experiments might lead one to conclude that they ran smoothly, that they were a huge success and that the results were

⁴⁶ Phororo, *Livestock Farming in Lesotho*, p. 133-4.

⁴⁷ Phororo, *Livestock Farming in Lesotho*, p. 134.

⁴⁸ LNA 2476/ II[I], 'Mantsebo to Forsyth-Thompson, 1 August 1951.

⁴⁹ Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs*, p. 78; Quinlan, 'The Livestock Economy in the Mountain Zone of Lesotho', p. 30; Swallow, Motsamai, Sopeng, and Storey, *Livestock Development and Range Utilization In Lesotho*, p. 23; Lawry, 'Private Herds and Common Lands', p. 107-108.

⁵⁰ Chakela, *Review and bibliography*, p.13.

significant. A more detailed reading of the published reports and certainly a reading of the archival records would suggest otherwise.

As was the case with many other schemes initial plans were reported as successful implementation. The 1936 *Annual Report* described the initial ‘deferred grazing’ experiment as a huge success before it had even had time to be up and running, and then in 1939 it was reported that the scheme had never even happened. The *Annual Report* for the year ending 30th September 1946 described the ‘rotational grazing’ scheme as having been up and running for two and a half years, but the archival record shows that in March 1944 the scheme had only been talked about and it was not until later in 1944 that the beacons were even set-out to delimit the area to be controlled. The first season that the rotation was even nominally attempted was 1945/46.

Often the *Annual Reports* regurgitated the previous years descriptions of the policy, simply changing the dates. The 1946, 1947 and 1948 *Annual Reports* contain exactly the same paragraphs on Thaba Tsoeu and Thaba Putsoa; only the number of years since the scheme was initiated were changed. In the section on Thaba Putsoa they did not even managed to change that between the 1947 and 1948 *Annual Reports*.

8.3.3. The Pilot is the project

The two fenced plots were originally conceived of as an experiment to see what would happen if bitter karoo bush was left ungrazed. The results were as the Agriculture Department would have expected: that with reduced grazing pressure plots returned to their ‘climax’ community of Themeda triandra dominated *rooigras*. As the plots were often burnt, and grazed, the findings of the research should have been treated with a greater degree of scepticism: perhaps it was actually the burning that reduced the coverage of bitter karoo bush, as some Basotho informants contended.⁵¹ The findings, flawed though they may have been, did, however, inform subsequent policy, in particular the closure policy, and could, therefore, be seen as an example of a successful experimental project.

The post 1945 rotational grazing scheme was supposedly not just an experiment but also a pilot or demonstration project, which could then be applied to the country as a whole. As with most pilot projects in Lesotho, and elsewhere in Africa, the ‘success’ of the pilot project was not replicated nationally.

⁵¹ In February 1932 Chief Tebesi told the Resident Commissioner and officials of the Department of Agriculture: ‘when they burn the veld this karoo burns and next season grass grows’. LNA 212, Notes of an interview with representatives of the Paramount Chief, 24 February 1932.

Indeed it would have been extremely surprising if it had been. The rotational grazing scheme on 1,150 acres had taken two years and many man-hours of work to simply demarcate and organise and subsequently needed constant supervision from two local caretakers, a visiting advisor to the Paramount Chief and the occasional visiting official from the Department of Agriculture. Assuming similar levels of administrative input and supervision, extending the pilot project to the 6100 sq. miles defined as mountain grasslands⁵² would have required some 6,790 caretakers, at a cost of approximately £162,950⁵³ per annum, or more or less double the total 1949/50 budget for the Department of Agriculture.⁵⁴ At the Thaba Tsoeu plot the caretakers were also supervised by fairly frequent visits from Department of Agriculture officials and the plots were originally demarcated by a Department officer; an expansion of the scheme would have involved substantial recruitment of new staff, again with major implications for the budget.

How would have the Basutoland administration responded if these figures had been put to them in the 1940s or early 50s? Probably by pointing out that the project was designed as a demonstration and that once neighbouring livestock owners saw the tremendous improvements in pasture cover they would establish similar schemes with no need for caretakers or supervisors. This was, indeed, what was suggested in the *Colonial Annual Report* of 1947:

In view of the success attending this demonstration of the Paramount Chief, the Ward Chiefs in Qacha's Nek and Mokhotlong are undertaking grazing control through-out their wards and work in this direction is already underway. By these means it is hoped that within a few years the mountain areas will again be covered with luxuriant pasture.⁵⁵

After reading the archival report of the project the first obvious point is that calling it a 'success' in 1947 is highly misleading. The 1946/7 summer grazing season was the first in which it was seriously attempted and it encountered many problems. Secondly the closure policy ('grazing control') was not undertaken by the Ward Chiefs of Mokhotlong (who was one and the same as the Paramount Chief in any case) and Qacha's Nek after seeing the demonstration project, but rather after they were persuaded to do so in a meeting with the Resident Commissioner and senior Department of Agriculture staff.⁵⁶

⁵² Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1949, p. 33

⁵³ This figure is extrapolated from the fact Headman Seholo was paid a salary of £2 per month in 1945.

⁵⁴ The total allocation was £80,101, Great Britain, *Colonial Annual Report: Basutoland 1950* (London, 1951), p. 21.

⁵⁵ Great Britain, *Colonial Annual Report: Basutoland 1947* (London, 1949), p.4.

⁵⁶ See chapter 9.

Given the fact that at the very least a significant minority of neighbouring livestock owners were hostile to the demonstration (at least this is how the Department of Agriculture viewed their activities such as grass burning and trespassing) even the greatest Departmental optimist must have thought it unlikely that the project would be taken up spontaneously. The above quote from the 1947 *Annual Report* tacitly reflects this reality: it was not neighbouring livestock owners but other senior chiefs who were impressed by the results.

Pilot projects have been attempted with great regularity in both colonial and post-colonial Lesotho. Rarely have these area based pilot projects been translated into national projects or policies. To an extent this could be seen as a successful application of the pilot project concept: a policy was attempted, found to be a failure and abandoned. Nevertheless pilot projects have often been implemented with no prior consideration of their national feasibility. In the case of Thaba Tsoeu the Department of Agriculture did not even do something as simple as extrapolating nationally from the rotational grazing scheme's suggested stocking rate of 1lu per ten acres during the summer months with one third of the range closed at any one time. Applied nationally this would have meant that the mountain area could have accommodated only 260,300 lu during the summer (and no livestock in the winter) compared to a national herd of 1,015,573 lu, according to the official census in 1949.⁵⁷ As the lowland grazing resources were perceived to be severely over utilised the only solution would have been a massive programme of forced culling: something the colonial authorities never felt able to attempt. Clearly there was never any serious possibility that the scheme could be applied nationally: the project was designed in such a way that it could never go beyond the pilot stage.

8.3.4. *De facto* land alienation

During the 1940s the enclosure at Thaba Putsoa and the rotational grazing scheme at Thaba Tsoeu were both reserved for the exclusive use the Paramount Chief's livestock. In effect the Basutoland administration and the Paramount Chief simply ignored one of the key constitutional principles of the Basotho state: that all land belongs to 'the nation'. Under the Laws of Lerotholi it was explicitly stated that:

The grazing area of the country is communal, no chief, headman or commoner having the right to graze privately where others are not allowed to graze.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See Figure 4.5.

⁵⁸ Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs*, p. 74.

Under the maboella regulations areas of grazing could be declared closed, or closed to specific classes of livestock, but under customary law these maboella restrictions were supposed to apply to everybody.⁵⁹

In addition areas of leboella were usually declared in order to ensure adequate winter grazing for local villagers' livestock. At Thaba Tsoeu the opposite appeared to be the case: local livestock owners were denied access on a year round basis to what seems to have been a village grazing area which had probably previously been used mainly as winter grazing. If this was indeed the case local livestock owners may have found themselves denied access not just to an area of grazing but to a key resource for getting livestock through the lean winter months.

The enclosure or demarcation of specific areas for the exclusive use of an individual, even if that individual was the Paramount Chief, was clearly unlawful. When Sturrock first discussed the possibilities of fencing in two enclosures in 1932 with representatives of the Paramount Chief, he stressed that, as the areas to be fenced were 'useless' bitter karoo bush, they would not be 'depriving any man of his pasture'.⁶⁰ This concern did not seem to figure in 1941-2 when the experiment was reformulated and when the Thaba Putsoa enclosure was described as having made a 'marvellous recovery'.⁶¹ The tone of the reports and correspondence on the relevant Department of Agriculture files suggests that in the mind of the officials the act of enclosing the land had conferred ownership on them or on 'Mantsebo. Indeed when Leakie first outlined the plans for the rotational grazing scheme to the 1944 National Council he referred to the area as being *owned* by 'Mantsebo'.⁶²

8.3.5. Favouring the chiefly elite

Chapter 7 showed how the politics of land constrained the ability of the colonial authorities to undertake projects that involved removing power over land allocation from the chiefly authorities. Though the scheme was clearly resented by many local inhabitants it was supported by 'Mantsebo who, as the Ward Chief, was in charge of the administering the cattle-post grazing areas of Matsieng ward which made up the vast majority of Maseru district.⁶³ Mantsebo's reason for supporting the scheme is obvious

⁵⁹ Sheddick, *Land Tenure in Basutoland*, p.121-122.

⁶⁰ LNA 212, Notes of an interview with representatives of the Paramount Chief, 24 February 1932.

⁶¹ LNA 1012/II, Pasture Reclamation, Report on Grazing Experiments, Thaba Putsoa and Makhakas Pass, 15 June 1941.

⁶² Basutoland *Proceedings of the National Council*, 1944, 39th Session, p. 255.

⁶³ Though see chapter 7, the rights of administration over mountain cattle post areas were open to some debate. Also note that it is possible that the Thaba Tsoeu scheme fell within a village cattle-

and material; she gained access to areas of summer grazing where her livestock did not have to compete with other livestock. A year after the scheme was dropped by the Basutoland authorities 'Mantsebo tried to get them to revive the project, and sought their support in extending her 'private grazing area' to a larger portion of the Ward.⁶⁴

Despite the Department of Agriculture's aim of implementing both an experiment to determine the 'correct' grazing pressure and a demonstration of the success of rotational grazing the scheme was actually managed to ensure the best grazing possible for 'Mantsebo's herds. Rather than deciding upon a management strategy and then observing how this affected the quality of grazing and productivity of the livestock the Department of Agriculture altered the management strategy in line with availability of grazing in order to ensure the maximum nutrition for 'Mantsebo's livestock.

In short the Basutoland authorities implemented a project that directly favoured the most powerful member of the Basotho chiefly hierarchy at the expense of local livestock owners. In so doing they probably hoped to quell any national political opposition to the scheme and to further their project of interesting 'Mantsebo in agricultural development.⁶⁵ They were indeed successful in averting any national political opposition to the scheme; but in so doing they destroyed any chance of the schemes acting as a demonstration to encourage the average Mosotho livestock owner in the environs of Semongkong to rally behind their plans for a national rotational grazing policy.

As with the closure policies in Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek the Department of Agriculture attempted to portray the schemes as simply a refinement of an existing Basotho resource management technique: the system of declaring leboella. As the previous section has made clear there were significant differences in the usufactory arrangements for the schemes and areas of leboella. There were also differences between the manner in which the schemes were decided upon and the manner in which maboella was supposed to be declared, especially if the scheme at Thaba Tsoeu was indeed within a village grazing area. Instead of the local chief or headman's declaring the area leboella on the basis of discussion with local resource users, the areas were declared closed by the Paramount Chief on the basis of discussions between her advisors and officials from the Department of Agriculture. The schemes, therefore,

post area: the administration of which would usually have been delegated to a lower ranking chief or headman,

⁶⁴ LNA 2476/ II[I], 'Mantsebo to Forsyth-Thompson, 1 August 1951.

⁶⁵ See chapter 7.

undermined the role (and power) of a lower ranking chief in favour of the Paramount Chief.

8.3.6. Problems caused by ‘abnormal years’

Throughout the life of the projects at Thaba Tsoeu and Thaba Putsoa there were reports that the experiments or demonstrations were hampered by abnormal weather conditions. In 1941 L.F. Wacher, the Senior Agricultural Officer, reported that ‘the season, as regards the growth of grass, was a most curious one’⁶⁶ and in 1942 that ‘the year under review has again been an abnormal one’.⁶⁷ The experiment at Thaba Putsoa was hampered by ‘late rains’ in both the 1944/5 and 1945/6 seasons⁶⁸ and Leakie advised the Government Secretary, in October 1945, that the implementation of the rotational grazing scheme at Thaba Tsoeu would have to be delayed ‘on account of the drought’.⁶⁹ The assumption amongst the Department of Agriculture officials seems to have been that the experiments would work so long as the weather would act ‘normally’; with no recognition that extreme inter-annual variability *was* the norm.⁷⁰

8.3.7. Weak administration

Despite the fact that these two projects were visited relatively frequently by officials from the Department of Agriculture and were actively supported by the high ranking chiefs of the Ward, the projects were plagued by the lack of control over the activities of local livestock owners. During the 1930s and early 1940s fence cutting, burning and ‘trespassing’ were frequent occurrences at both sites and during the mid-1940s ‘trespassing’ on the rotational plots at Thaba Tsoeu appeared to be the rule rather than the exception. There is no record in the archives of anyone ever being charged with ‘trespassing’, fence cutting or grass burning.

The Basutoland authorities tended to blame this lack of control on the incompetence (or resistance) of the local Basotho administration, in particular the local headman Sekoolo Sethnoamajoe. The fact that they managed not only to employ him twice, but also pass on his advice about the likelihood of people respecting beacons, is simply ignored in the archival record. Quite why ‘Mantsebo should have suggested Sekoolo be employed as the caretaker in January 1945 is unclear. One possible clue is that when Collett visited Thaba Tsoeu in March 1942 he found 32 cattle in the enclosure belonging to Sekoolo

⁶⁶ LNA 1012/II, Wacher to Thornton, 15 July 1941.

⁶⁷ LNA 1012/II, Wacher to Leakie, 18 July 1942.

⁶⁸ LNA 2476/II, Collett, L.H., Report on Grazing Experiments, 12 August 1950.

⁶⁹ LNA 1012/II, Leakie to Government Secretary, 27 October 1945

⁷⁰ See Table 1.1.

and a further thirty who most probably belonged to 'Mantsebo'.⁷¹ This strongly suggests that Sekoolo was at that point acting as the manager for part of 'Mantsebo's herd and her recommendation that he be appointed caretaker of the rotational grazing scheme reflected his position.

The Department of Agriculture officials appeared to report the advice that beacons would be better respected than fencing with no sense of irony. Of course it is not possible to determine their private discussions or beliefs about the validity of this claim but the archival record leaves an impression either of hopeless optimism or extreme gullibility. The records of the massive closure policy in Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek district create a similar impression. It is to this project that we turn in the next chapter.

⁷¹ LNA 1012/II, Collett to Leake, 17 March 1942.

9. Chief Matlere Lerotholi and the 1947 Closure Policy in Mokhotlong District

The centre piece of British colonial development policy in the mountain areas of Lesotho in the immediate post-war era was a policy to close vast swathes of rangeland to all livestock. In this chapter I argue that this policy was never actually implemented, despite the numerous reports of its success. After weighing up the evidence for and against implementation of the policy, I discuss the local political issues which I believe account for its non-implementation and the local and national political implications of this gap between discourse and actual events.

As we saw in chapter 6, pressure from the Dominions Office (and indirectly from South Africa) meant that in 1946 and 1947 the Basutoland administration needed to come up with some sort of policy that would be seen to be tackling the issue of overgrazing and soil erosion in the mountains. Their options were severely limited, however, by financial and administrative constraints. The policy that was devised in response to these dual pressures was crude in the extreme: it simply consisted of declaring huge areas of communal grazing totally closed to all livestock. Range science taught the Department of Agriculture officials that total exclusion of grazing would allow the pasture to return to its climatic climax formation which would, in turn, inevitably lead to a decrease in the rate of soil erosion.

The Department of Agriculture were fortunate that the two chiefs of the major mountain wards appeared to instruct their people to remove all their livestock from the designated areas. As we saw in chapter 7, however, the chiefs' rights to issue these instructions was a matter for considerable debate. It is notable that the instructions were never issued as formal Orders from the Paramount Chief: indeed there have to be serious doubts about whether the instructions were ever actually made known to the relevant livestock owners, at least in Mokhotlong district.

9.1. The official version of the closure policy

The Department of Agriculture's *Annual Report* for the year ending 30th September 1946 announced that:

Systems of rotational grazing have been introduced in a number of centres, with the object of improving grazing, or, as is more often the case, allowing the re-establishment of proper grass cover on the mountain slopes.¹

¹ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report* 1946, p. 1.

There were no further details about these systems in the *Report* and from the archival record it would appear that the only rotational grazing project in existence in 1946 was the one at Thaba Tsoue (discussed in chapter 8), though it is possible that there were other *ad hoc* schemes attempted by District Commissioners or District Agricultural Officers which were never written up in the Departmental files.

Exactly the same paragraph on ‘systems of rotational grazing’ appeared in the 1947 *Annual Report*, again with no further details. By this date the closure policy had been agreed to by the Ward Chiefs of Mokhotlong and Qacha’s Nek but it is unclear if this was what the paragraph in the *Annual Report* was actually referring to. The paragraph was repeated for a third time in the 1948 *Annual Report*, but was now accompanied by details of the closure policy: something that could in no way be described as a ‘systems of rotational grazing’. It was reported that in September 1947 the two Ward Chief’s had instructed livestock owners in their wards to de-stock ‘badly denuded mountain slopes’ until adequate grass cover had been re-established. The stock were to be removed to ‘areas which in the past have carried little or no stock’. The area to be destocked totalled about one-third of the entire mountain grazing area.²

These sketchy details were elaborated on in an appendix to the *Annual Report* in the following year.³ The report detailed the areas of Mokhotlong that had been closed to all grazing and made a vaguer reference to ‘similar arrangements’ in Qacha’s Nek. Figure 9.1 indicates the approximate areas of Mokhotlong district that were to be closed to grazing. The appendix to the 1949 *Annual Report* is the most detailed description of the closure policy in any source, but it is still difficult to work out exactly which areas were to be closed, especially in the western sections of the district.

The 1949 *Annual Report*, and every *Annual Report* thereafter until 1956, carried reports of the success of the closure policy. These reports were in turn often cited in other reports and correspondence sent from Basutoland officials to the High Commissioner’s office in Pretoria/Cape Town and thence on to the Dominions/Commonwealth Relations Office in London. Sections on grazing policy from the Department of Agriculture’s *Annual Reports* often turn up verbatim in the *Colonial Annual Reports* for Basutoland. They were also cited in press and academic reports on soil conservation. An article in *VeldTrust* in August 1954, entitled ‘Basutos Avert Disaster’, for example,

² Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report* 1948, p. 13-14.

³ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report* 1949, p. 27-33.

repeated the Department of Agriculture's claim in 1949 that 'more than 1,400 square miles of grazing have already been removed from grazing'.⁴

As reports on the policy were passed up along the chain of command from the Basutoland Department of Agriculture to London it was given increasingly grand titles. A crude policy of closing areas to grazing was translated into 'grazing control' in the Department of Agriculture's *Annual Reports*.⁵ In a letter to the Commonwealth Relations Office in June 1947 Evelyn Baring went a step further: he stated that compulsory rotational grazing was being enforced and that the whole of the two districts had been declared Agricultural Improvement Areas.⁶

The impact of closing grazing on the mountain grasslands and on rates of soil erosion was likewise described in very positive tones. The return of *rooigras* species, in particular *Themeda triandra*, into the areas destocked was reported in *Annual Reports* from 1950 onwards. The 1952 *Annual Report* claimed that there had been a 'widespread improvement in the grass cover with consequent slowing down of erosion',⁷ while in 1953 it was:

... stated confidently that soil loss from storm water run-off is now very well under control in the cattle post areas.⁸

On occasions these claims of success were further exaggerated in reports sent on to London: one document (appropriately dated 1 April 1954) made the highly unlikely claim, seemingly based on the 1953 Annual Report, that 'loss of soil by storm water run off in the mountain area has now ceased'.⁹

⁴ Anon. 'Basutos Avert Disaster: Fight to Conserve Cradle of the Orange River' *VeldTrust* August 1954, p.25; Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report* 1949, p. 33.

⁵ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1948 through to 1956.

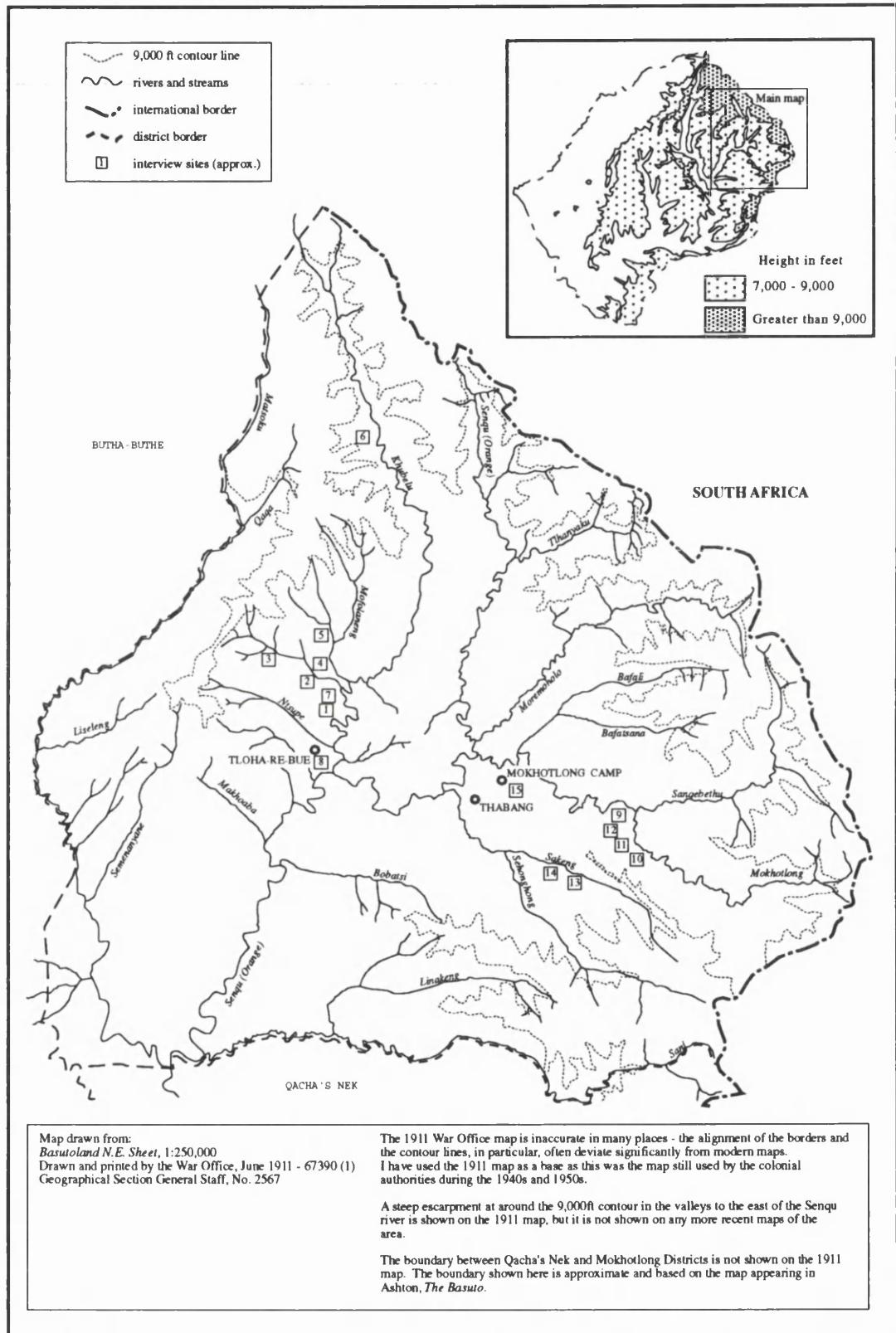
⁶ PRO DO35/4007, High Commissioner: Visits, Baring to Machtig, 24 June 1947. This is despite the fact that the National Council had convincingly rejected the Agricultural Improvement Area policy the previous year, see chapter 7.

⁷ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture *Annual Report* 1952, p.19.

⁸ Basutoland, Department of Agriculture *Annual Report* 1953, p.15.

⁹ PRO DO35/4330, Revised Copy of a Collection of Notes on Various Aspects of the Administration of the High Commission Territories likely to arise in Connection with Transfer, 1 April 1954. This claim is totally ludicrous; even on grasslands totally unaffected by any human activity some soil erosion will occur due to storm water run-off.

Figure 9.1 Mokhotlong District, showing 9,000 foot contour line and interview sights



Despite these confident claims, the direct evidence for the successful implementation of the policy in Mokhotlong district amounts to no more than a handful of reports by colonial officials who had trekked through the mountains. Evidence for an increase in favourable grass types is confined merely to casual observation, and evidence for a decrease in the rate of soil erosion was based simply on a supposition that observations that the species composition of the range was changing inevitably meant a decrease in erosion.

There were two officially sanctioned surveys of siltation rates in the Senqu/Orange river during this period which could possibly be used to indicate the impact of the closure policy on rates of erosion.¹⁰ However neither of these reports quantify the rate of siltation precisely. Both reports merely assess the siltation rate qualitatively at one point in time, and do not indicate how it was changing over time. This means that even if it were possible to compare the two surveys directly it would be impossible to tell if they represent a long term trend or are simply two points on a fluctuating trace. Furthermore, even if it were possible to show that siltation rates were falling during the period in question, it is quite another matter to prove that this was directly attributable to the closure policy.

The direct archival evidence for the implementation of the closure policy in Mokhotlong (as opposed to unsubstantiated statements of success) consists of five separate reports written after treks through the cattle-post areas.¹¹ Two of these were written by P.A. Bowmaker, the Principal Agriculture Officer in charge of the policy (November 1949 and March 1952)¹² and two by Evelyn Baring, the High Commissioner (November 1948 and c. May 1951).¹³ The only independent report was written by I.B. Pole Evans (February 1950), but as Pole Evans had been specifically

10 In 1949/50 H.H. Green and R.C. Germond of Jeffares and Green, Consulting and Chartered Civil Engineers, Johannesburg carried out a survey, funded by the CD&W, of possible sites to build a dam in the lower reaches of the Orange river inside Lesotho, PRO DO35 4061, Jeffares and Green, 'A Water Resource Survey of Basutoland', January 1951. See chapter 6 for the political significance of the investigation and its findings. N. Shand did a further survey of water resources in Lesotho in 1956, Shand, 'Report on the Regional Development of the Water Resources'.

11 Though it should be noted that a vital file (LNA 2476/IV) was missing from the archives. This file might contain further evidence of successful implementation during the period mid-1952 to late-1954. There are not, however, references to further treks or other surveys of the policy on the relevant PRO files.

12 LNA 2476 II, Bowmaker, P.A.O. 'Cattle Post Trek, 14th to 26th November 1949' and Bowmaker, P.A.O., 'A Report on a visit to Mokhotlong from 6th -28th March 1952'. Bowmaker also made a trip sometime in 1947 when the closure policy was about to be enacted (references to it are made in the above two reports) but I have been unable to locate a copy of a report either in the PRO or LNA.

13 PRO DO35/4007, High Commissioners visits to Basutoland and PRO DO35/4010, High Commissioners Visits to Basutoland. Baring also went on a trek in early 1946, before the closure policy was established, to investigate the National Veld Trust claims, PRO DO35/1180/Y950/5.

commissioned by the Basutoland authorities to write a complimentary report it is perhaps a bit exaggerated to call the report independent.¹⁴ The two reports by Bowmaker and the report by Pole Evans go into a great deal of detail about the areas visited and make detailed observations on the existence of different species and the general state of the range.¹⁵ It is possible to trace their routes and to locate some of their observations on the map. An obvious lacuna in the archival record is the regular quarterly reports from the Mokhotlong District Commissioner that I know existed because of extracts in other files. There is, however, no reference to any such reports in the files specifically on the grazing closure policy and no extracts pasted into the files on grazing control, so I have had to assume that they do not say anything significantly different from the reports in the grazing control files.

All five trek reports describe the success of the closure policy. They all specifically mention a marked improvement in the species composition of the range in most closed areas, with an increase in *rooigras* species and a decrease in sehalahala/bitter karoo scrub. Just two years after the enactment of the closure policy, Bowmaker reported a ‘very marked recovery’ in the state of the rangeland upper Mokhotlong river valley and the other southern Mokhotlong district cattle-post areas.¹⁶ By the time of his 1952 trek, which also covered the right-hand tributaries of the Senqu/Orange river, the range was deemed to be fully recovered (i.e. close to its climatic climax) and ready to be re-opened to grazing. The official re-opening of the closed areas was delayed until 1956 while the Department of Agriculture persuaded the Paramount Chief and National Council to institute new regulations to allow Ward Chiefs greater control of cattle post areas.

All five reports include either references to ‘trespassers’ or descriptions of herds in areas that, according to the placing of 9,000 foot contour line on the 1911 map (Figure 9.1), should have been closed. In February 1950 Pole Evans reported cattle and horses ‘trespassing’ in the closed areas of upper Senqebethu valley and mentioned ‘several large flocks of sheep ... and some cattle’ in a section of one of the tributary valleys of the Mokhotlong river that appears to be just below the 9,000 foot contour. In the valley of the Mohlesi stream and the area around the headwaters of the Sakeng he observed ‘many cases of trespassing stock’ in ‘country which was supposed to be protected’.¹⁷ After his trek in March 1952 Bowmaker reported that a mission station, almost

14 LNA 2476, Pole Evans, I.B. ‘Visit to Basutoland in February, 1950’.

15 Pole Evans report refers to a number of photos and numerous figures. Unfortunately these are missing from the report in the LNA.

16 LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker ‘Cattle Post Trek, 14th to 26th November 1949’

17 LNA 2476/II, Pole Evans, ‘Visit to Basutoland in February, 1950’.

definitely St. James Mission in the lower Sehonghong valley,¹⁸ had a few hundred head of sheep grazing in the closed area and also mentioned that 'odd groups of cattle' belonging to the Ward Chief (or perhaps the Paramount Chief) had been seen in the closed area of the Moremoholo valley. His report in November 1949 does not explicitly mention infringements of the regulations but one section describes large herds in the upper Mokhotlong valley which is almost all below the 9,000 foot contour right up to the South African border.¹⁹ Nevertheless these infringements are dealt with in a way that suggests they were the work of only one or two individuals and that on the whole livestock owners adhered to the regulations.

These five reports are the only direct sources of evidence that I have been able to discover showing that the closure policy was fully implemented (despite a few infringements) and that it was a success. Although, as I have noted above, three of them seem comprehensive and detailed, they appear to me to provide a rather flimsy foundation for the glowing reports about the policy in *Colonial Annual Reports* and other official and unofficial literature.

9.2. Evidence from Oral History

In April and May 1995 I carried out a series of interviews with elderly people at various sites in Mokhotlong (see Figure 9.1). The interview sites are clustered around two locations, one in the 'Batloka area' of the district and one covering the Mokhotlong and Sakeng valleys. I chose to centre the interviews on these two locations because of their particular administrative history which will become apparent later in the chapter. Specific villages²⁰ were chosen to give a balance between areas closer to the main agricultural valleys and more distant areas close to the cattle post areas. In each village I interviewed the oldest competent and willing person. In most villages there was only one willing person of a suitable age to interview.

For two reasons the vast majority of interviews were with men; firstly, at marriage women usually move to a new village so they are rarely the oldest inhabitant; and secondly, older women were almost always unwilling to answer questions about livestock, quoting the 'traditional taboo' on women handling livestock. Most

18 This issue was eventually taken up with the mission in November 1953, but apart from asking them how many livestock they had (220 sheep, 15 oxen, 9 horses, 2 mules, 4 cows) nothing was done, LNA 2202/II, Cattle Posts: Traders and Missions.

19 LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker 'Cattle Post Trek, 14th to 26th November 1949'

20 Villages in the mountain area tend to be much smaller than in the lowlands and may simply consist of a handful of homesteads.

interviews were carried out in Sesotho via an interpreter. The majority were tape recorded and an independent source later listened to the tapes and confirmed that the translation was by and large accurate.²¹ There were four interviews that did not conform to this pattern (numbers 2, 7, 8 and 15 in Table 9.1). These were interviews where I specifically sought out a key informant who I thought may be particularly knowledgeable.

The most striking result of these interviews was that not one person had ever heard of the policy to close large tracts of grazing for a eight-to-nine year period. It is possible that everybody I interviewed had simply forgotten about the grazing closure. This, however, does not seem very likely.

Every man I spoke to had either owned or managed livestock during the period 1947-56. The closure policy (if implemented) would have led to a wholesale shift in the way livestock were managed and would have had severe impacts on the lifestyle of herdboys. Herdboys would have been forced to move their livestock from the valley (winter) cattle-post areas to the high (summer) mountain cattle-post areas year round. This would obviously have involved a huge loss of grazing land - particularly more sheltered winter grazing areas and a huge change in the pattern of grazing and seasonal movements. A number of men (2, 6, 9, 10, 12) described working as herdboys during the period in question at cattle posts within the area supposedly closed to grazing.

The end of the Second World War (or the 'war with Hitler' as it was universally called) and the return of the Basotho soldiers to the mountain villages proved to be an important point around which people could order their memories. Informants were all able to tell me about what they were doing in the years following the war.

Most interviewees were able to tell me about other policies that were implemented during the 1940s and 1950s, such as the programme of forced villagisation (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Interviewees at the eastern sites also told me about a more recent policy that has closed a large area of grazing near Sani Pass (9, 11, 12, 13) and about a current USAID grazing project (9, 10, 11, 12).

21 In the interests of confidentiality I did not record informants names. Though the closure policy is clearly not controversial, other issues that arose during interviews, such as the recent formation of Grazing Associations, were contentious. Following the advice of Liana Kente, my interpreter, the tape recorder was only switched on after initial introductions and only when the informants agreed. On a couple of occasions informants asked me to switch-off the tape recorder when discussing certain issues. All copies of the tapes remain in my possession.

It is also possible that interviewees did not want to discuss, with an outsider, a policy that may have been controversial. It would be unlikely that this would be the case with every individual and some interviewees happily told me about how people had resisted the programme of forced villagisation during the 1940s and 1950s (1, 8, 11, 15), or why they disliked the recent USAID project (10, 11, 12) and one man even told me why he refused to obey leboella regulations (10).

Two people I interviewed were members of the local political elite of the district (7, 15). One had been a District Council member through-out this period and even he claimed never to have heard of the policy! He was very surprised when I showed him photo-copies of the reports of treks outlined above. His reaction to these documents is perhaps the most convincing argument against these policy being implemented:

How could they have stopped all grazing? It is people's livelihoods - they would have starved - they would have refused to do it. Nobody could attempt this.

The secretary to the present Batloka chief and the 'Batloka court historian' (8) also denied all knowledge of the policy though they said they were not surprised by the trek reports as the Basutoland authorities and the Ward Chief often claimed to be doing things in the Batloka area that in reality never happened. They both maintained, however, that it would have been impossible for the policy to have been implemented in the valleys to the west of the Senqu/Orange river without their knowledge.

In summary the oral evidence strongly suggests that there was never even an attempt to implement the closure policy.

9.3. Other evidence for non-implementation

There are other, mainly circumstantial, pieces of evidence to support the view that the closure policy only ever existed on paper despite the up-beat reports of success in the *Annual Reports* and other published documents. The 1954 Department of Agriculture *Annual Report* did admit that in the more 'lawless' districts grazing control had proved to be difficult to enforce, but, on the whole, there were very few hints of any problems what-so-ever.²² There are however a few hints in the five trek reports themselves and in the confidential files that suggested the Basutoland authorities were aware that the closure policy was not being enforced exactly to plan.

²² Basutoland, Department of Agriculture *Annual Report*, 1954, p.9.

Table 9.1. Interviews In Mokhotlong District April/May 1995.

	Year of birth	Sex	Language of interview?	Literate?	Recorded?	Site of interview	Notes
1	1918	F	Sesotho (English)	Sesotho	yes	Outside son's hut	Ex-school teacher, gave lots of detail about villagisation programme but reluctant to talk about grazing.
2	1936	M	Sesotho	Sesotho	yes	In office	Department of Agriculture employee, stressed environmental decline and complained about people not following regulations.
3	1900 (?)	M	Sesotho	no	yes	Outside hut	Went to mines three times, unwilling to discuss anything in detail.
4	1918	M	Sesotho	no	yes	Outside hut	In army 1941-46 then mines for a few years. Excellent memory for herd sizes and locations of grazing areas.
5	1902	M	Sesotho (English)	no	yes	Outside hut	In army - very keen to talk about war experiences. Went to mines before war.
6	1933	M	Sesotho	no	no	Outside headman's hut	Very difficult interview. Interventions from headman and 'village secretary'.
7	(?)	M	English	Sesotho and English	yes	In office	In charge all district primary schools and a LEC minister. Father was member BNC.
8	1928	M	Sesotho	Sesotho (semi)	no	In Area Chief's office/court	Introduced as the Batloka court historian. The Secretary to the Area Chief joined in the discussion later on (in English).
9	1935	M	Sesotho	no	yes	Outside clinic	Member of USAID grazing project. Testimony was somewhat inconsistent.
10	1928	M	Sesotho	no	yes	Outside hut	Very poor -went to mines four times. Confident and outspoken.
11	1924	M	Sesotho	no	yes	In village grazing area	Miner for about ten years - had quite a few ponies.
12	1936	M	Sesotho	Sesotho (semi)	yes	In PeaceCorp worker's hut	Miner for about fifteen years. Opposed to USAID project but very diplomatic.
13	1914	M	Sesotho	no	yes	Outside hut	Long term miner. His hut had been removed in villagisation programme during 1950s without his knowledge.
14	1920	F	Sesotho	no	no	Outside hut	Very nervous about being interviewed.
15	1924	M	English	Sesotho and English	yes	In office	Ex-member of District Council in 1940s-50s. Successful business man.

The are hints in Bowmaker's 1952 report that he suspected there were more problems than he was willing to admit in writing. In his abbreviated report (later translated into Sesotho and sent to the Paramount Chief) he stated that 'considerably more closing needs to be done in the Batloka area'. As the vast majority of the area was already officially closed to grazing (see Figure 9.1) he presumably meant that the closure policy needed to be enforced. The report also frequently mentions cattle posts that needed to be removed, for example in the Koakoatsi valley, but it is not clear if these are references to cattle posts in use or to the huts themselves.²³ While his November 1949 report states that 'Destocking measures have been very effectively carried out ...[with] a few minor exceptions', it also mentions that there was no noticeable increase in the stocking rate for the areas where livestock should have been sent.²⁴ Pole Evans's 1950 report mentions that the lower Mokhotlong valley was characterised by an extremely short grass cover, probably an indication that the area had been heavily grazed.²⁵

There was never any attempt to do even the simplest calculations about the impact of the closure scheme on livestock densities in the open areas.²⁶ It is difficult to estimate the exact livestock population of Mokhotlong district during the period in question. The Department of Agriculture stopped producing district level figures for livestock populations in 1937 after it abandoned the national sheep-dipping campaign. National figures, however, continued to be produced throughout the colonial period. The livestock population of Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek in 1937 are given in Table 9.2. These figures need to be treated with a great deal of caution: there were many reasons why livestock owners would want to keep the numbers of livestock in their possession secret from the colonial administration. Up until 1937 the livestock census figures were collected from the dipping tanks where officially people had to dip their sheep every few months for scab. Many livestock owners resisted this policy as they believed that the dip poisoned their livestock and it is, therefore, likely that the figures often contained significant errors. It is not clear how the figures were collected for the period after 1937.

23 Bowmaker, 'A Report on a visit to Mokhotlong from 6th -28th March 1952'

24 LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker 'Cattle Post Trek, 14th to 26th November 1949'

25 LNA 2476/II, Pole Evans, 'Visit to Basutoland in February, 1950'.

26 Cf chapter 8 on the Pilot Projects in Maseru District.

Table 9.2 Head of livestock by species and total livestock units for Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek, 1937.

	Mokhotlong	Qacha's Nek
sheep	258,173	255,699
goats	42,047	71,254
cattle	29,622	41,325
equines	13,222	12,582
Total lu	102,888	119,298

According to the Basutoland Department of Agriculture the cattle-post areas of Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek totalled an area of some 1,500 square miles. Out of this, 1,080 square miles had been closed to grazing - leaving an area of 420 square miles open to grazing.²⁷ If we assume that the livestock population of the two mountain wards remained in a similar proportion to the national herd between 1937 and 1949 there would have been something in the order of 260,400 livestock units in the two wards by 1949 (a rise of 17 percent from 1937).²⁸ If all these animals had been moved onto the open areas of the wards the stocking rate in these areas would have been a touch over one lu per acre. This contrasts with Staple and Hudson's recommendations of 8 acres per lu for rangeland above 8,500 feet.²⁹

A stocking rate of one lu per acre would have represented a huge increase in the stocking rate of these high pastures. The fact that Bowmaker did not notice any significant increase in livestock densities in these areas suggests that livestock from the

27 Basutoland, Department of Agriculture *Annual Report*, 1949

28 The next year for which District level data is available is 1965. The following table indicates that the proportion of in national herd in the two districts remained relatively constant over a 28 year period:

Table 9.3 Livestock populations in Mokhotlong and Qachas Nek as Percent of National Totals, 1937 and 1965.

	1937			1965		
	National total	Mokhotlong (%)	Qacha's Nek (%)	National total	Mokhotlong (%)	Qacha's Nek (%)
sheep	1,283,394	20.1	19.9	1,661,502	18.9	11.5
goats	411,931	10.2	17.3	877,820	13.8	8.9
cattle	418,921	7.1	9.9	346,079	8.5	8.6
equines	108,851	12.1	11.6	123,073	14.5	11.0
total (lu)	866,837	11.9	13.8	977,016	13.7	9.9

29 See chapter 4.

closed areas were not moved above the 9,000 foot contour line. It is also significant that another report about the high plateau grazing areas, written during the early 1950s, makes no mention of the closure policy.

The high altitude grazing areas include bogs in the vicinity of many stream heads. These bogs were seen as being particularly vulnerable and highly susceptible to destruction by overgrazing or trampling by cattle. In January 1954 and 1955 a South African ecologist, E.M. van Zinderen Bakker, visited these areas to write a report on the bogs which was submitted to the colonial authorities. It is clear from both the content and the tone of the report that Van Zinderen Bakker's primary interest was in the intrinsic value of the bogs themselves and not their economic or wider environmental significance. One might, therefore, safely assume that any policy that could threaten this ecosystem would be discussed in detail (and presumably condemned). The closure policy, which would have inevitably led to increased grazing pressure on bog vegetation in the open areas, is not, however, even mentioned in the report.³⁰

Another report that does not mention the closure policy is the Jeffares and Green report on water resources. The survey team carried out fieldwork during 1949 and 1950, but make no mention of the fact that significant areas of the catchment area they were investigating were totally close to grazing. Indeed they state in their final report that overgrazing was a problem *below* the 8,000 foot contour line: an area supposedly closed to all livestock.³¹

Just as no calculations were done about the feasibility of increasing the livestock density in the areas to be left open there was never any discussion in the Departmental files about how the areas officially closed were to be demarcated. Fencing and even simple beaconing were dismissed as too expensive and it was decided to rely upon natural physical features to describe the area to be closed. In this context it is notable that on the 1911 1:250,000 map an escarpment is recorded at or around the 9,000 foot contour line on the slopes above and to the east of the upper reaches of the Senqu river. More recent maps, such as the 1982 1:50,000 series, do indicate that there is a break of slope at or around the 3,000 metre mark but this is nowhere as pronounced as the 1911 map would suggest. Furthermore in other areas of the Ward, especially towards the west, this distinction between valley sides and plateau is not altogether clear. In none

30 PRO DO119/1385, E.M. van Zinderen Bakker, 'Report to the Government of Basutoland on the Origin and Importance of the Bogs in the Basutoland Mountains' (unpublished, 1955).

31 PRO DO35/4061, Jeffares and Green, 'Water Resource Survey of Basutoland', January 1951, p.20.

of the files or official reports is there any indication of how livestock owners were informed of the natural features that would be used to indicate which areas were closed.

The inaccuracy of the 1911 map was never mentioned on the files or reports on grazing control. Nevertheless it was clearly a frustration for the officials trying to oversee the closure policy. In the late 1940s the Basutoland administration requested that the High Commissioner try to get the Directorate of Colonial Surveys to push Lesotho up the list of territories waiting to be properly surveyed:

The existing Ordinance Survey map can only be regarded as a sketch map suitable for travelling. Many deficiencies have been found both by the Surveyor to Public Works Dept. and by officers of the Agricultural Department who are now engaged on the controlled grazing work in the mountains. The consensus of opinion of these officers is that the present map is inaccurate and totally inadequate for present requirements....Now that the Basuto are beginning to accept the principle of controlled and rotational grazing a great deal of demarcation will have to be done. An accurate topographical map is essential for this type of work and an aerial survey would be immense help in deciding upon detail.³²

The High Commissioner's office passed on these requests to London, stressing the political importance of the closure policy for the transfer issue.³³ The Directorate of Colonial Surveys regretfully informed the High Commissioner's office that they could not begin to survey Lesotho until 1951 at the earliest, unless they asked the Union government for help with the aerial photography. Not surprisingly Baring and his Chief Secretary, A. Clarke, thought this was an extremely bad idea and Clarke made a file note: 'Basutoland has "had it" and must wait until 1951'.³⁴

In March 1952 Bowmaker took a set of aerial photographs taken for the Directorate of Colonial Surveys into the field in an effort to delimit areas to be used as units for stock limitation policies He found the task impossible and was forced to abandon the project.³⁵ In June 1952 he wrote to the Directorate of Colonial Surveys asking them when they would have the maps of the mountain zone ready:

I believe I mentioned to you when you were last at Maseru that I intended to visit Mokhotlong during March to start a system of stock limitation there. For this a fair notion of the area of each small valley was required, and I intended to work this out from the aerial survey photographs while passing through the country. For the reason a) occasional variation in height from which the photographs were taken, and consequently upsetting of scale, b) snow and c) shadow I have found the job practically impossible to complete, and as, politically, it is desirable to proceed with delimitation in the Leribe, Maseru and Mokhotlong district as soon as possible, i.e. while the Native Authority is agreeable, I would be most grateful for any advice and help you are able to offer. ... I would be most grateful if you

³² PRO DO119/1442, Marwick to Clarke 16 March 1949.

³³ PRO DO119/1442, Clarke to Humphries, 30 August 1949.

³⁴ PRO DO119/1442, File Note by Clarke, November 1949.

³⁵ LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker 'A Report on a Visit to Mokhotlong From 6th - 28th March, 1952'.

could let me know ... when your first maps of the three districts are likely to be ready.³⁶

Bowmaker clearly totally underestimated the amount of time a survey team needed to produce accurate topographical maps. Ground truthing of the aerial photographs was an extremely difficult affair in the broken topography of Lesotho's mountains and the final maps were not released until the late 1950s.³⁷

Another hint that the Basutoland authorities knew there were more problems with the closure policy than they let on in official publications is the totally disproportionate response from the Basutoland authorities to the very mild implied criticisms of the closure policy in Sheddick's *Land Tenure in Basutoland*.³⁸ Sheddick had originally been commissioned to write a report on land tenure by the Basutoland authorities but as we saw in chapter 7 his report was not to the administration's liking. As well as disagreeing with some of his arguments about rights to administer the mountain grazing areas the Basutoland authorities reacted strongly to a couple of his quite minor comments on the closure policy.

The Basutoland authorities were particularly irked by Sheddick's implication that the closure policy was the work of the Department of Agriculture and not the chiefly authorities. Sheddick reported that the Basutoland administration had 'arranged for the imposition of a series of restrictions designed to control animal density and restrict the movement of stock'.³⁹ Forsyth Thompson thought that this was

A rather inadequate and malicious reference to the Basutoland system of rotational grazing which is based on traditional methods and is being introduced by the Paramount Chief on the advice of her professional advisers in the Agriculture Department.⁴⁰

Sheddick's published report contained a short foreword from the Commonwealth Relations office pointing out which parts the report they did not accept, and reiterating that 'grazing control has not been imposed on the Basuto'.⁴¹

How can this large gulf between the official version of the closure policy and that suggested by oral history be accounted for? I believe the answer can be found in the

36 PRO OD6/275; Bowmaker to Col. G.J. Humphries, Directorate of Colonial Surveys, Tolworth, 11 June 1952.

37 See PRO OD6/548 for correspondence from survey party in Lesotho, 1956-58.

38 Sheddick, *Land Tenure*.

39 Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, p. 112.

40 Letter from Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, 12 February 1952, Patrick Duncan Papers, University of York, DU7.12 Minutes to Government.

41 Commonwealth Relations Office 'Foreword' in Sheddick *Land Tenure*, p. xiv.

particular administrative circumstances of the district and it is to these I turn in the next section.

9.4. The Administration of Mokhotlong

In the period 1947-56 the sparsely populated Mokhotlong district was officially administered by a European District Commissioner and District Agricultural Officer⁴² with a small Basotho staff⁴³ and by the local Basotho chiefly authorities. Up until 1945 the area had been administered as a sub-division of Qacha's Nek district with an Assistant District Commissioner stationed at Mokhotlong camp. The 1946 Census gave a total Basotho population for the district of 36,765 (and 35 Europeans) in an area of 1,770 square miles.⁴⁴

Communications with the rest of the territory were very poor and post and supplies came up from Natal over the Sani Pass rather than directly from the lowlands. By the early 1950s there was radio contact with Maseru, but the wind-power generator took up to a week to charge up enough electricity for even a short conversation. During this period regular plane journeys with Maseru did become possible, though Mokhotlong Camp could still be cut off from the rest of the country for weeks because of poor weather.⁴⁵

The constitutional and administrative uncertainty in Lesotho as a whole during the colonial period was reflected in Mokhotlong at the district level. Officially the chief of Mokhotlong ward was the Paramount Chief Regent, 'Mantsebo, though in reality the ward was administered on her behalf by Matlere Lerotholi, who came to be regarded by the British as *de facto* Ward Chief and was more often than not given that title in official documents.

Matlere was a descendant of Paramount Chief Lerotholi via a very junior house. When Seeiso was placed as Ward Chief in Mokhotlong by Paramount Chief Griffith in 1926, Matlere was ordered to move to the mountains with him and placed in a village in the Moremoholo valley. According to some oral sources, and to Gideon Pott who was stationed at Mokhotlong Camp in 1942-45, Matlere spent his younger years working as

42 The first Agricultural Officer was posted in Mokhotlong in 1949, Basutoland, Department of Agriculture *Annual Report*, 1949.

43 Including from the mid-1950s onwards the country's first Mosotho Assistant District Commissioner, Interview with Sir James Hennessy, 12 November 1996, Cambridge.

44 Great Britain, *Colonial Annual Report: Basutoland 1947*, (London, 1949), p. 15.

45 Interview with Sir James Hennessy, 12 November 1996, Cambridge.

Chief Seeiso's herdboy.⁴⁶ When Seeiso was appointed Paramount Chief (in 1939), and moved to Matsieng, Matlere was appointed to look after his affairs in Mokhotlong district. He continued in this position after Paramount Chief Seeiso died and 'Mantsebo' was appointed as Regent. He was able to use his position as *de facto* ward chief to promote his brothers to more senior positions within the headman/chief hierarchy and together they were able to form a powerful local clique.

Despite his royal lineage and his support from the Paramount Chief, his political position in Mokhotlong was actually quite weak in the early 1940s. Assistant District Commissioner Pott had little confidence in Matlere and his brothers and in fact tried to get him removed from his position as *de facto* Ward Chief. In a letter to his District Commissioner at Qacha's Nek (forwarded to the Government Secretary in Maseru) he alleged that Matlere was lining his own pockets, and the pockets of 'Mantsebo', with the fines he collected from his court at Thabang instead of handing the money over to be held in Trust for the young Paramount Chief elect.⁴⁷ There were also rumours that

Matlere was 'Mantsebo's lover:

Matlere is a "great favourite" with the Regent. The natives of the district in fact refer to him as the Regent's husband. I understand the paramount chief suspected this liaison before he died. He [Matlere] is called away frequently on 'business'.⁴⁸

Pott reported that, despite their growing influence, the Lerotholi brothers were unpopular in Mokhotlong. In May 1941 he wrote to his DC in Qacha's Nek that:

They come from a junior house of the Late Paramount Chief Lerotholi and as my interpreter and sergeant state "would be nobodies" in the lowlands.⁴⁹

A year later he was still trying to bring pressure to have the Matlere faction removed: I have no hesitation in saying that these four brothers of the Lerotholi family, i.e. Matlere, Mabina, Mahlomola and Mosinoa are thoroughly disliked, are self-seeking individuals and are only tolerated because chief Seeiso placed them here. They will stop at nothing to enrich themselves in spite of an apparent social charm.⁵⁰

Matlere's position was made more difficult because of an ongoing dispute about the right of the ward chieftainship centred at Thabang to rule over the whole of the administrative district. To explain why it is first necessary to briefly consider the previous history of Mokhotlong district.

46 LNA/1882, Pott to D.C., Qachas Nek, 20 August 1941.

47 LNA/1882, Pott to D.C., Qachas Nek, 29 October 1942.

48 LNA/1882, Pott to D.C., Qachas Nek, 29 October 1942.

49 LNA/1882, Pott to D.C., Qachas Nek, 20 August 1941.

50 LNA/1882, Pott to D.C., Qachas Nek, 29 October 1942.

9.4.1. Chiefly rivalries and ‘Medicine Murders’ in Mokhotlong

Prior to the late nineteenth century the mountain areas of Lesotho were mainly inhabited by groups of San plus the occasional Nguni. As in many other areas of southern Africa during the nineteenth century the San population was gradually wiped out or absorbed into surrounding communities. In 1868 the first British Government Agent of Basutoland instituted a policy of genocide against the San groups and by 1873 the last independent San communities, located in Sehonghong valley, had been destroyed.⁵¹

The first organised group of Basotho to move into the Mokhotlong area were the Batloka clan who had previously been settled in the Mount Fletcher area of the Cape. Under their powerful leader, Chief Lelingoana, they allied themselves with those groups resisting British attempts to dis-arm the Basotho during the 1880-81 Gun War (to display their loyalty to Letsie they sent him the de-capitated head of the British magistrate John Austin) and were granted, in thanks, the whole of Mokhotlong district with the promise that no other chief would be placed over them. Shortly afterwards, however, Letsie decided, for strategic reasons, to place one of his sons, Rafolatsane, in Mokhotlong and it was agreed that he would control the valleys to the east of Senqu and Lelingoana would control the valleys to the west.

This division of the area remained until 1925 when Griffiths placed his son Seeiso as Ward Chief over the whole district.⁵² Both Lelingoana and Rafolatsane rejected Seeiso's authority over them, and for a number of years appeared to have been able to maintain their power base within their respective areas.⁵³ When Rafolatsane died in 1932, however, his successor ('Mankata, the widow of Rafolatsane's senior son who had died before his father) was unable to maintain full control over her area. In 1935 Chief Seeiso, after an intervention from his father, was allowed to place his headmen in two-fifths of the area previously controlled by Rafolatsane. Matlere's family and close followers were able to secure important headmen's positions at this juncture. After

⁵¹ Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, p.132. K.J. Wilson reports, however, that Chief Lelingoana told him (in 1928) that the Batloka were actively involved in the murder of many San during the 1880s, Wilson, K.J., 'A Memory of Chief Lelingoana of the Batloka Tribe', *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library*, 47,1, 1992, pp.22-27.

⁵² The following details are based on Ashton (*The Basuto*) and an anonymous and unpublished report titled 'Analysis of Ritual Murders and their relation to various administrative events' (unpublished report, n.d. from the papers of G.I. Jones). Colin Murray thinks that this report was written by Jones but Coplan and Quinlan ('A Chief by the People') argue that it was probably written by Ashton.

⁵³ Lelingoana's chieftainship was based at Tloha-re-bue and Rafolatsane's at Molumong.

1933 tensions between a much weakened Rafolatsane group⁵⁴ and the Seeiso group died down, though friction remained below the surface and occasionally re-appeared through the 1930s and 1940s.

The Batloka group also had their power base undermined in the mid-1930s after Lelingoana died (1934) and was replaced by his son Mosuoe, who had his rank reduced to sub-chief under Seeiso. When Mosuoe refused to send his followers to plough or gather firewood for Seeiso, he was fined two head of cattle which he again refused to pay. The dispute was taken on to the Paramount Chief's court in Matsieng, where the fine was overturned and Seeiso was told not to make unfair demands on Mosuoe and his followers. Nevertheless it was made clear that Mosuoe was subordinate to Seeiso, who had judicial and administrative authority over him.

Mosuoe appealed to the Resident Commissioner but he refused intervene, saying that it was an administrative decision for the Paramount Chief to adjudicate upon alone. At the same time however he assured Mosuoe that his chieftainship of the Batloka would not be taken away and that he was looked on as being of the same status as his father. These judgements did little to clear up the exact relationship between the two chiefs and the dispute simmered on. In 1944 it re-surfaced when the newly appointed Regent, 'Mantsebo, demanded that Mosuoe surrender a portion of his district in the same way as Rafolatsane's successor had done. Mosoue contested the demand, first in the Paramount Chief's court, where he not surprisingly lost, and then via the colonial judicial system. He eventually won his case, on a technicality, on appeal to the High Court⁵⁵ and, in 1948, he had his gazetted title amended to that of Chief of the Batloka.

Despite the ruling in Mosoue's favour the dispute between the three local political groupings (the Matlere faction, the Rafolatsane faction and the Batloka faction) continued. In December 1947 the District Commissioner wrote to the Government Secretary in Maseru about re-newed tensions between Matlere and Mosoue in the aftermath of the High Court judgement the previous year.⁵⁶ There was, however, a very different attitude towards Matlere amongst the officials in 1947 to that expressed by Pott in 1941-3. The Government Secretary now told the D.C. of Mokhotlong that Mosoue should still accept Matlere's orders whilst the Paramount Chief considered

⁵⁴ Accord to Ashton (*The Basuto*, p.199) Seeiso had supported the succession of 'Mankata to Rafolatsane's chieftainship as he believed she was a weak leader and her succession would strengthen his position in the Ward. Ashton also reports that in 1936 'Mankata went insane and Lerato, widow of Rafolatsane's second son, acted in her place (p. 198).

⁵⁵ Basutoland Civil Record No. H.C.C. 11/46, Mosuoe Lelingoana vs. the Paramount Chief, before Justice E.M. de Beer, 30 May 1946 (copy shown to me at Tloha-re-bue, May 1995).

⁵⁶ LNA 1882, D.C. Mokhotlong to Government Secretary, Maseru, 23 December 1947.

making a further appeal against the judgement⁵⁷ and on the 13 March 1948 the D.C. of Mokhotlong reported that Matlere was exercising extreme tact in his dealings with Mosoue.⁵⁸

This change of attitude towards Matlere is even more striking given the large number of medicine murders in Mokhotlong in which Matlere and his brothers were either directly or indirectly implicated. G.I. Jones detailed Matlere's involvement in these medicine murders in his confidential report to the Commonwealth Relations Office in 1950. In a passage that was deleted from the final published report, he stated that:

The Mokhotlong murders still remain a mystery. Two ... have never been satisfactorily explained. In a third ... the principal accused was reported to have said he was acting under the orders of the Ward Chief and in four others the principal accused, Seabatha Lorotholi [sic], Mahlomola Lorotholi [sic], Mabina Leretholi and Tsoteng Griffith were close relatives (half brothers and brothers' son) of the acting ward chief, had been placed there by Chief Seeiso or his successor and placed in Chief Seeiso's own section of the Ward. Until the mystery and suspicion which surrounds these Mokhotlong murders is [sic] dissipated, the Mokhotlong people will continue to think that the Regent and Matlere Leretholi who acts for her, are involved in them, and people in other parts of Basutoland will consider that as long as the Regent and her favourite councillor remain under suspicion of using Diretlo medicines, lesser chiefs and headmen will be encouraged to do the same.⁵⁹

Despite the Basutoland authorities' knowledge of Matlere's involvement in numerous medicine murders, he was often described in glowing terms by British officials, mainly on the basis of his willingness to institute grazing control. After his final trip though Mokhotlong in 1951 Evelyn Baring eulogised Matlere's attitude to the grazing control and reported that the country could do with more chiefs of his stature.⁶⁰ Pole Evans was also fulsome in his praise:

One cannot conclude this discussion without referring briefly to the prominent part played by Chief Matlere in the destocking scheme, first carried out in his ward, and which has now become a shining example for all others to follow in the general scheme of pasture rehabilitation. Chief Matlere was most helpful on the tour through his area. He took a deep interest in and showed a real grasp of the grassland problem with all its ramifications. He was also imbued with a genuine determination to do all in his power to get his people to carry out their obligations to the land. Full advantage should be taken of the efforts of such enlightened leaders by backing them up with all the advantage which scientific investigation alone can give.⁶¹

57 LNA 1882, Government Secretary, Maseru, to D.C. Mokhotlong, 8 January 1948.

58 LNA 1882, Extract of Report from DC Mokhotlong, 13 March 1948.

59 PRO DO35/4158, Jones, G.I. 'Report Submitted to Sec. of State for Commonwealth Relations' (Feb. 1950), p. 34.

60 PRO DO35/4010, Visits of High Commissioner to Basutoland.

61 LNA 2476/II, Pole Evans 'Visit to Basutoland in February, 1950'

It seems highly likely that the Basutoland authorities were willing to be less harsh on Matlere and 'Mantsebo at the time of Jones's investigation at least partly because they had both apparently embraced the concept of grazing control.⁶² As we saw in chapter 7, Baring was particularly keen to stress the role of senior chiefs in the development process. Whilst in London shortly before the Jones Report was submitted, he appeared to try to pre-empt any recommendations that Matlere and 'Mantsebo be removed, arguing that:

The practice of ritual murder must be broken, but efforts must also be made to avoid breaking the chieftainship in the process.⁶³

This is not to say that the Basutoland authorities were willing to cover-up Matlere's role in the Mokhotlong murders totally and he was eventually arrested for his part in another medicine murder in 1952. He was then accused of having ordered five men to murder a man, cut off parts of his body and deliver them to his brother, Mabina, to fly them over to Maseru (it was presumed by the colonial authorities for use by 'Mantsebo'). After their arrest, three of the men turned state witness and pointed the finger at Matlere and his brother, Mabina.⁶⁴

The tone of the relevant correspondence from Basutoland authorities hints at some regret that they had been forced to arrest Matlere.⁶⁵ Significantly one of first issues

62 Hugh Ashton agrees that this supposition is 'pretty close to the mark', pers. cors. 12 June 1996. As we saw in chapter 7 Gordon Hector, the Deputy Resident Commissioner in the late 1950s, told Marc Epprecht that 'Mantsebo won "grudging respect" from the British for her willingness to institute unpopular anti-erosion policies, Epprecht, "Women's "Conservatism" and the Politics of Gender", p. 42.

63 PRO DO35/4025, Notes by Sir E. Baring on the Political and Economic Position of the HC Territories [c.1950]. Baring already had a good idea of what Jones' report would include. In December 1949 he had sent a memo to the Commonwealth Relations Office detailing Jones's initial comments on his investigations: 'He thinks that the aims of the Government should be: i) The removal of the Regent who he believes is almost certainly deeply concerned in the murders. This should not be done by direct Government action, but if the Basuto themselves would do it then the cessation of ritual murders is possible. ii) All classes of chiefs, sub-chiefs and headmen should be drawn more into the administration and given specific responsibilities. At the same time there should be improved methods of enabling commoners to express their views and so take some part in work of government.'. PRO DO35/4158, Witchcraft: The Jones Report on Ritual Murder in Basutoland.

64 PRO DO119/1382, Arrowsmith to Wray, 26 November 1952.

65 This is especially apparent when compared to the tone of the correspondence when Matlere was arrested for a second time, in July 1960. At this time the Assistant Superintendent of Police wrote: 'I feel it is essential that a conviction be obtained against 1st accused [Matlere] as he has been involved directly and indirectly in this type of crime for many years and these cases will not stop unless he is got out of the way', PRO DO119/1386, Memorandum by Assistant Superintendent of Police, n.d. (c. July 1960). Matlere was again able to avoid prosecution, 'by a hairs breadth' according to Lichtenberg, the Prosecutor; PRO DO119/1386, Prosecutor's Report, 6 January 1961. He was acquitted on the basis of an alibi showing he was in Maseru at the time of the murder and there were no flights to Mokhotlong shown in the regular pilot's log book for the relevant period. It was only after Matlere had been acquitted that it came to light that another pilot had made an

mentioned in the High Commissioner's report on the case to the Commonwealth Relations Office was Matlere's role in grazing control:

Chief Matlere Lerotholi is the Paramount chief's representative at Mokhotlong, and although he is not by birth one of the senior chiefs, he is certainly one of the most effective. He has been most useful to Government in enforcing measures for grazing control which is more advanced in Mokhotlong than in any other district.⁶⁶

Patrick Ashley-Cooper, an extremely wealthy English businessman who took a close interest in Lesotho,⁶⁷ told the Secretary of State at the Commonwealth Relations Office that arresting Matlere was a mistake, and that the authorities should be supporting the Chief's efforts to implement development projects.⁶⁸ Unlike in the case of Chiefs Bereng and Gabashane there was no discussion of how Matlere's power should be curbed if he were acquitted.⁶⁹ As it turned out the state witnesses changed their stories when they got into Court and the case against Matlere and Mabina collapsed.⁷⁰

Matlere appeared to be angry that the British had put him on trial and wanted to make a counter claim against the witnesses who had spoken out against him.⁷¹ His annoyance at being charged with murder may account for some of the delay in re-opening the areas officially closed to grazing. In March 1952 Bowmaker had met with Matlere in Mokhotlong to discuss plans for grazing management as the closed areas were thought to be ready for re-opening.⁷² In the end the areas were not officially re-opened until 1956. Unfortunately I was unable to locate the file covering the period mid-1952 to late-1954 in the series Department of Agriculture series 'Grazing in the Mountains' in the LNA, so it is difficult to determine the exact causes of this delay. As we saw above the delay in obtaining accurate maps was no doubt partially to blame, but a cooling of relations with Matlere may also have been a factor. Certainly news that he had

unscheduled flight to Mokhotlong at the time of the murder; pers. cors, Sir James Hennessy, 22 November 1996. Matlere's brother, Makhahlela, had his conviction for the murder over-turned on appeal, PRO DO119/1386, Registrar of High Court, Maseru to High Commissioner, 14 June 1961.

⁶⁶ PRO DO119/1382, Arrowsmith to Wray, 26 November 1952.

⁶⁷ His daughter was married to Patrick Duncan, then a Basutoland Civil Servant, and he visited the country on a number of occasions see, Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, p. 56. He was especially interested in agriculture and soil erosion, and discussed these issues with 'Mantsebo in February 1952. It is not recorded if Matlere was present at the meeting, *Patrick Duncan Papers*, University of York, DU5, 20/6, Extracts of Notes on Basutoland: Visit by Sir Ashley Cooper, February 1952.

⁶⁸ PRO DO 35/4011, Sir Ashley Cooper's Suggestions About Basutoland, Together with a Commentary by the High Commissioner, February 1954. The High Commissioner argued that the police action had been justified.

⁶⁹ See PRO DO119/1378, Note on discussion between HC and RC re: Bereng and Gabashane, 28 April 1949, where Baring and Forsyth-Tompson discussed banishing the two chiefs if their appeal to the Privy Council was upheld.

⁷⁰ PRO DO119/1378, Wray to Marwick, 26 February 1953.

⁷¹ PRO DO119/1378, Inglis to Marwick, 6 March 1953, covering translated copy of Matlere to Inglis, 2 March 1953.

⁷² LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker, 'Report on Visit to Mokhotlong, 6th - 28th March 1952'.

overcome his ‘bitterness’ about the trial was linked to his willingness to get on with the programme of grazing control:

Chief Matlere Lerotholi appears to be getting over the bitterness against the government which resulted from his trial on a charge of medicine murder. The District Commissioner Mokhotlong reports that his work in regard to agricultural improvement and development is most encouraging. He is particularly keen to implement without delay the Paramount Chief’s recent order⁷³ regarding the demarcation and carry capacity survey of grazing areas in the mountains.⁷⁴

Even if Matlere’s apparent willingness to accept grazing control policies was not directly related to the Basutoland authorities turning at least half a blind eye to his involvement in numerous medicine murders, it is clear that his willingness to advocate grazing control did give him a vital political boost. Despite the ruling of the Appeal Court, the Department of Agriculture continued to regard Matlere as the Ward Chief of the whole of Mokhotlong district. He was always referred to by the title Ward Chief and never as Paramount Chief’s Representative - Mokhotlong, as officially gazetted. In short Matlere Lerotholi, a lesser chief by birth, became by the late 1940s one of the most powerful chiefs in Lesotho and a favourite of the Basutoland authorities. His support for grazing control measures played no small part in his rise to power. One section of the 1948 *Colonial Annual Report* seems particularly apt:

Marked success has been achieved in certain areas by Chiefs who have shown they are conscious of their administrative duties. For example the problems of soil erosion and grazing control are being energetically tackled by the Chiefs of Qacha’s Nek and Mokhotlong and striking results have already been obtained. The time is coming when the stature of a chief will be judged not only by his birth but more particularly by his achievements.⁷⁵

In the eyes of the Basutoland authorities Matlere’s stature was very much based on his achievements in implementing grazing control, but, in the light of my oral history, this achievement must, at the very least, be regarded with a considerable amount of scepticism. The obvious question that now arises is: ‘Were the Basutoland authorities willing accomplices in the invention of a myth about a successful soil conservation policy, or did they have the wool pulled over their eyes?’ The answer is inevitably somewhere between the two, though exactly where is a matter of some speculation.

⁷³ Order 1/1955 issued by ‘Mantsebo on 18 November 1955, reproduced as Appendix IV of Basutoland, Department of Agriculture *Annual Report* 1955, p.65-66.

⁷⁴ PRO DO35/4361, Extract from Tergos, no.6, June 1956.

⁷⁵ Great Britain, *Colonial Annual Report: Basutoland 1948*, London, 1949, p.7.

9.5. Explaining the gap between rhetoric and reality

From the evidence presented above it is clear that the Basutoland authorities did know there were more problems with the closure policy than the upbeat reports in Department of Agriculture *Annual Reports* and other published documents would suggest, but I suspect they did believe that Matlere had at least attempted the policy. James (later Sir James) Hennessy, who was the D.C. in the mid-1950s, certainly recalled the policy having been enforced, though he could not remember details. He remembered the condition of the pastures in Mokhotlong district being much better than elsewhere in the country, which he put down to the success of the closure policy.⁷⁶

One of the reasons the Basutoland authorities believed that the closure policy had been instituted was that they trusted Matlere. He was clearly seen in a very different light to most other chiefs. Hennessy recalled that he carried his reputation before him and that if he said he was going to do something he would do it.⁷⁷ Despite his association with medicine murders Matlere was seen to be a good influence on ‘Mantsebo and ‘one of the most effective’ chiefs.⁷⁸ Despite the support of Baring (see chapter 7) ‘Mantsebo was generally seen by the Basutoland authorities as being the ‘weakest point’ in the administration.⁷⁹ Jones argued that she was :

not a person of strong or masculine character. Her health was poor, she had no political experience and little aptitude for ruling. People, particularly some of the older chiefs, felt she was very much of a woman, and that any chief who succeeded in becoming her favourite councillor would be able to exercise undue influence in national affairs.⁸⁰

The Basutoland authorities also believed that her advisers would have a powerful position and tried to encourage support for ‘Mantsebo from strong (male) advisers such as Matlere, Bofihla Griffith,⁸¹ and Theko Makhaola.⁸² During the 1950s five chiefs

⁷⁶ Interview with Sir James Hennessy, 12 November 1996, Cambridge.

⁷⁷ Interview with Sir James Hennessy, 12 November 1996, Cambridge.

⁷⁸ PRO DO119/1382, Arrowsmith to Wray, 26 November 1952

⁷⁹ See for example Duncan to Government Secretary, 4 July 1951, Patrick Duncan Papers, University of York, DU 7.12, Minutes to Government.

⁸⁰ Jones *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, p. 34.

⁸¹ Bofihla was the Acting Ward Chief of Likhoele Ward in Mafeteng District and the half brother of Paramount Chief Seeiso. He was one of ‘Mantsebo’s official advisers between February 1949 and March 1952, at which point there was a falling-out over ‘Mantsebo’s attitude to a levy to provide funds for higher education, see PRO DO119/1382, Arrowsmith to Wray, 26 November 1952.

⁸² Ward Chief of Qacha’s Nek and one of the most senior chiefs in Lesotho. He was at the centre of politics for many decades and the uncle and one of the major supporters of Bereng Griffith in his succession bid against Seeiso and ‘Mantsebo. Like Matlere he was often described as a forceful and effective chief by the Basutoland authorities. His reputation was also largely built on his willingness to institute grazing control policies in his ward. Like Matlere he was tried and acquitted on a murder charge in the early 1950s, PRO DO119/1383, Arrowsmith to Scrivenor, 13 February 1954. While the Basutoland authorities thought he would be a good influence on ‘Mantsebo their

came to dominate political life at Matsieng: Nkoebe Mitchel, Leabua Jonathan, Leshoboro Majara, Patrick 'Mota and most importantly Matlere Lerotholi.⁸³

Despite the fact that the Basutoland authorities were willing to trust Matlere over the implementation of the closure policy they were obviously aware that he could say one thing and do something else entirely. Even after his arrest and trial Matlere frequently spoke out against medicine murders in the National Council and other forums.⁸⁴ One anonymous Mosotho commented:

People are astonished when they see that people who have dabbled in medicine murders are treated with great respect and are in the forefront of the work for the nation.⁸⁵

It was not just over medicine murders that Matlere could be inconsistent. In chapter 7 we saw how he changed his mind about his rights as a Ward Chief to control grazing at the cattle-posts, and he also displayed two very different attitudes to the Agricultural Improvement Areas. In the 1946 National Council Matlere spoke out against the contour banks being driven through peoples fields:

There is an outcry from the nation against the contour furrows that are made through the lands.

He pointed out that the banks significantly decreased the amount of land available for ploughing, especially on the more sloping mountain fields:

Some people have already abandoned their lands because of contour banks made through them.⁸⁶

Earlier that year, however, Matlere had told the District Commissioner that he supported the plans to establish an Agricultural Improvement Area in the whole area north of the Sehonghong and east of the Senqu. He even issued instructions on behalf of the Paramount Chief that people should construct furrows above their fields using tools supplied by the Agricultural Department.⁸⁷

Clearly Matlere was a cunning political character. But how was he able to cover-up something as obvious as thousands of head of livestock being in an area supposedly closed to grazing?

relations were strained, especially after 1953 when it was rumoured Theko had fathered a child by MaBereng (mother of Bereng Seeiso, the heir to the throne), PRO DO35/4361, Extract from Tergos, no. 37, July 1953. At this stage there were even allegations that he was plotting the death of 'Mantsebo'

⁸³ Machobane, *Government and Change*, p. 248. The degree of intrigue and in-fighting was clearly demonstrated in 1955 when there were also rumours that Nkoebe Mitchel was involved in a plot to kill 'Mantsebo', PRO DO35/4361, Extract from Tergos no 6, June 1955.

⁸⁴ PRO DO119/1384, Arrowsmith to Scrivenor, 30 May 1956.

⁸⁵ PRO DO119/1383, anonymous to How, 27 February 1954.

⁸⁶ Basutoland National Council *Proceedings of 42nd Session*, October 1946, p.496.

⁸⁷ LNA 2351/E, Assistant DC Mokhotlong to Government Secretary 16th January 1946. The plans fizzled out over the following year especially as there were no tools forthcoming to carry out the works.

It is notable that every trek around the district was accompanied either by Matlere himself or a close member of his clique. Matlere accompanied Pole Evans's trek and made a positive impression on him, perhaps displaying the charm referred to by Pott in 1942:

From conversations I had from time to time with Chief Matlere on my trip I found that he had the highest regard for Mr Bowmaker's work and placed important faith in his judgement and understanding.⁸⁸

Bowmaker's 1952 trek was accompanied by Matlere's brother Seabatha (who had been arrested for murder in October 1943, and eventually acquitted in November 1946).⁸⁹ On this trek Seabatha attempted to stop Bowmaker going into the Batloka area where it appeared to be more obvious that grazing had not been closed:

Chief Seabata [sic.] raised objections to going so thoroughly through the area falling under Chief Mosuoe, that is the Batloka country, but I assured him I would do it on my own responsibility without approaching Chief Mosuoe and make appropriate apologies when we met him later.⁹⁰

It is very possible that whoever accompanied the trek was able to get word on ahead and ask herdboys to keep their livestock hidden from view of the party. The physical geography of Mokhotlong, with its numerous steep sided valleys with many incised meanders, make this eminently possible.

It is also notable that, with the exception of Baring's 1951 visit,⁹¹ the treks all took place during the summer and autumn months in order to avoid the severe cold and snow of the winter. At this time of year many of the livestock would have been away at the high cattle posts even without regulations. If they had visited the closed valleys in the winter months they may have seen more herds brought down to avoid the severe weather at higher altitudes.⁹²

It seems possible that Matlere and his followers were able to give the Basutoland authorities the impression that he had at least partially implemented the policy when he had done no such thing. But what about hiding, from the resident's of Mokhotlong, the fact that he supported a policy that would adversely affect their livelihoods ? To most of the individuals I interviewed the political life of Maseru seemed impossibly remote in the 1940s and 50s. The political parties organising in the lowlands during this era

88 LNA 2476 II, Pole Evans to Forsyth-Thompson, 23 March 1950 [covering report on mountain grazing survey, Fed. 1950].

89 Jones *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, p. 87.

90 LNA 2476/II Bowmaker, 'Cattle Post Trek, 14th to 26th November 1949'.

91 The exact date of this trek is not in the records, but his report on the trek was written in June, suggesting the trek took place in May. There is no mention of severe cold or snow so perhaps this trek was also not quite as late in the year and the report written up later.

92 See Ashton *The Basuto*, chapter 9 for a description of the grazing system in this era.

did not seem to have any impact in the distant mountain valleys. The only interviewees who could tell me anything about Lekhotla la Bafo and the Basutoland Congress Party in the 1940s and 50s were the two members of the local political elite (7 and 15). One interviewee (6) claimed not to have even heard of Lekhotla la Bafo. Discussions about the closure policy in the National Assembly would only have been heard by members of the Matlere faction and there was no Josiel Lefela to carry the word back to local people in Mokhotlong.

The oral evidence suggests that chiefs and headmen issued instructions during the 1940s and 1950s, forcing people to move their livestock away from the village grazing areas during the summer months. A number of oral informants (3, 5, 7) told me that during the 1940s they were instructed to take all their livestock to the cattle-posts for three months a year over the summer period. Another informant (10) told me that it was during the 1940s that headmen first started to systematically enforce leboella regulations around the villages (though he attempted to resist the rules wherever possible). One oral informant (5) recalled that shortly after the Second World War they were told that smallstock should not be kept at the lower altitude (winter) cattle-posts during the summer and had to be taken up to the high plateaux areas near to the border with Qwa Qwa. They were allowed, however, to return to the winter cattle post areas in the autumn. These regulations had not been in existence when he was a young man and worked as a herdboy for his father, but they were in force when he returned from military service in North Africa. Another oral informant (7) reported that people did move their smallstock to the high cattle-posts for three months a year during the 1950s but there were no regulations forcing them to do this, it was merely as result of personal choice in response to increased grazing pressure around the villages. He thought that this had only become a regulation sometime after 1966.

One possible explanation of why Matlere was able to tell the Basutoland authorities one thing and the people of Mokhotlong another is that there was confusion between leboella, the closure policy and possibly the Paramount Chief's 1946 Order to send smallstock to the mountains.⁹³ The Basutoland authorities explained the closure policy as an extension of leboella and sometimes referred to the closed areas as such. Four oral informants (4, 10, 11, 14) reported that chiefs often ignored the leboella regulations. This, and the fact that Chiefs illegally impounded commoners livestock, were both common allegations in Lesotho.⁹⁴ By ignoring leboella Chiefs and their

93 As we saw in chapter 7 there appeared to be some confusion between the 1946 Order and the 1947 closure instructions in Qacha's Nek district.

94 Sheddick, *Land Tenure*, p. 122. See also speech by Dinizulu Maime (Maseru District) Basutoland

allies were able to ensure access to grazing areas with little competition from commoners herds.

While Hennessy was certain that the closure policy was implemented he also said that a cynic's view of the policy (not necessarily his) was that it was the way in which Matlere reduced competition for grazing between his herds, and those of his close allies, and the average Mokhotlong livestock owner.⁹⁵ This testimony tallies with a short section of Bowmaker's report on his March 1952 trek:

Two Cattle Posts were seen to be still existing and occupied in the *Leboella* area but otherwise the return of grass in Moremoholo valley was thoroughly satisfactory. The Cattle Posts themselves were in very fair condition and it was admitted by the Senior caretaker that these Cattle Posts and certain odd groups of cattle in them belonged to the Ward Chief, or possibly the Paramount Chief; this matter we were unable to sort out specifically.⁹⁶

There may be good reason why the chiefly elite in Mokhotlong were particularly keen to ensure access to exclusive grazing areas during the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s. Rapidly recovering prices for both wool and mohair made the late 1940s and early 1950s a lucrative time for commercial smallstock producers (see Figure 9.2). Wool and mohair were especially important products in the mountain zone: Mokhotlong district with about 6 percent of Lesotho's population⁹⁷ accounted for about 12 percent of total mohair production.⁹⁸ The distribution of the smallstock population in the mountain zone was very skewed and ownership was concentrated into the hands of a few individual owners, many of whom were the senior chiefs.⁹⁹ These commercial livestock owners were probably keen to impose more *leboella* and force commoners to take their livestock to the high cattle-posts during summer as a way of ensuring their own access to better grazing areas near the villages.

National Council, *Proceedings of 47th Session*, September 1951, p. 489.

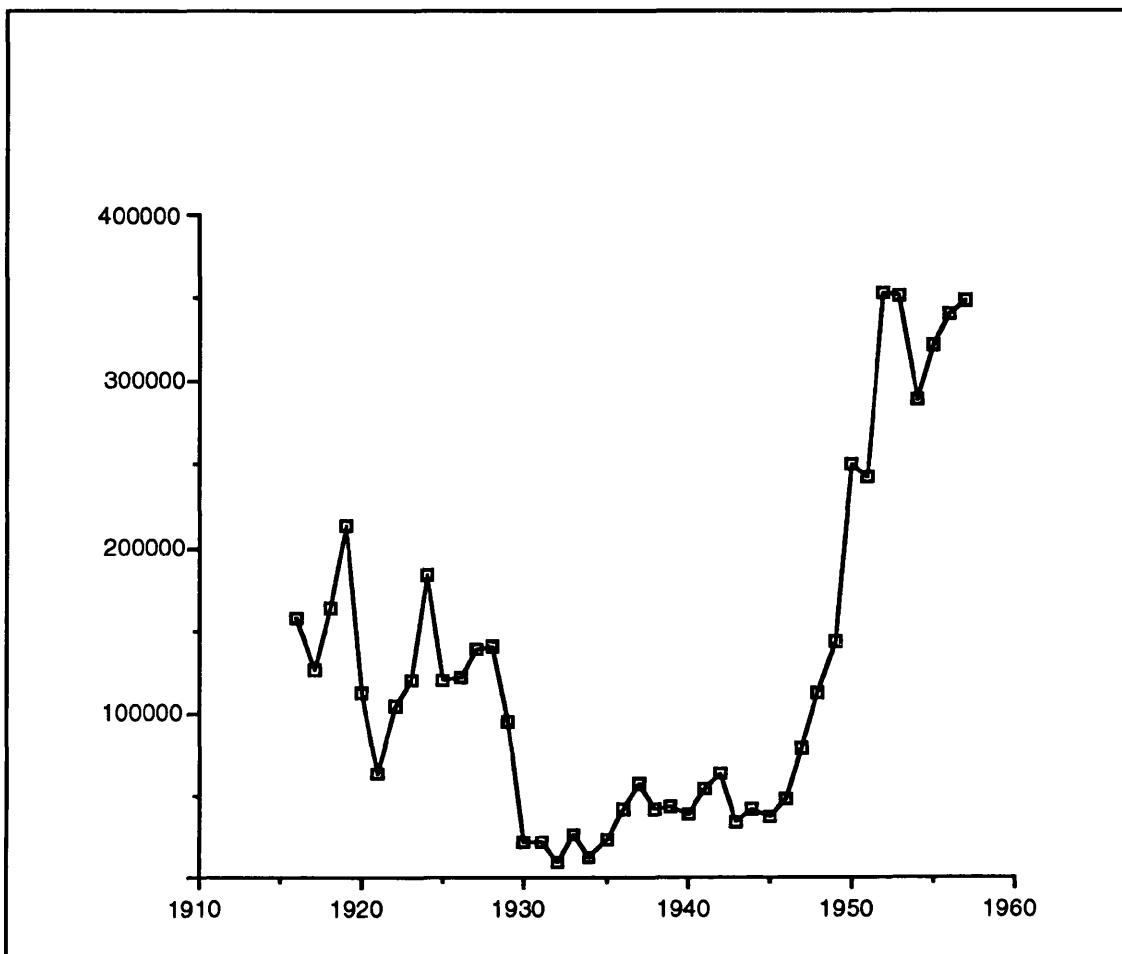
⁹⁵ Interview with Sir James Hennessy, 12 November 1996, Cambridge.

⁹⁶ LNA 2476/II, Bowmaker, P.A.O. 'A Report on a Visit to Mokhotlong from 6th - 18th March 1952'

⁹⁷ Based on the *de jure* population figures given in the 1956 Census.

⁹⁸ Calculated from figures for 1960 in Uys, *The Lesotho Mohair Industry*, p. 68. See footnote 100 on the accuracy of these figures.

⁹⁹ See Table 1.3 and accompanying text.

Figure 9.2 Total Value of Mohair Exports for Lesotho, 1916 - 1957 (£)¹⁰⁰

One of the significant things about the mohair industry for the closure policy is the mohair goat's notoriously high mortality rate in adverse weather conditions. If mohair goats get wet, especially after shearing, or if they get caught in winter storms, they tend to get ill and die very rapidly.¹⁰¹ Under these circumstances it is extremely unlikely that any livestock owner would keep mohair goats on the high pastures during the

¹⁰⁰ Figures from Uys, *The Lesotho Mohair Industry*. These figures need to be treated with a great deal of caution especially as there is no doubt that a lucrative illegal export market existed in order to avoid the Wool and Mohair Export Levy. One of the most obvious routes for illegal mohair export would have been over the uninhabited mountain passes between Mokhotlong and Natal. An indication of the size of the illegal trade can be found in figures comparing output of mohair per goat in South Africa and the legal output per goat in Lesotho. While South African goats produced about 7 lbs of mohair per goat, official mohair production figures for Lesotho indicate an output of only around 2 lbs (Uys, *The Lesotho Mohair Industry*, p. 71). While some of this discrepancy could be explained by lower productivity in Lesotho it is likely that it is partially also a function of large quantities of mohair in Lesotho not showing-up on official figures.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Daniel Phororo, 25 April 1995, Maseru.

winter months: though most rainfall falls in the summer there are irregular but frequent and sometimes quite heavy falls of snow or rain especially on the high peaks along the Drakensberg escarpment. While sheep are able to cope with these harsh conditions mohair goats are not and if the closure policy had been applied the Mokhotlong mohair industry could not have survived.

In addition to the political benefits of telling the Basutoland authorities that they were implementing the closure policy there were thus material benefits for Matlere, 'Mantsebo and their close allies in applying elements of the closure policy. These elements of the closure policy were, I would suggest, understood by commoners in Mokhotlong not as a new policy but simply as a more vigorous application of leboella. Despite complaints about their abuse of leboella the chiefs seemed to be able to ensure that people complied with some fairly severe instructions. Many oral informants made comments along the lines that in the 1940s and 1950s you did what the chiefs told you to do. The programme of forced villagisation undertaken by the chiefly authorities in Mokhotlong meet with only the most clandestine of resistance.¹⁰² In this context it must borne in mind that Matlere and his followers were directly implicated in a whole series of brutal and very public murders and even when Matlere was arrested he as able to get off the charges. Jones records that there were ten murders in Mokhotlong recorded in between 1938 and 1949, corresponding to a rate of one murder per 3,700 people compared to a national figure of one murder per 7,900 people.¹⁰³

In summary I believe that the evidence suggests that the following provides a more adequate explanation of events in Mokhotlong district than the official reports of success. Firstly, livestock belonging to a few individuals such as Matlere and 'Mantsebo were allowed to graze within the officially closed areas without the Basutoland authorities asking any questions. Though these individuals only accounted for a tiny percent of the population they would have controlled a much larger percent of the livestock population. Secondly, poorer livestock owners continued to graze their animals in village grazing areas and valley cattle posts during the winter months. In the summer months many (but by no means all) livestock would have been taken up to the high plateau areas, many of which are above the 9,000 ft contour line. This was not, however, in response to government policy but as a way of ensuring access to adequate summer grazing. The Chiefly authorities ruled Mokhotlong despotically and most people were unwilling to resist their instructions over leboella or the temporary movement of livestock to high cattle posts during summer. Nevertheless the chiefly

102 See chapter 1.

103 Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, appendix B

authorities, and probably the Basutoland officials, knew that any attempt to fully enforce the closure policy would have resulted in a serious impact on people's livelihoods and widespread resistance and the closure policy was, therefore, never attempted.

10. Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explore both the causes and consequences of conservation/development projects in the mountain livestock sector. Early chapters of the thesis explored the development of ideas which shaped the way colonial officials, and other conservationists, ‘read’ Lesotho’s mountain environment. Chapters 6 and 7 examined the regional and national political forces that drove the formulation of policy and traced the way in which policy both reflected and, in turn, shaped the political landscape. Finally I turned to a specific investigation of the two major projects in the mountain livestock sector during the late-colonial period. Both of these projects were written-up as hugely successful in the official literature, but from archival and oral evidence (and common-sense) I concluded that they suffered from numerous problems of implementation. Indeed I argue that the closure policy was never actually implemented (certainly not in Mokhotlong and probably not in Qacha’s Nek District). Nevertheless, as I indicated in chapter 2, just because a project fails does not mean it has no impact on the economy, society or politics. In the case of the closure policy these impacts were significant at a local, national and even regional scale - quite a feat for something that only ever existed on paper!

10.1. What did the livestock development policies achieve?

As we saw in chapters 8 and 9 there is good reason to believe that the two major policies attempted in the mountain zone in the late colonial period could never have achieved their objectives. As with the Thaba Tseka project of the 1970s and 1980s investigated by Ferguson, this does not mean, however, that they had no impact on the local society or economy. In the case of the closure policy this impact extended far beyond the local and became an element in international politics. In line with the arguments presented by Ferguson this section of the conclusion will briefly address the question ‘what did the colonial livestock development policies achieve?’.

10.1.1. Departmental advantage

One of the most obvious achievements of the livestock development policies was to increase the relative importance of the Department of Agriculture in the Basutoland administration. The significance of the task meant that the Department could claim pride of place in the administration. If the Department of Agriculture was challenged on any of its policies by other members of the administration, for example over their understanding of ‘customary’ rights to mountain grazing, it cited the centrality of protecting the pastures to the country’s future.

Within the administration the constant stress on the importance of the issue of pasture conservation led to some criticism of the Department. According to the Chief Secretary to the High Commissioner's Office, Agriculture was 'not adverse to taking departmental advantage of the importance of its task'. This was a position that led to some resentment amongst other departments and the various District Commissioners.¹

10.1.2. Development funding

One of the elements that other departments may have resented was the concentration on soil erosion for CD&W funds. On the other hand the Basutoland authorities were able to use the very existence of the soil erosion problem that used to justify the flow of development funds to the country. Applications for CD&W funds constantly stressed the immediacy and grave danger of the problem of pasture degradation and soil erosion.²

Pleas for funding for anti-erosion work were linked to the siltation of South African rivers and the transfer question. This extended to other forms of development funding and technical work. In 1949, for example, the Basutoland authorities and the High Commissioner tried to use the closure policy and its political implications for relations with South Africa to pressurise the Directorate of Colonial Surveys to push Lesotho up the list of counties waiting to be accurately mapped. On this occasion they were unsuccessful, but the administration was able to secure significant contributions from London for soil conservation measures. The major funds were for the work in the lowlands³ but the state of the mountain environment and the closure policy were an important factor in ensuring the continued flow of external funds.

10.1.3. Good publicity against transfer

Despite the fact that the closure policy was probably never implemented it received extremely good publicity. This was politically significant as it was used by the British to counter South African claims of neglect, and was important in their resistance to transfer. The lowland contour bank building programme was frequently used by the British to show what they had achieved, and all official visitors to Lesotho were taken

1 PRO DO35/4014, Notes on the visit of the Chief Secretary to the High Commissioners Office to Basutoland , Febuary 1952.

2 See for example, PRO DO35/1180/Y950/4 and PRO DO35/1187/Y1136/23.

3 In October 1946 the CD&W Fund approved a grant of £282,000 over 10 years for the lowland contour bank building scheme, PRO DO35/1187/Y1136/23.

on obligatory tours of the lowland schemes. Practical difficulties meant that the mountain closure policy was not on the itinerary of visiting dignitaries, though the Basutoland authorities did specifically contact Pole Evans to tour the region because they hoped to use his comments as part of their publicity strategy in the aftermath of the Nationalist election victory in the Union.

The fact that the closure policy was never implemented did not harm its publicity value. Indeed the non-implementation could be seen in a positive light in this context. Had there actually been attempts to impose the regulations, the closure policy would have surely encountered numerous incidents of resistance, as similar policies had just across the border in Witzieshoek. Its non-implementation meant, that there was no resistance, so it could be reported as a success and acceptable to the local population.

10.1.4. A defence of indirect rule

The Basutoland administration constantly linked the success of the closure policy to the system of indirect rule. The support of chiefs such as Matlere and Theko was seen as crucial to the implementation of the closures. Their apparent willingness to implement the plans was seen as proof that the system of chieftainship did not have to stand in the way of development. Colonial development/conservation discourse was full of references to the possibility of modernising tradition, without losing the ability of customary law to control the rural population. The closure policy itself was seen as an example of the successful updating of a customary resource use regulation (*maboella*).

The role of the closure policy in defending the system of indirect rule might suggest that it acted as an ‘anti-politics machine’, to use Ferguson’s phrase. Nationally the Basutoland administration did try to use the fact of soil erosion to quieten political opposition. When Baring visited the Resident Commissioner in 1947, during an era of intense political machinations over the issue of succession to the Paramount Chieftaincy and ‘medicine murders’, they decided that their general policy should be to ‘try to divert attention from political to agricultural issues’.⁴

10.1.5. Chiefly politics

Agricultural issue could, however, be intensely political. During the 1940s some of the most heated debates in the National Council were around proposals for the establishment of ‘Agricultural Improvement Areas’. The closure policy and other regulations concerning grazing in the mountains were advocated in a highly charged

⁴ PRO DO35/4007, Baring to Machtig, 24 June 1947.

political atmosphere. ‘Mantsebo used her powers to issue Orders and Rules about conservation and development as an effective political tool in her battle against Bereng and Gabashane. In Mokhotlong, Matlere made extremely good use of the closure policy to bolster his originally weak political position. Largely on the back of the closure policy he was able to transform himself from the position to a local headman to a figure of national standing.

In Qacha’s Nek, Theko also made use of the political space granted him by the closure policy. Already a powerful chief in the mid-1940s he was able to use his support for the closure policy as insurance against any move by ‘Mantsebo to oust him for supporting Bereng in the battle over succession. After a 1948 visit to observe the closure policy in Qacha’s Nek, Baring told Forsyth-Thompson that the Basutoland administration should strive to have Theko appointed as the Paramount Chief’s senior adviser.⁵ Given their strained relations it is hardly surprising that this did not occur.

10.1.6. Impact on the local community

By bolstering the political position of two powerful and despotic local leaders it could be argued that the closure policy acted against the interests of the local population of the mountain zone. Certainly both Matlere and Theko made some use of the powers granted to them in the name of development and conservation to undermine local political opposition and line their own pockets. In both wards the chiefs applied the villagisation programme as a method of curtailing formation of communities beyond their control.

There is some evidence in both Mokhotlong and Qacha’s Nek that elements of the closure policy were applied and livestock were ordered out of the valleys during the summer months. There is also evidence that Matlere and ‘Mantsebo did not move their own herds from the closed areas and the policy was, therefore, to their material advantage. The pilot plots in the mountains of Maseru were more clearly used as a way for ‘Mantsebo to gain access to a private grazing area for her livestock. In both situations this material gains for important chiefs would have been at the expense of the ordinary livestock owner. On the other hand by telling the Basutoland authorities he was applying the closure policy and then not doing so Matlere potentially saved the population of Mokhotlong from more draconian policies controlled more closely by the

⁵ PRO DO35/4007 Report of High Commissioner on his recent visit to Basutoland, 12 November 1948.

Department of Agriculture or perhaps, worst still, by the Union Department of Native Affairs.

10.2. Pattern, process, discourse and policy

It is clear that the colonial authorities were frequently unaware of exactly what was going on in the Lesotho mountains. They also lacked reliable information about the mountain environment. The limited basis of their factual knowledge did not, however, prevent them from drawing strong conclusions about the direction of environmental change. They were able to do this by the application of ecological theory.

Despite the absence of long-term data on vegetation patterns in the mountain zone colonial officials and ecologists such as Pole Evans believed they could determine vegetational processes simply by observing contemporary patterns. Their understanding of range science (based upon theories of plant succession) allowed them to draw strong conclusions from the observations they made in the field. The most important observation they made in the field was the presence of indicator species, especially sehalahala. It was believed that these species were indicative of a seres plant community and the mountain environment had, therefore, been deflected from its climax.

Using range science colonial officials were able to construct a process of vegetational change simply by observing a spatial pattern of vegetation at one point in time. Recent changes in ecological theories of African rangelands could be used to re-interpret the observations to indicate a different (more complex) process of change. This is not to say that the colonial officials were necessarily wrong to think that the mountain grasslands were being over-grazed, merely that the evidence they cited could not support the conclusions they drew.

In his rebuttal of Beinart's exploration of official thinking on conservation, Phimister is critical of studies that concentrate on an analysis of discourse.⁶ In this thesis I have attempted to show how an understanding of both general environmentalist and specific ecological discourses are central to an understanding of colonial conservation and development policy. Ironically, Phimister's closing quote from E.P. Thompson highlights this extremely well: the 'discipline of history is, above all, the discipline of

⁶ Phimister, 'Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context'; Beinart, 'Soil erosion, conservation and ideas about development'.

context; each fact can only be given meaning within an ensemble of other meanings'.⁷ The observations made by colonial officials need to be understood not simply as facts proving environmental decline but as facts produced within the context of a specific scientific discourse.

Colonial conservation and development policies arose in response to a perception that the African rural environment was being degraded. That does not mean, however, that the environment was actually being destroyed. While this may have been the case at certain times and in certain places, it certainly does not hold that it was the case at all times and in all places. This thesis demonstrates the problems associated with using observations made by colonial officials as indicators of uni-linear environmental decline. It also demonstrates the need to take reports of the successful implementation of conservation and development policies from publications such as departmental annual reports with more than a pinch of salt. Both these observations have important implications for much of the existing literature on African social and environmental history.



⁷ Thompson, E.P. 'Anthropology and the discipline of historical context', *Midland History*, 6, 1972, p. 45; quoted in Phimister, 'Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context', p. 275.

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